

# Parent-Child Dynamics: Assessing, Supporting, Teaching

presented by

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## Visitation: The Research is Clear

- Frequent, well planned, purposeful, and progressive visitation between children and their parents can...
  - shorten the children's stay in foster care
  - increase the likelihood that safe and permanent reunification will occur
  - ease the grief, loss, and confusion children experience as a result of separating from their families
  - improve children's well-being while in care

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## Goals of Visitation

- Meet the developmental needs of the child.
- Mitigate the trauma of placement.
- Give parents opportunities to practice parenting skills and significant care-giving.

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### Continued

- Give the case worker an opportunity to observe and assess families and their progress.
- Support/satisfy reasonable efforts requirements.
- Reunify child and parent

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### To Achieve Goals

- Increase
  - Frequency of visitation
  - Quality of visitation (parenting skills)
  - Parent involvement outside of visitation

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		Visitation Frequency	
		LOW	HIGH
Treatment plan compliance	LOW	High Correlation	Low Correlations
	HIGH	Low Correlation	High Correlation

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### **Chicken or the Egg?**

- The more parent participates in her treatment plan the more she visits with her child.
- The more parent visits with her child the more likely she is to follow her treatment plan.

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### **Research**

- regular visiting has proven a powerful incentive for parents suffering from substance abuse to engage in services immediately and seek treatment.

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### **Improve Odds of Family Success**

- First visit should occur within the first 24 hours of removal.
- Within the first 3 days, a progressive visitation plan is developed to help set parent, caregiver, and child expectations.
  - know what's happening next
  - better understand what's required to reunite the family
- Create support team composed of caregivers, relatives, or family friends familiar with the family and its situation. Can include foster parent.

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**Continued Use Parent's home, or another familiar setting**

- members of the family team, as opposed to Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff, conduct supervision.
  - children and parents feel more comfortable, which can make the visit more productive
  - relieves caseworkers of supervision duties.
  - center visits on a purpose or activity that supports bonding among parents, children, and siblings and allows parents to practice modeling behaviors and parenting skills.

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**Continued**

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**Quality: Prepare and Debrief the Parent**

- Psychologically prepare the parent before and after visits
  - Set goals for visit and a plan for how those goals will be achieved.
  - Problem-solve the challenges – both emotional and physical – to participating in visitation.
  - Parent and Coach can rate the visit and/or video the visit and critique it.
  - Discuss successes and challenges of the visit and desires and goals for future visits.

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## Stop Calling it “Visitation”

- To “Visit” means to pay a temporary social call.
  - And that is exactly what visitation between birth parents and their children in foster care often looks like.
  - This is the wrong message to the parents and the wrong message to the child.

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## Increase parental involvement

- Communication and connectedness through transitional objects, phone calls, skyping, picture sharing, texting.
- Encourage (order) participation in important aspects of children’s lives, such as school meetings and activities, extra curricular activities, medical and therapy appointments, etc.

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## Role of Foster Parents

- Foster parents work as part of the treatment team, the family team *and directly with birth parents.*
  - Foster parents are a resource to the birth parents.
  - Foster parents co-parent with regular input from birth parents.
  - Foster parents transport children to visits, coach during visits and testify in court.

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## Example

- New Mexico's "Ice Breaker" meetings for foster and birth parents occur within 2 work days.
  - arranged and facilitated by a foster parent liaison (former foster or adoptive parent).
  - focus on the child and his or her needs.
    - Birth parents share: child's personality, likes and dislikes, routine, bedtime habits, allergies or medications, favorite toys, special activities, and academics.
    - Foster Parents share: who else lives in the foster family, where the child will sleep, and regular activities in the foster home.

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## Continued

- Foster and birth parents are encouraged to maintain contact (e.g., phone calls, email).
- Why?
  - Children make a better adjustment when their foster parents know as much as possible about them.
  - Foster parents will see birth parents as "human beings" and be more able to support reunification.
  - Older children are more comfortable knowing that their foster and birth parents have met and feel that their loyalty is not being put to the test while they live with a foster family.

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## In addition

- Foster parents have access to training specific to their needs and questions.
  - a foster parent can email his or her concern and ask for a specific training, which will be online within a week.
- Experienced foster parents train newer caregivers

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## Obstacles

- Parent
  - Poor parental commitment to the child.
  - Inability/willingness to choose child over drugs/alcohol or other competing forces.
- Agency
  - Using visits as rewards for following case plan (or punishment for not).
  - Lack of resources for providing the necessary supervision/coaching/mentoring.
  - Recruitment and retention of foster parents.

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## Up the Ante

- Rather than removing or limiting parental responsibilities and involvement, increase the demands for parental involvement and parental responsibility.

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