

Maintaining Children's Relationships with Parents, Relatives and Friends (Family Time)

ISP supports children and young people to maintain relationships with their parents, grandparents, siblings, wider family members, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives. Depending on the child's Care Plan and safeguarding arrangements, this may be achieved through face-to-face visits and activities, telephone or video call, or by letter.

Formally within the care system, these arrangements are referred to as 'contact', but we use the term 'Family Time' in accordance with young people's preferences and our 'Language that Cares' approach. Within this policy, the term 'contact' is only used when referring to formal care proceedings.

This policy explains the arrangements that need to be in place to support and facilitate Family Time

This policy is compliant with the [Fostering Services National Minimum Standards](#) and the [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#).

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Family Time with Parents and Siblings

Wherever possible and appropriate, children and young people should be encouraged and supported to stay in touch with their parents and siblings. Such arrangements should be consistent with the child's Care Plan which must take account of any Child Protection Plan or Contact Order that may be in force. There is a presumption of continued contact between the child and their family while the child is in foster care, unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare.

Family time with parents or siblings may only be permitted if previously agreed by the child's social worker and set out in the child's Placement Plan. Family Time arrangements should always be clearly detailed, setting out the purpose, type of meeting, the venue (or type of meeting place), the frequency and how the arrangements will be evaluated and reviewed. The role of telephone (including mobile) communication should also be considered.

If the young person uses social networking apps and gaming consoles it is important for an agreement to be reached between the young person, their social worker and foster parent about how to safely do this if there are contact restrictions in place.

Family time arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child's needs. The child's welfare is always the paramount consideration and each child's wishes and needs should be individually considered and regularly assessed.

So far as it is reasonably practicable, the wishes and feelings of the parents and the child's foster parents must also be sought before a decision about family time arrangements is made.

Family time arrangements must not be withdrawn as a sanction imposed on a child.

Keeping in Touch with Significant Others

For children in care, the terms contact and Family Time generally refer to the child's relationship with members of their birth family, but it may also apply to the child's wider family, previous foster parents or staff from residential settings, former teachers or counsellors, friends from another area where they lived in the past; anyone, in fact, who has played a significant role in the child's life. Without specific attention, we know that contact arrangements tend to wither and become less frequent over time, with the result that children leave care isolated and lacking in the support networks that other children and young people take for granted.

It is important to emphasise that the expectations of contact relate not simply to the foster child's immediate family but also other significant relationships.

Unsupervised Arrangements

Children may only have unsupervised Family Time with parents and siblings, and agreed contact with significant others, with the agreement of the placing authority. Arrangements must be set out in the Placement Plan. Foster parents understand the importance of family time for children and young people and will facilitate and support agreed arrangements to achieve a positive outcome for the child.

Supervised Arrangements

The decision about the need for Family Time (or contact with others) to be supervised will be made by the placing authority as part of the assessment and planning process. The reasons should be clearly recorded and the arrangements set out in the child's Placement Plan which will be regularly reviewed as a minimum at the Looked After Review.

The arrangements will include the details about the role of the supervisor, the extent of the supervision required (it may be sufficient to supervise from an adjacent room) and if the visit is confined to a certain identified area, for example a specified Contact Centre.

We ask the placing authority to complete a detailed Contact Risk Assessment form prior to Family Time that is supervised by ISP. The risk assessment includes:

- Any known risk that the parent may abduct the child.
- Behaviour concerns in relation to parents or other adults during Family Time, including known use of alcohol or drugs.
- Concerns about the use of technology during Family Time.
- Action to mitigate risk, including number of supervisors and venue requirements.

Those supervising Family Time should familiarise themselves with the requirements as detailed in the Placement Plan and Contact Risk Assessment, follow the requirements specified and fully record their observations as soon as possible after Family Time has taken place. The record is shared with the supervising social worker and local authority social worker and stored on the child's Charms record.

Foster Parents Visiting Family Homes

If it is likely that foster parents will take children to see their family in the family home, and supervise this Family Time, they must consult their supervising social worker beforehand - and a risk assessment should be completed by the placing local authority. Advice should be provided to the foster parents on any risks and strategies they should adopt.

If foster parents are confronted with unacceptable behaviour during the visit, they should attempt to comply with the guidance provided by their supervising social worker, but if they consider that they and/or the child is at significant risk, they should leave, preferably with the child, and contact the child's social worker and their designated supervising social worker. The foster parent will be required to write up a separate report based on their observations and the reasons why they felt it necessary to end Family Time early.

Managing Concerns

Whenever the foster parent and/or the agency's staff are concerned about a child's reaction to Family Time, this will be communicated to the child's social worker as soon as possible and the discussion will be recorded within the daily log.

Should the foster parent or other agency staff have any concerns during Family Time and consider that immediate action is required, they should take what reasonable steps they can to reduce or prevent any risk. Wherever possible, this action should be taken by a foster parent after first consulting their supervising social worker or by other agency staff after consulting their line manager. In exceptional circumstances, they should notify the police. The police must be called immediately if the parent attempts to abduct the child.

Emergency restrictions on Family Time or other contact can only be made by the agency to protect the child from significant risk and must be notified to the placing authority (child's social worker) within 24 hours.

Restrictions or Termination of Family Time

Contact should always be agreed with the placing authority and no restrictions on Family Time should be made by the foster parent without the agreement of the child's social worker. *

In the event of being unable to contact the child's social worker or the social worker's manager, the placing authority Duty Team should be contacted.

**The only exception to this is in an emergency situation where the foster parent or a member of staff within the agency reasonably believes that they need to safeguard or promote the welfare of the child; if foster parents take any such action, they must notify their supervising social worker and the child's social worker immediately afterwards.*