

Supporting Family Time (Contact) in Restoration

This factsheet provides information and guidance for planning family time (contact) when a child's permanency goal is restoration.

Family time is a critical part of working toward restoration. When a child's permanency goal is restoration, family time:

- supports a strong and stable relationship between the child and their parents
- gradually prepares the child and their parents for the child's return to their parent's care
- provides an opportunity to observe the way parents interact with their child
note: These observations are an important part of assessing whether restoration is in the child's best interests.
- helps parents see how the changes they have made have improved their relationship with their child
note: This can keep parents motivated to make and sustain the changes necessary for a successful restoration.

The Role of Caseworkers

The role of a caseworker in the context of family time is to:

- plan family time, considering the views of the child and parents in how, when and where family time occurs
- consider how family time can support and re-enforce a child's connection to community and culture (including language)
note: For culture and identity, please see the Working with Aboriginal Children, Young People and Families practice area and Cultural Care, Identity and Support practice area.
- provide practical assistance to make sure family time is as meaningful, supportive and safe as possible
- coach and support parenting skills and safe parenting

- assist the child and parents (and siblings if they have been separated) to repair their relationship and to bond
- assess changes over time and the ability for the parent to care for their child safely.

It is important that the caseworker continuously seeks out the views of the child about their experience of family time. Checking in with children to continue to help them understand their experiences.

Coaching and Mentoring the Parents

Support parents during family time visits by actively coaching parents. This is different to passively observing family time. Coaching is a vital part of supporting families toward a successful restoration. Some practical tips are:

- Use the [emotion coaching approach](#) to help parents develop caregiving skills.
- Recognise that some parents may not know how to ‘play’ with their children, especially if they have spent time apart. [Tools to support play](#) may be useful to build a parent’s confidence and encourage connection.
- Develop parenting strategies together and write them up. They can be as simple as time-together playing, talking and eye contact during nappy changes, or strategies to respond to challenging behaviours.
- Identify members of their network who could provide guidance or help with some caregiving tasks.
- Normalise times when the child is upset or overwhelmed – this is to be expected.

The Role of Parents

For parents working toward a child’s safe return home, family time is an opportunity to build the skills of parents and to support and assess parent-child interactions and allow parents to:

- demonstrate their parenting role (their ability to interact with their child in ways that shows their skills as a parent)
- demonstrate knowledge of the child’s development (their ability to support their child’s specific needs)
- respond appropriately to the child’s signals, including their awareness of how the child communicates

- put their child's needs ahead of their own
- show empathy toward the child and attend to their experience and point of view
- implement developmentally appropriate boundary setting strategies.

The Role of Carers

Carers play an important role during a restoration. Children benefit when their carers and their parents have a positive relationship. This can reduce anxiety and enhance a child's sense of safety and security during the uncertainty of a transition.

Family time can be good opportunity for carers and parents to further develop their relationship. Carers are in an optimal position to support, coach and mentor parents during family time. This can occur in a number of different ways such as:

- information sharing, including sharing the child's current routine, likes and dislikes
- giving reinforcement of positive caregiving, interactions and changes
- modelling, such as demonstrating strategies the carer has used to support the child when feeling overwhelmed, allowing the child to receive a consistent response from all the significant adults in their life.

Help carers' share these insights in a sensitive and empathic way. Support parents to implement any new strategies. For more information see [Supporting Parents in Restoration](#).

For more information see [Supporting Carers through Restoration](#) and [Supporting Children and Young People in Restoration](#)

Planning Family Time

For children being restored, plan for family time to occur in natural settings and gradually involve times and activities that reflect the realities of the child returning home. Attending family time in natural settings can also help practitioners develop positive relationships with children and their families. For more information see [Relationship-Based Practice](#).

Consider a staged approach, allowing:

- parents time to develop their parenting skills gradually in situations that reflect what full-time parenting will actually look and feel like

- practitioners, carers and other adults in the child's network to offer coaching and advice as the parent practices various caregiver roles and responsibilities.

Family time could include:

- establishing healthy routines (such as cooking dinner for, or with, the child, sharing a meal, household cleaning, grocery shopping)
- going to medical or other appointments
- helping with homework
- playing in both structured (for example card games, drawing) and unstructured ways (for example imaginative games).
- spending time together before school- making the lunch, dressing and getting to school
- bedtime settling routines
- attending established social routines such as sporting or recreational events
- attending cultural events or engaging together in cultural practices or rituals.

If a child requires additional support such as administering medication, family time is an opportunity for parents to experience this role with the support of carers or other adults.

Make sure that carers are included in the planning as family time increases in frequency and changes to support a child's transition home. Support carers to remain involved by considering what they may need to maintain their own commitment to family time visits.

Planning Family Time with Siblings

All children in care need to be connected to their siblings to experience stability, continuity and security in their life. Strengthening and maintaining sibling connections is especially important for siblings with a goal of restoration to:

- enable siblings to support each-other during restoration (where appropriate)
- improve the siblings wellbeing and sense of connectedness
- help siblings learn new behaviours (when behaviour has presented difficulties in the past)
- increase the likelihood of successful restoration.

Consider family dynamics and the unique circumstances of each family when planning sibling family time. For example:

When a child is returning to live with siblings that have always lived at home, siblings are given an opportunity to spend time together and prepare for the changes that will occur after restoration.

When a group of siblings that will be returning home, provide opportunities each child needs to spend one-on-one time with their parents. The parents need to understand the individual needs of each child, as well as the realities of parenting the children when they are together.

When siblings have different case plan goals (for example, when one of the siblings is to remain in long term care because they have a strong bond with their carer and restoration is not in their best interests)

- explain to each of the siblings why it is necessary for there to be different case plan goals and
- listen and act upon their views, wishes and suggestions about how they want to be included in plans for family time.

When siblings are living in different placements with different carers, well considered and planned family time is vital to overcome the logistical barriers to ensure all children are given an opportunity to see their siblings.

Increasing Family Time to Achieve Restoration

Gradually increase family time in preparation for the child returning home. This includes moving towards unsupervised time between parent and child and overnight stays at the family home. Outline how everyone will know when the parents and child are ready to progress, how this will occur, how it will be monitored, and how it will be reviewed in the child's case plan. The child's network must each understand the plan, how it will move from one stage to the next, and what barriers may arise. If the plan needs to change, be transparent with families - explain how the plan has changed and why.

Note: for children whose goal was previously long-term care, family time may only be significantly increased if the Children's Court (Court) has approved a new permanency plan with the goal of restoration. This is done via a Section 90 application.

For more information see [Restoration Legal Process from Long-Term Care \(PRM-18\)](#) and [Restoration Pathway for Children Entering the Care System](#).

Introducing Unsupervised Family Time

When a child is returning home, arrange for the child to have unsupervised family time with their parents, when safe to do so. If safe, unsupervised family time cannot be arranged at an appropriate point of the restoration plan, consider whether restoration is an appropriate case plan goal.

Supervised and unsupervised family time are each key components in assessing progress towards the family's case plan goals. A parent's capacity to have safe, unsupervised family time demonstrates their readiness to keep their child safe and attend to their child's needs.

When unsupervised family time is introduced, the practitioner continues to attend at least one in four family time visits. This allows the practitioner to make observations and assessments about the relationship between the child and their parents, and any changes that the parents have made. This informs important decisions about when it is safe for a child to go home.