

SECTION 4: SHARED PARENTING

Foster caregivers are encouraged to cultivate positive, supportive relationships with birth parents. In order for the relationship to be successful, everyone involved must contribute to the effort. It requires good communication, cooperation, respect, careful planning, joint decision making, and an understanding of everyone's roles. There are a number of benefits to creating supportive relationships and sharing information with birth parents. Birth parents can provide information and insights that enable foster caregivers to meet children's needs earlier and in a more effective way. Seeing their birth and foster caregivers working together can change the way children function and enhance child development and well-being.

Creating such a relationship does not happen all at once. Like most relationships, it develops gradually. This may often start with low-level contact between the birth and foster caregivers — for example, through the exchange of email you can discuss the child's week and asking questions that only the birth parent can answer. You can also choose to create a journal to pass back and forth. As everyone grows more comfortable, the relationship between birth and foster caregivers might progress, involving steps such as recording the family reading a book and playing it for the child at bedtime.

In maintaining a child's relationship with the birth parent, foster caregivers may also model appropriate behavior and parenting techniques. Moreover, both birth and foster caregivers have more information about the child while birth parents develop an understanding of the child's needs which can lead into a smoother transition back into the parent's home.

When the child returns home, lines of communication sometimes remain open. These positive connections between the foster caregivers, the child, and the child's family will not have to end, even if the placement does. Foster caregivers may continue to provide support to the child and birth parents and maintain the relationship (See Appendix 2 on Page G).

PARENTING TIME AND FAMILY CONTACT PLAN

DCS will facilitate contact between a child and the child's parents, siblings, family members, relatives and individuals with significant relationships to the child. This preserves and enhances relationships with and attachments to the family of origin. All case plans for children in out-of-home care include a family contact plan. It is developed with involvement of family members and the child, if age appropriate. Frequency, duration, location and structure of contact and visits are determined by the child's need for safety and for family contact with safety being the paramount concern. Visitation takes place in the most natural, family-like setting possible, with as little supervision as possible, while still ensuring the safety of the child.

SUPERVISED VISITS

By definition this is a visit between a child in care and his/her parent/caretaker, sibling, or other relative that is monitored and supported through the physical presence of a third party, a Visitation Facilitator.

Foster Caregivers may be asked to provide transportation to and from supervised visits.

VISITATION FACILITATOR

This is any person designated by the DCS Specialist to monitor a visit between a child in care and the parent/caretaker, sibling or other relative. This may include a parent aide, transportation worker, volunteer, psychologist, therapist, out-of-home care provider, extended family member or other party.