



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VISITS

BY AND FOR PARENTS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Family Time Tips

Below are general guidelines about visits. However, every case is different. Ask your caseworker and your attorney about your case.

1. VISITS WITH YOUR CHILDREN SHOULD:

- Start within a week of your child entering foster care
- Take place for at least 2 hours each week and more often for infants and toddlers
- Be unsupervised as much as possible

2. BEYOND VISITS, YOU CAN:

- Ask for contact by phone or email (If you have a positive relationship with the foster parent)
- Exchange photos and letters
- Participate in children's medical visits, school conferences and activities

3. VISITING TIME SHOULD INCREASE IF YOU'RE:

- Attending consistently and on time
- Paying attention to your child for the whole visit
- Showing progress on the goals in your case — not just attending programs, but showing behavior changes related to the safety concerns in your case
- Being nurturing and loving

4. YOUR CASEWORKER REPORTS TO THE COURT WHETHER YOU:

- Attended your visit
- Came on time

- Called in advance if you were going to be late or had to reschedule
- Gave your attention to your child the whole time
- Disciplined your child appropriately
- Kept anger and frustration out of time with your child

5. YOUR VISITS MAY BE SUPERVISED, OR BE SET BACK TO SUPERVISED, IF:

- There's a concern that your child will be unsafe with you
- You are not showing a change in being able to keep yourself and your child safe
- You are not taking steps to address mental health problems or addiction
- There's a concern you will run off with your child
- There's a concern that you will influence your child's testimony in court

6. IT'S RARE BUT YOUR VISITS MAY BE CANCELLED ON THE SPOT IF YOU:

- Are drunk or high
- Act aggressively or make threats
- Hit your child — including "popping" your child — or threaten your child
- Blame, shame, or threaten your child in any way, especially saying that it's your child's fault that you have a case
- Can't calm down even after a warning
- Arrive very late without calling

How to Self-Advocate

1. Talk to your caseworker and lawyer about your visiting plan and ask for a copy of the court report.
2. Ask your caseworker to explain exactly what you need to do to make progress and ask for feedback after each visit.
3. Keep a "Visiting Notebook." Write down:
 - Whether you attended and if you were on time;
 - How the visit went;
 - If your visit was cancelled and why, and whether it was made up.
4. If your visit is cancelled, speak to your caseworker to reschedule. If your visits are not made up, show your Visiting Notebook to your caseworker's supervisor, a parent advocate and to your lawyer.





Eat, Play, Love

After my daughter went into foster care at 18 months old, we had visits in an agency visiting room: no toys and very gloomy green paint on the walls.

Before each visit, I would pack a bag of toys, coloring books and reading books. I tried to be ready for any activity.

A VISITING ROUTINE

My daughter would come wearing clothes that were too small, and her hair was never done properly. I would hug her and then take her to the bathroom to change her clothes and do her hair. It made me feel better that I was still able to take care of my daughter.

Then she would usually eat a Happy Meal, and for the rest of the visit, she and my husband and I would play. Her favorite thing to do was color. She also liked us to bring kitchen things, like plates and spoons and forks. We would pretend we were cooking.

Every visit, I took pictures to look at during my week.

When it was time to say goodbye, I tried not to cry because I did not want my daughter to see me hysterical. I would tell her, "I love you and I'll see you next week." Then we would say goodbye with a hug and a kiss.

LAUGHING AND PLAYING

When the judge gave my family unsupervised visits, it was such a weight off. I was able to really hold my daughter and smother her with all of my love.

We were always there early to pick her up and on time to drop her off. We would take her to the park and the playground, and to see our friends.

I loved taking her to the swimming pool. I bought her a little sky blue one-piece bathing suit. Now that I was sober, I was able to laugh and play in the water with her without any shame. These were moments that I did not want to let go of.

Visiting Checklist

Did I...

- ✓ Attend my visit
- ✓ Arrive on time
- ✓ Plan activities
- ✓ Bring toys
- ✓ Bring a snack
- ✓ Greet my child's foster parent
- ✓ Keep anger/frustration out of my visit
- ✓ Focus only on my child

Did I respond to my child's needs...

- ✓ for me to be trustworthy
- ✓ for affection and attention
- ✓ to follow a routine
- ✓ to have fun together
- ✓ to feel safe with the foster parent
- ✓ to talk about experiences in foster care
- ✓ to say goodbye in a positive way

DID YOU KNOW

Parents are allowed to ask for visits to happen anywhere, like at a park or at the library. The caseworker may not be able to say yes every time but you can ask. A foster parent can also supervise visits outside the agency.

Rise
TIPS



TIPS is brought to you by the parents at Rise, which trains parents to write and speak about their experiences with the foster care system.

For information and peer support, go to: www.risemagazine.org or like us on Facebook: @readrisemag