

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISITATION

Research Shows:

Visitation is essential for a child's well-being

The primary purpose of visitation is to maintain the parent-child attachment, reduce a child's sense of abandonment, and preserve their sense of belonging as part of a family and community. A child needs to see and have regular contact with their parent(s), as this relationship is the foundation of child development.

Visitation is fundamental to permanency

Visitation facilitates permanency planning, promotes timely reunification, and helps in the decision-making process to establish alternative permanency plans. Visitation maintains and supports the parent-child relationship necessary for successful reunification.

Visitation is vital to a child maintaining family relationships and cultural connections

Maintaining family connections has life-long significance for a child. Visitation maintains their relationships with siblings and others who have a significant role in a child's life. When a child loses family connections, they also lose family history, medical history and cultural information. Visitation is considered the heart of reunification, but even when reunification is not likely, parents, siblings and extended family continue to be important in children's

The Benefits of Visitation

Research identifies the following as benefits of parent-child visitation:

- Supports parent-child attachment
- Eases the pain of separation for all
- Maintains and strengthens family relationships
- Reassures a child that their parent(s) is/are alright and helps them to eliminate self-blame for placement
- Supports the family in dealing with changing relationships
- Enhances parent motivation to change by providing reassurance that the parent-child relationship is important for a child's well-being
- Provides opportunities for parent(s) to learn and try new skills
- Supports a child's adjustment to the foster home
- Enables the parent(s) to be active and stay current with their child's development, educational and medical needs, church and community activities
- Provides opportunities for parent(s) to assess how their child is doing, and share information about how to meet their child's needs

- Assists in the assessment and decision-making process regarding parenting capacities and permanency goals
- Reduces the time in out-of-home care
- Increases the likelihood of reunification.

Understanding reactions and supporting visitation:

Some children will feel happy and excited about visits with their parent(s), but for children of any age, there may be times when they become upset either prior, during, or after a visit. This may be due to:

- Normal feelings of loss and separation reactivated by seeing the parent(s) which can have an effect on the child's mood, ability to cope, and their behavior.
- Being anxious and fearful when visiting with their parent(s); their time together may be very stressful.
- Children experiencing a conflict in loyalty and feeling a need to reject the foster parent(s) when returning to the foster home to affirm their love for their parent(s).
- Feeling a loss or lack of control.
- A child thinking that it is their fault they cannot go home.
- Being confused about why they cannot go home.
- Not being able to talk about confusion or fears.
- A child being defensive when feeling that their parent(s) are being criticized.
- Regressing to babyish behavior, whining, having nightmares, wetting the bed, becoming aggressive, and being unable to listen, and/or complain of physical pain before and/or after visits.

Visitation and family contact should never be used as a reward or punishment but should always be considered a right of families and children.

These thoughts about visitation were put together by **Gwen Slippy**, D3 Foundations Trainer, Certification Unit Marion County CW. Gwen can be reached at 503-689.6469. This information was summarized using the "Minnesota Department of Human Services, *Child and Family Visitation: A Practical Guide to Support Lasting Reunification and Preserving Family Connections for Children in Foster Care.*"

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