

Preparation of the Parents for Family Visits

Visits are opportunities for parents and siblings to attach and bond with each other despite the fact the children are in out-of-home placement. The visits are also opportunities for parents to learn and demonstrate new skills. Preparing parents for family visits can strengthen the interactions between the child and parent and possibly head off the areas of potential trouble. Things to consider when preparing the parents for visits:

- Involve parents in the planning of visits including:
 - Time, date and location of the visit
 - Who will attend the visit
 - Activities that can be done during the visit
- Talk with the parents about how they may be feeling about the visitation process. Many parents have strong emotional responses to seeing their children and may need the opportunity to discuss how they feel even before the visits occur. A parent that is overwhelmed emotionally will often have little ability to attend to how the child is feeling during the visits.
- Assist the parent to identify ways to cope with the multitude of emotions they may be feeling including anger, sadness, guilt, nervousness or joy at seeing the child(ren) again.
- Help the parent to understand all the benefits their child and family will receive from the visits.
- Talk with the parent about the questions the child may ask during the visit so the parent can prepare answers prior to the visit. Questions from the children can include: “Why can’t I live with you?”; “Are you better yet?”; “Why did this happen?” and “When are you going to get better so I can come home?”
- Help the parent understand some of the behaviors they may see from the children during the visit and when the visit is ending. Acknowledge that leaving the child with the caregivers will be painful and prepare the parent for this prior to the visit. Children will often cry and not want to separate physically from the parent that can be devastating to both the child and the parent.
- Help the parent pack a bag filled with things that comfort the child including:
 - A picture of the parent and/or siblings
 - A blanket, stuffed animals or pillow from home
 - A t-shirt, nightgown or clothes that smell like the parents which can soothe the child greatly when having difficulty dealing with the separation

Handout #4

- A favorite book or toy