

## **FAMILY CONTACT HIGHLIGHTS**

*(Summarized From OCS Policy and Procedures Section 6.5.6 Family Contact)*

When a child is removed from his parental home, OCS should encourage frequent, regular, and reasonable visitation of the child with the child's parents. The nature of that contact should be unique for each child. Frequent family contact facilitates reunification and/or permanency and contributes to the wellbeing of children placed out of home. Family Contact is defined as:

*Normalized family contact for children that is least restrictive, most family like setting; parents performing activities as they normally would; parents taking full responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children.*

Contact between parents and children should take place in the community whenever possible and the level of supervision shall be determined based on whether the contact can be **unsupervised**, **supervised intermittently** or in more **structured family time**.

Family contact plan will be developed and will include:

- A. Level of supervision and reasons for the level
- B. Goal of family contact
- C. Schedule, frequency, duration, location and participants
- D. Suggested activities
- E. Instructions for the parent during family contact
- F. Procedures for emergencies and special situations.

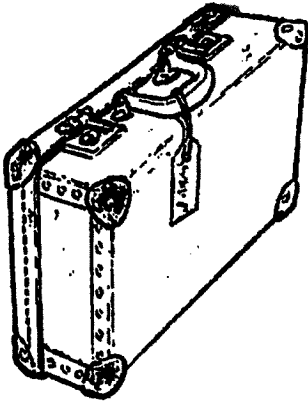
Family Contact should happen fairly soon after placement and supervised initially to determine appropriate levels of supervision in the future. Resource families may be asked to assist with supervision at some point as the family contact develops.

The Resource Family and other out-of-home care providers have a role in Family Contact and this is outlined in the Office of Children's Services Policies and Procedures. Resource families are expected to:

- Have regular ongoing contact with the birth parent;
- Permit parent to visit children placed in their home;
- Support the positive intent of family contact;
- Provide transportation for the child, if pre-arranged by worker;
- Have the child ready to participate in family contact at the agreed upon time;
- Help the child accept separation from parent;
- Record observations problems, etc. that affect the child before during or after the visit and provide this information to the worker, and;
- Support the child following visits.

## WHAT DOES A CHILD NEED AT THE TIME OF A MOVE OR A TRANSITION?

*The following information was first presented by, Norma Nelson of the Northwest Adoption Exchange in a workshop for Anchorage foster and adoptive parents. It is adapted and used here by permission.*



**Information:** Children need to have information about when transition will happen and what will happen. Children need time to prepare and to make adjustments. Just like parents and resource parents who experience grief, separation, and adjustment, children do too. Lifebooks can help with this.

**Answers to questions:** Children need a chance to ask questions and they have the right to have answers.

**Reassurance and Validation:** Children need to hear that they will be okay and that their feelings are important, even those feelings of anger, doubt or fear. They need a chance to talk and express those feelings without having them discounted.

**Visitation with Birth or Adoptive Family:** Children need visitation with their birth family on a regular basis in order to keep attachments going or to build new ones. Visitation and contact with the adoptive family before the transition is made, also helps a child make the change from one home to another.

**A Chance to Say Good-bye and Hello:** Rituals of good-bye, dinners or parties, or some designated time to say good-bye is an important part of transitions both for children and for resource families. Conversely, if there is a welcome from adoptive parents or birth parents, it helps a child make a clear transition.

**A Blessing:** Children need to hear from their resource parents (especially if it has been a long term placement) that they "bless" or approve that this transition is taking place.

**Post Placement Contact:** Ideally, contact between family and former resource families can continue after reunification. Phone calls, remembering birthdays, doing respite care, or providing support to a birth parent are all ways to continue contact.

## WHAT CAN THE RESOURCE PARENT DO?

1. If the child is being adopted, **provide information to the new family.** Write out the child's schedule. Share photos, school papers, and artwork. With the child compile a lifebook to share with the new family.
2. If the child is being adopted, **find out as much information as you can** about the new family so that you can prepare the child and answer his/her questions.
3. **Increase your availability to the child.** That means "hanging out" and being there just in case a child wants to talk. Listen, allow for feelings and validate those feelings.



## Handout 5-5

4. **Learn about, watch for and normalize signs of grieving.** Help children understand and express what they are feeling. Don't rush to make everything okay for the child.
5. **Facilitate and support visits** with the adoptive family members. Help children deal with feelings about visits – both negative and positive.
6. **Deal with concerns promptly.** Learn to express your feelings and your concerns outright. When a problems start, deal with them right away before they get too big.
7. **Make moving day significant.** Send favored objects and toys and clothes with the child. Give a simple gift – photo album or an address book, allow for good memories.
8. **Talk about placement contact during transition, not after.** Talk with parents and caseworker about what is acceptable to all parties.
9. **Put together a lifebook for the child if he doesn't have one.** Lifebooks are tools to help children make sense of the past and to keep track of things that happen during a child's lifetime. Children depend on the adults around them to be the memory keepers. It is helpful if resource parents help each child develop a lifebook or a record of important events that happen while he or she is placed with you. These scrapbooks contain photographs and drawings of people, places, pets and events that have been significant to the child.

Things you may want to include:

- *A picture when the child first comes to your home*
- *Addresses, pictures and phone numbers of friends*
- *Report cards, certificates of achievement, drawings*
- *Pictures of social workers and therapists*
- *Pictures of foster siblings, pets, teachers*
- *Pictures of holidays and birthdays*
- *Pictures of birth parents or extended families*
- *Programs from school, church or scouting events*
- *A handwritten letter to the child*
- *Stories about the child: how he showed affection, favorite foods, cute things he did, favorite games, or funny sayings*
- *Developmental milestones such as walking, sitting, or riding a bike*
- *Information about injuries, illness or hospitalizations*
- *Pictures of him as a baby or small child*
- *Letters from birth parents or relatives*
- *Copy of the birth certificate*

