

FAMILY INTERACTION: Nuts and Bolts/Tools and Forms



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Nuts and Bolts

Do you see your children only in a single room located in a public building?

Do you play games with your children for two hours at a time?

Do you interact with your children by being face to face with them for two hours?

Do you correct your children in front of strangers?



NORMALIZED FAMILY CONTACT FOR CHILDREN

- Least restrictive, most family like environment
- Parents performing activities as they normally would
- Parents taking full responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children



Case assessment by family contact specialist in collaboration with case social worker

- Model best parenting practices with families
- Agencies must take minimum risk
- Never do anything for a child that a parent can do.
- Constant review of FI with parents and children
- Allow parents to make the plans and support them
- Permanency is always the goal - LIFEBOOKS
- Foster parents must be specifically trained to work with birth parents and assist in the supervision of family contact.

Assumptions!

1. Agency must approach contact the opposite of how we have.
2. Family permanency is not built on reward/punishment.
3. How often can you come?
How can I help get you here?

Basic Elements of Family Interaction Plan

- Frequency
- Length of time
- Location
- Supervision
- Participants
- Support Services
- Activities
- Case identification information
- Reasons for child being in care, risk to the child, ways to protect child if child needs to be protected.



The program must include:

- A center with a home like atmosphere
- Access to public transportation or in neighborhoods of highest removal
- Program directed by trained attachment therapist
- Case assigned a trained family interaction specialist

Preparing Children for Contact

- Address child's knowledge gaps.
- Demonstrate respect for child's family, heritage and history.
- Respect a child's defenses.
- Help child understand what happened, and prepare for the future.
- Discuss sibling contact.

Preparing Children for Contact

- Create a forum for addressing placement issues.
- Review and practice safety plan with child.
- Pay attention to child's desires and concerns about reunification.

Preparing Children for Contact

Key points to remember in preparing children for visits:

1. Children's preoccupation with details.
2. Time references meaningful to children.
3. Address child's concern fir personal safety.
4. How child might feel after contact.
5. Elicit fantasy about contact and address misinformation

Preparing the Foster Family

First, are the foster parents able and willing to:

- Value parent/child relationship
- Allow visits in their home
- Supervise visits in their home
- Document as requested by worker
- Provide transportation
- Help child prepare for contact
- Help parents provide a safe home
- Maintain confidentiality

Preparing the Foster Family

When the foster family needs assistance, consider these ideas:

- What time is best for contact
- What time commitments do foster parents and birth parents already have
- What is the child saying about contact?
- What aspects of initial contact should be recorded to develop and support case plan
- Help foster parents prepare for these events: Awkwardness, child who won't be comforted, angry parent, parent who is drunk or high, sadness at end of contact.

Preparing Parents for Contact

- Consider what behaviors must change for the child to go home.
- Parent must know what is being assessed.
- Parent should be allowed to build on strengths
- Help parents explore reasons behind the behavior
- Parents should determine who is included in contact.
- Expect parent to plan contact, and assist as needed.
- Parent must commit to keep child safe.

CONTACT MUST BE CHILD SPECIFIC



- Child's ability to self-care
- Family's willingness/ability to get help
- Child's request for and reaction to visits
- Divided loyalty/chaos at home
- Developmentally appropriate activities
- Therapeutic needs of child
- Consider child's schedule

Parent/Child Relationship Neglect

- Lack of knowledge
- Immature
- Ambivalent
- Living conditions – poor
- Rejection/unwilling





Parent/Child Relationship Physical Abuse

- Inability to manage anger
- Limited child management skills
- Philosophical commitment to corporal punishment.

PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIP: SEXUAL ABUSE

- Different from physical abuse/neglect – it is the disabling condition
- Not curable, can be managed
- Child contact with the perpetrator with should be based on the child's therapy
- Support non-offending parent to build attachment for child and receive counseling
- Supervise until non-offending parent takes responsibility for safety of child
- Watch for failure to protect.

Special Conditions Affecting the Parent

- Drug or alcohol addiction
- Incarceration
- Parental non-compliance with Family Interaction
- Issues of foster parents
 - * Extra supports to assist parent
 - * Putting aside biases



Phases of Family Interaction

- I. Initial
- II. Middle
- III. Transitional



Initial Phase Characteristics:

- Builds relations
- Assessment/Goal setting
- Ten to Twelve weeks
- People uncomfortable
- Pressure on child
- Close supervision
- Supervisor plays important roles
- Levels of supervision - fade in/out



Initial Phase Reasons

- Assessment
- Mediate
- Problem Solve
- Assess ability to provide safety
- Demonstrate strength resources
- Identify impediments to reunification
- Modeling/Facilitate goals

Middle Phase

Characteristics:

- Responsibility shifts agency to parent
- Work toward goals
- Activities chose to provide learning/practice
- Collaboration of agencies
- Timing and reconnection assessed
- Consider change in arrangements
- More often/longer
- Time – months to years



MIDDLE PHASE REASONS

- ❖ Forum for parents to show growth
- ❖ Facilitate progress
- ❖ Demonstrate reduction of risk
- ❖ Show timing
- ❖ Reactions to family interactions
- ❖ Messages sent
- ❖ Shift responsibility
- ❖ Use community supports

Transition Phase

Characteristics:



Case goal in sight
Secure services after
return

Plan ahead
Maximize contact
Evaluate remaining
stressors

Transition Phase Alternative Permanent Placement

- **Three Critical Messages:**

I love you
I can't take care of you
I give you permission to love
someone else

- **Video and/or letter**

- **Parents role changes**


