

NEW YORK STATE
 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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SAR A. PERALES
 Commissioner



An Informational Letter informs local districts of potential developments in the Social Services field, or of actual or potential developments in collateral fields of interest.

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

TRANSMITTAL NO.: 86-INF-3
 (Family and Children Services)

TO: Social Services Commissioners

SUBJECT: Parental Visiting of Children in Foster Care

DATE: April 30, 1986

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION:

Social Services Districts
 Child Placement Agencies

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I. Purpose

This letter has two purposes. One is to emphasize the importance and the benefits of regular visiting between natural parents and their children in foster care. The other is to focus attention on agency practices which facilitate parental visiting of foster children.

II. Background

The Department's diligence of effort regulations (18 NYCRR 430.12(d)(1)) and Section 384-b(7)(f) of the Social Services Law reflect a consensus in the foster care field about parental visiting being a significant predictor of positive change for children in foster care. 18 NYCRR 430.12(d)(1) provides that for children in foster care whose permanency

FILING REFERENCES

Previous INFs/ADMs	Dept. Regs.	Social Services Law and Other Legal References	Bulletin/Chapter Reference	Miscellaneous References
78-ADM-85 82-ADM-42 85-ADM-42	430.12(d)	Section 384-b (7)(f)		

DSS-329 (REV 2)

planning goal is discharge to parents or relatives, the social services district shall facilitate visiting between the foster child and his or her parents or caretakers. Section 384-b(7)(f) of the Social Services Law requires social services districts to make suitable arrangements with a correctional facility and other appropriate persons for an incarcerated person to visit his or her child within the correctional facility. Information concerning the steps required to facilitate visiting between foster children and their incarcerated parents can be found in 85 ADM-42.

It should be remembered that children who are in foster care who do not have a permanency planning goal of discharge to parents or relatives, should be visited by their parents unless parental rights have been terminated or a court has restricted the rights of a parent to visit their children while the children are in foster care or such visiting would not be appropriate.

In the 1977 book, Children in Foster Care: A Longitudinal Study, two foster care researchers, David Fanshel and Eugene B. Shinn state that in their study of children in foster care they were "impressed with the frequency with which significant variance in change measures was accounted for by parental visiting". In comparing frequently and infrequently visited children they found that highly visited children had these characteristics.

1. Highly visited children showed significantly greater gains in non-verbal IQ.
2. Highly visited children showed significantly greater gains in verbal IQ scores over the full five years of the study.
3. Children who were highly visited showed more significant gains in a summary measure of their emotional adjustment as measured by figure-drawing tests.
4. Children who were highly visited showed significant changes in CBC scores (Child Behavioral Characteristics) for the composite scores of: (a) responsibility and (b) agreeableness. High parental visiting was a positive predictor of change for (a) defiance-hostility (negative correlation) and (b) emotionality-tension (negative correlation). Parental visiting helped predict change in: (a) agreeableness, (b) defiance hostility (negative correlation), and (c) emotionality-tension (negative correlation).
5. A higher level of parental visiting was a significant predictor of an overall positive assessment by the child's classroom teacher.

Although there were some outcome measures where parental visiting was not a significant predictor of change, Fanshel and Shinn were impressed by the overall positive effects of parental visiting. They concluded that visiting should be encouraged by agencies in the interest of the child's emotional well being. The positive effects of visiting were supported by a more recent study. It found that black children with zero visits were in placement an average of 64.45 months. Those with four or more visits were in placement an average of only 20.61 months. Data from this study of foster children in the Northeast region, which included New York, showed that 4 or more visits in contrast to zero visits was associated with a difference of nearly 4 years in average placement time.

III. Program Implications

Parental visiting of children in foster care is a practice that supports permanency for children. Parental visits which are regular and constructive help to alleviate a child's separation anxiety and to keep the natural parent involved with the child as well as with the agency providing temporary care. Assisting parents to visit requires a capacity within an agency to individualize the needs of children and their parents and a conviction that visiting, in general, leads to improved child-parent relationships.

An effective implementation of a policy on parental visiting can be expected to contribute to healthy interaction among all parts of the foster care system, however, it should be recognized that the reality of parental visiting is never entirely free of problems. Knowing or fearing what might happen during a visit causes some children to feel hostile or unhappy prior to a scheduled visit. Some children become very upset following a visit with the natural parent. For others negative reactions are a result of unpredictable or difficult parental behavior that is frustrating, embarrassing, or rejecting.

Problematic behavior following visits should not be a reason for terminating visits, especially for children who are to return to the natural parents. Only behavior on the part of the parents which is clearly dangerous to others should be considered grounds for taking action to suspend the rights of the parent to visit and concurrently to reassess the service goal for the child to return to the care of the natural parent.

The value and benefits of parental visiting are enhanced by subsequent discussions by a caseworker with the child or parent. Any problems arising during a visit can be identified and clarified. For children, especially, a discussion following a visit may help them to express painful feelings that have been suppressed but activated by the visit. These feelings or conflicts may have been a cause for some inner disturbance or have had a detrimental effect upon the child's social adjustment. Discussions initiated with the child by a caseworker about a problem occurring during a visit or the painful feelings that were experienced when the parent was present may result in greater self-awareness and in more effective control over feelings that the child has had to suppress. Through such discussions the worker can facilitate the child's maturation and progress in making constructive use of the placement situation.

Also, it may provide an opportunity for the caseworker to be of assistance in resolving or beginning to resolve some of the underlying difficulties in family relationships. Through an effort at protecting self esteem and diminishing hostility or guilt after a problematic visit a caseworker may make it possible for both a child and parent to have a different perspective on their relationship. Through the support and reinforcement of their caseworker, both the parent and child may perceive and understand the other better and be able to make some subtle but positive change in how they communicate and in the way they relate to one another.

IV. Fiscal Implications

In the directive 78-ADM-85 agencies were advised that transportation costs related to the visits of a natural parent/guardian with a child in foster care or visits by a child with the natural parent/guardian may be claimed for

state reimbursement by local social services districts. In correspondence of April 12, 1985, this office advised local commissioners that transportation costs are included in the maximum state rates of the Standards of Payment system for travel within a fifty mile radius of the agency.

The April 12, 1985 correspondence also advised commissioners that costs for transportation for home visits in excess of a fifty mile radius could be negotiated and agreed upon through section (e) of the Financial Agreements of the model contract. These costs were to be defined as a separate amount above the maximum state aid rate to be paid to the voluntary agency when that agency provides the transportation. Transportation costs for home visits in excess of a fifty mile radius may also be paid directly or provided directly by the social services district without involving the voluntary agency in specific contract provisions.

Note: Such costs are to be authorized through the WMS case on the POS section of the authorization. The appropriate POS service type code is "72" (Transportation - Regular) for the circumstances described above. A POS of "72" requires the same elements be completed in the POS section as any other POS code.

V. Recommended Goals for a Program of Parental Visiting

1. Assist natural parents in understanding and accepting their role of the natural parent of a child in foster care and the importance of visiting their children. Give the natural parent positive reinforcement with regard to their interest in visiting.

Comment:

Although the terms "natural parent" or "birth parent" differentiates a child's parents from foster parents, neither term carries the connotation of the actual ambiguous role expectations of their position. While retaining parental rights over the child, the parent is legally limited in the amount of authority that is retained over child. It is a position of being neither parent or non parent, but rather something in between. Rights and duties are significantly altered and are incongruent with those they had as the caretaking adult. Typically, the capacity and motivation to acquire new role behaviors are complicated by ambivalence and a sense of failure. Role discontinuity accompanying the abrupt change in parental rights and responsibilities often results in confusion, anxiety and stress. Important agency objectives are to prevent this from happening and to make it possible for the natural parent to perceive the agency as a facilitator and an ally. With this perception it is reasonable to assume that parents will cooperate and the purpose of visitation - to maintain the parent-child relationship and to prepare the family for reunification - may be realized.

2. Assist natural parents in understanding their child's sense of time and becoming knowledgeable about developmentally related visitation activities.

Comment

- (a) A child's sense of time should be defined for parents in terms of the child's age-related ability to remember and feel cared for by persons he/she has not seen for a specific period of time. Frequent, regular visitation is emphasized as necessary if the child is to be able to remember and experience the parent as a parent.
- (b) Developmentally related visitation activities are those that reflect an understanding of the growth process of the child and a knowledge of the specific tasks that are to be carried out for supporting the development of a normal personality. For example, during infancy a crucial developmental task is for the child to develop an attachment to the natural mother or a surrogate mother. An essential developmentally related visitation activity would be to meet the infants basic needs for feeding, changing, holding, cuddling, etc. This approach to planning visits engages the parent in the task of learning about the child's developmental needs and increases the competence of the parent in attending to these needs at the same time it promotes mutually satisfying parent-child interaction.

NOTE: Examples of developmentally related visitation activities are found in Appendix A.

3. Arrange meaningful visitation opportunities in a relaxed, natural setting and avoid office visits unless there is a real concern for the child's safety or there is a need to control or structure parent-child intervention during the visit.
4. Assist the natural parent in preparing for a visit by reviewing plans for making the visit successful and by discussing and setting short term goals for each visit.

Comment

The physical separation from the parent is invariably perceived by younger children, especially, as a lessening of parental love, a perception which is a cause for feeling insecure. Therefore, a frequent short term goal is to help a parent know how to reassure the child that separation has not lessened the intensity of parental feeling or the strength of the parent's emotional attachment to the child.

5. Arrange to speak with the natural parent following a visit to evaluate the effects of the visit with regard to the parent/child relationship, family relationships, the child's role and status in the family, and the readiness of the family to provide adequate care of the child.
6. As necessary, carefully structure and supervise the visits. Some children will inevitably experience anxiety and exhibit some symptoms (such as restlessness, stomach upsets, sleep disturbance, etc.) prior to and following visits.
7. Evaluate the child's responses to parent-child visits when visitation appears to be having a detrimental effect and secure appropriate clinical

opinions regarding the advisability of either continuing or suspending visitation.

- (a) Identify any specific destructive parental behavior which occurs during visits (for example, making unrealistic promises).
- (b) Following a visit, discuss the inappropriate behavior with the parent and explain the effect of the behavior on the child.

Comment:

Behavioral problems may be due in part to the natural parents' tense or traumatic handling of the child; in part, these may be due to a belief held by the child that parental feeling and concern has diminished. Usually, however, most younger children who are upset after a visit are protesting the separation. There may be episodes of screaming, threats, crying or negativism, reactions that child development specialists regard as the first stage of a mourning process that lasts as long as the child's emotions are concentrated on the absence (loss) of the parent but is halted if the child is returned to the natural parent or if there is provision for an adequate substitute parent.

8. Identify factors that may be the cause for the parents cancelling visits or arriving late for a visit.

Comment:

If the reason for the failure to keep an appointment was an unrealistic visiting plan efforts should be made to rearrange the visiting time, location, or circumstance. By aggressively reaching out to parents, workers can convince them how important visiting is.

9. Assist child care workers/foster parents in understanding why natural parents are important to children in foster care.

Comment:

The presence of the natural parents in the placement picture frequently complicates and renders difficult child care workers'/foster parents' attempts to help children to cooperate with their placement agency. A child psychiatrist, Ner Littner, has described the reasons why there may be resentment of the natural parents: "Some natural parents have severe emotional problems. They may be uncooperative, unpredictable, and inconsistent. They may show up at inconvenient times, or early or late or sometimes not at all. They may return the child to the foster parents home at the wrong time. They may be argumentative, critical ... unrealistically promise the child anything. They may be sabotaging the foster parents best efforts... Their visits with the child may result in a temporary worsening of the child's behavior or functioning..."

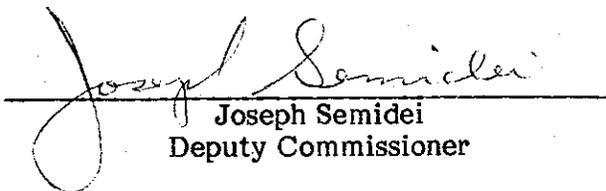
The pressures that child care workers/foster parents experience through their contacts with natural parents have to be acknowledged

and accepted. At the same time an objective in discussions with child care workers and foster parents is to help them understand the importance of natural parents to their children. Ner Littner has emphasized that "no matter how troubled or difficult they may be to the child - they are his roots to the past, his support and his foundation. When he is separated from them, he feels that he has lost a part of himself."

10. Identify specific ways in which child care workers/foster parents can help natural parents and their children to benefit from planned visits and engage them in the process of planning for a parental visit. Assisting child care workers/foster parents to define their role in a planned visit is important and will improve the chance for a visit to be a positive experience. A caseworker's understanding of the child and the parent will be improved by eliciting from them observations as to what happened during a visit and their opinions on the effects of the visit.

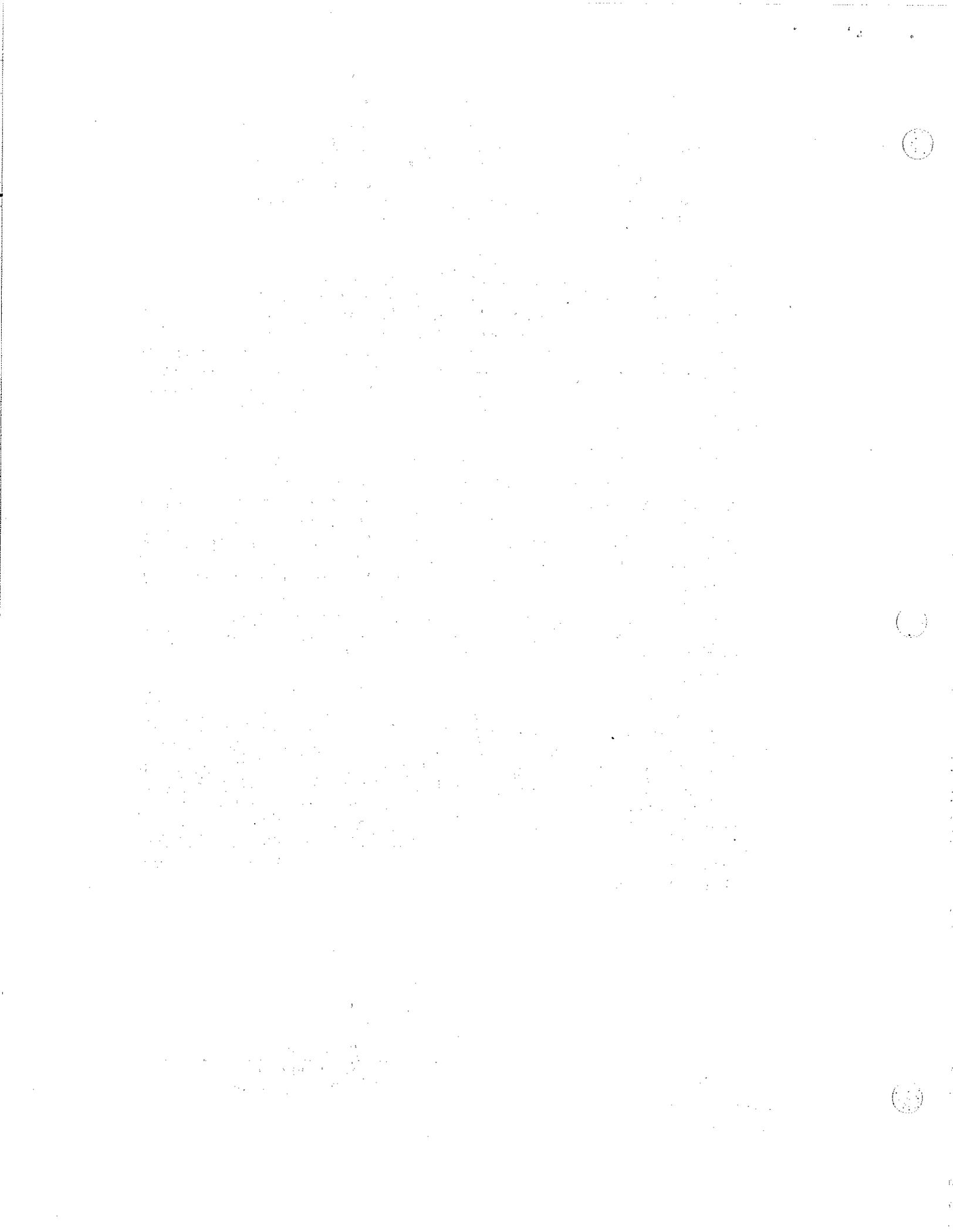
V. Additional Information

1. It is recommended that each agency make available to natural parents and guardians a brief, clearly written statement about the agency's parental visiting policy. This should describe the agency's expectations of parents with regard to regular visiting and, also, the agency's policy on the financial assistance that is available to parents for facilitating visiting. The criteria for establishing eligibility for assistance is left to the discretion of each social services district. The Department assumes that local districts will strive for consistency and fairness in determining who is eligible for this assistance, and at the same time, maintain sufficient administrative flexibility for a viable program of parental visiting.
2. A 1984 Child Welfare League of America publication, Establishing Parent Involvement in Foster Care Agencies is recommended reading for foster care supervisors and administrators interested in strengthening an agency's parental visiting program. Also recommended is The Parent in the Shadows which is used in the Introductory Foster Parent Training Course of the Child Welfare League of America. Both publications may be either borrowed from the Department's Material Resource Center, One Commerce Plaza, Room 725, Albany, New York 12260 or purchased from the Child Welfare League of America, 67 Irving Place, New York, New York 10003.



Joseph Semidei
Deputy Commissioner

Attachments



APPENDIX A

Developmentally Related Visitation Activities

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Developmental tasks</u>	<u>Developmentally related visitation activities</u>
Infancy (0-2) Trust vs. mistrust	Develop primary attachment	Meeting basic needs (feeding, changing, holding, cuddling)
	Develop object permanence	Peek-a-boo games
	Basic motor development (sit, reach, stand, crawl, walk)	Help with standing, walking, etc., by holding hand, "come to me" games
	Word recognition	Naming objects, repeating name games, reading picture books
	Begin exploration and mastery of the environment	Child-proof environment; encourage exploration; taking walks; playing together with colorful, noisy, moving items.
Toddler (2-4) Autonomy vs. shame/doubt	Develop impulse control	Making and consistently enforcing rules
	Language development	Reading simple stories; playing word games
	Imitation, fantasy play	"Let's pretend" games; encouraging imitative play by doing things together such as "clean house", "go to store"
	Large motor development (run, climb, dance)	Playing together at park; assist in learning to ride tricycle; dance together to music
	Small motor coordination	Draw together; string beads together

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Developmental tasks</u>	<u>Developmentally related visitation activities</u>
	Develop basic sense of time	Discuss visits and visit activities in terms of "after breakfast", "after lunch", "before supper", etc.
	Assert preferences	Allow choices in activities, clothes worn, foods eaten
Pre-school, Early School (5-7) Initiative vs. guilt	Sex role identification	Be open to discussing boy-girl physical differences
	Begin development of conscience	Be open to discussing child's perception of sex roles; read books about heroes together
	Develop ability to solve problems	Make and enforce consistent rules; discuss consequences of behavior
	Begin concrete operations (time, space, hierarchy)	Encourage choices in activities
	Task completion	Point out cause-effect
	Play games with rules	Plan activities with beginning, middle, end (as prepare, make cake, clean up)
	School entry	Play simple games such as Candyland, Old Maid
		Shop for school clothes together; provide birth certificate, medical record required for school entry; go with child to visit school, playground prior to first day; accompany child on first day

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Developmental tasks</u>	<u>Developmentally related visitation activities</u>
School-aged (8-12) Industry vs. inferiority	Skill development (school, sports, special interests)	Help with homework; practice sports together; demonstrate support of special interests, as help with collections; go fishing; attend school conferences and activities
	Peer group development	Involve peers in visitation activity
	Team play	Attend team activities with child (child's team or observe team together)
	Develop self-awareness	Be open to providing feedback
	Preparation for puberty	Discuss physical changes expected; answer questions openly
Early adolescence (13-17) Group identity vs. alienation	Cope with physical changes	Help with attention re: personal appearance, such as shaving, buying cosmetics, bra; provide information re: physical changes
	Begin abstract thinking	Plan, discuss future; discuss politics religious ideas
	Interest in heterosexual relationships, dating	Set clear rules, be open to discussing problems
	Become more independent of parents	Help learn to drive; delegate responsibility; allow to handle money
	Changes in peer group associations	Transport to peer activities; include peers in visitation plans

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Developmental tasks</u>	<u>Developmentally related visitation activities</u>
Late adolescence (18-22) Identity vs. role diffusion	Separation from family Develop life goals and values Rework own identity and sex-role identity Develop capacity for intimacy	Encourage independence through actions such as help move to own apartment, help apply for jobs Be aware of and tolerate independence-dependence conflict Be open to discuss adolescent's options, "think through" together; share own experiences as young adult

APPENDIX B**WORKERS AND FOSTER FAMILIES INVOLVEMENT WITH BIRTH FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**Minimum InvolvementFoster Parents' ActivitiesWorker's Activities

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|--|---|
| 1. talk with child regarding feelings about missing parents, help child with grief about separation from parents | talk with foster parent regarding child's and parents' reactions to child's separation; engage foster parent in understanding child's reactions and in planning to help child with grief |
| 2. provide progress reports about child to parents through letters, sharing school papers, pictures, etc. | act as message bearer when appropriate; encourage child and foster parents to share information with parents |
| 3. help child with gifts and cards for parents on special days | notify foster parent of special days (such as parents' birthdays) |
| 4. encourage parental participation in decision making by providing information about child to worker, requesting parental opinions, feedback through worker | discuss importance of continued parental input into decisions about the child; be available and willing to serve as message bearer and interpreter |
| 5. prepare child for visits, encourage child's open expression of feelings about visits, transport to visits when no contact with birth parents | keep foster parents informed of visit plans, involve foster parents in exploring child's reactions to visits |
| 6. seek information about child from birth parents through worker | provide foster parents with information about child, serve as message bearer to seek and report information about child from birth parents |
| 7. share child by allowing child to spend special days with parents when requested | be available to foster parents to plan for special days; advocate and teach need for child-birth parents time together on special days; recognize and accept foster parents' reactions |
| 8. refrain from demeaning child's parents to the child or to others | provide knowledge about birth parents to foster parents which may increase foster parents' empathy for birth parents; teach about child's need not to have others demean parents even when child is angry with them or disapproving of them |

- | | |
|---|---|
| 9. cooperate in plans for child; if disagree with plans, share ideas with worker, not child | involve foster parents in planning and keep foster parents informed of progress and change in plans; be available to foster parents to discuss openly foster parents' reactions to plans |
| 10. respect the confidential nature of all information about the child and the child's family | inform foster parents of expectation that information regarding child and family be held in confidence and of the rationale for expectation; deal directly with inappropriate sharing of such information |
| 11. allow/encourage similar post-placement involvement (cards, letters, sharing pictures) | be available to plan and monitor such activities |

Moderate Involvement

Foster Parents' Activities

Worker's Activities

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. allow/encourage phone calls between child and birth parents | plan limits for frequency, length of calls with birth parents, foster parents, and child; plan with foster parents about any expected problems |
| 2. transport children to visits where limited birth parent contact may occur, such as agency | be available to introduce, monitor, mediate |
| 3. allow/encourage visit in foster home with worker supervising visits | prepare child, birth and foster parents for possible reactions to situation, be available throughout visit; be available to process reactions following visits |
| 4. discuss decisions to be made about the child with birth parents on phone or in person | support foster parents' involvement of birth parents in decision making; be available to interpret, mediate when appropriate |
| 5. invite birth parents to attend activities such as school conferences and functions and clinic appointments with child and foster parents | assist foster parents, birth parents, and child in planning for activity and preparing for possible reactions; be available to process reactions following activity |
| 6. allow/encourage similar post-placement involvement | be available for discussion of reactions, assistance with limit setting, planning, monitoring |

Maximum InvolvementFoster Parents' Activities

1. allow/encourage unsupervised visits in foster family home or visits with foster parents as supervisors
2. coordinate visitation arrangements as agreed in the foster care plan
3. invite birth parents to participate in foster family activities such as picnics and birthday parties
4. assist birth parents in development of parenting skills through teaching and modelling
5. encourage birth parents to visit with foster parents when child is not in home
6. transport child to visits in birth families' home
7. allow/encourage continued relationship with child/birth family post-placement

Worker's Activities

- plan visits with child, foster and birth families; prepare for possible reactions, be available for processing, discussion of outcomes
- clarify roles with foster parents and support foster parents in roles agreed upon; be available for collaboration
- as above, participate in planning, preparing, processing
- participate in planning, preparing, processing; support foster parents in role as teachers and role models
- participate in planning, preparing, processing
- as above
- as above, and monitoring

