TOPIC:
Understanding the Concept of Family Time
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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:
Read through this self-study then fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire
Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.

Foster parents know that children in foster care need to maintain contact with families to build attachment and increase the chances of safely and successfully reunifying with their families. This family contact is critical. The Family Contact Improvement Partnership in Mat Su is working on promoting quality family contact through promoting the concept of family time. This is supervised contact (by trained volunteers, OCS staff, or foster parents) that is thoughtful and mindful of planning experiences that promote good interaction between parents and their children.

So what can you learn from these folks about your supervision or planning for family time of your children in care and their family members? Here are some ideas:

Here are other ways to prepare for family time:

• Support activities and other experiences that focus on the child's culture and what activities the family expects will be continued while their child is in foster care.

• Avoid using family time as a reward or punishment for the parent or the child.

• If extended family will be coming to the family time events, encourage them to be supportive and not take over the parent's authority or involvement. - Talking about how the family time event went before leaving to highlight what went well and what areas can be strengthened before the next family time event. The parent should be asked to relate what they did well and what they'd like to continue to improve upon. If the parent is feeling too emotional to respond in a positive way right after family time, plan a follow-up conversation for the very next day.

• If a child is uncomfortable, then the child has the right to end the family time event. The age and developmental level of the child should be part of the decision to end the family time event. For example, a three-year-old child who has been appropriately scolded for misbehavior and who then says they want to leave the session should be redirected and helped to share their feelings about what has made them unhappy or uncomfortable.

• If you need to reschedule a family time session, contact the caseworker as soon as you know. If you decide you no longer want to or are unable to be a Family Time Supporter for a family, contact the caseworker to set a date when you will stop providing family time. Plans should be made with the caseworker before the last family time event to minimize the negative impact this may have on the child.

INVOLVE THE PARENT DURING FAMILY TIME

• Try an Icebreakers at the beginning such as a brief activities or fun question

• Provide an idea to parents of some activities specific to the development age of the child.

• Using resiliency activities that help build on the strengths of the parent and the child.

• Encourage family members to talk about daily routines and how the family culture is expressed in day-to-day actions or activities or traditions.

Special considerations must be made when a parent or child has experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse. This is also true when a parent is living in residential treatment or jail or prison. The caseworker will give you extra tips if you are a Family Time Supporter for a family who has this type of situation.

Your role as a Family Time Supporter is to empower parents to have safe, meaningful, and healthy contact with their child that celebrates the family's culture. This can be done by helping parents plan age appropriate family activities for their family time.

During Family Time

Each family time event should flow using the same process, so the events are predictable for the parent and child. This helps create feelings of safety and security. Each session should include:

➢ Greetings that are warm and positive
➢ Family circle time to catch up on recent experiences and revisit family time goals
➢ Resiliency activity that supports the family goals and the developmental needs
➢ Meal or snack (when appropriate)
➢ Family clean-up time to work together on tidying up and caring for items in the room
➢ Review and planning time to help the parent take ownership and responsibility for what occurred in the session and for thinking ahead to the next session

You should be aware of the how the family is behaving and communicating throughout the family time event. Safety is always the main concern.

> During family time, the parent is responsible for their own behavior, for the child's belongings, and for following family time rules. You are responsible for child safety during family time and transitioning the child back to the foster home.

Each family has different traditions and ways of parenting. These should be encouraged and continue without interference from you unless they make the child unsafe. The focus is on safety, not on your personal preferences or expectations.

Possible family time settings can be the family home, a local restaurant, a family member's home, church, park, library, or community center. Family time may also include family events such as a birthday party or cultural ceremony for the child or parent. During family time, you should be in the role of an "extra adult." You can give positive guidance and offer suggestions through demonstration in natural interactions.

You should help the parent remind the child that the parent is safe, and that the child should not worry about the parent. You can help support this message by doing activities such as drawing a picture of what the parent and child will do together the next time they see each other. The child could also draw a picture of how family time went for them and what they enjoyed doing together that day.

For more information about Family Contact check out the **Best Practices Guide for Foster Parents** at https://www.rockmatsu.org/familycontact/ or call ACRF for a printed booklet.

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