

FAMILY VISITS AT AMARA

What is Family Time?

Children in foster care have the right to maintain and strengthen their connection with their parents and families. Our Family Time program assists with this through facilitating Family Visits between children and their families. These visits are generally with parents though they may be with siblings or other relatives if the DCYF Social Worker requests this.

When we are able, Amara's internal Family Visitation Specialists facilitate some or all Family Visits. It is our goal to help the child, parents, and foster parents have a high-quality positive experience with court ordered visitation. When we are unable to provide this service, it is done by an individual or agency contracted with DCYF.

As the foster parent, you provide daily care and are an integral part of Family Visitation process. Our Visitation Specialists will be accessible to you and will do their best to accommodate your requests.

If you feel you need support to better help your child throughout the visit process, your Amara Foster Care Specialist is the right person to help you. For questions/concerns regarding scheduling and logistics please contact your Visitation Specialist directly.

Visit types:

The DCYF Social Worker communicates to Amara what type of visitation the parents are approved to have as well as the court ordered length of visits and number of visits per week. This information will be shared with you.

- **Supervised:** The Visit Specialist must be able to see *and* hear the parents and children at all times.
- **Monitored:** The parents and children must be either in sight *or* sound of the Visit Specialist at all times; or the Visit Specialist is authorized to leave the parents alone with the child and check on them periodically (generally every 15 minutes). The DCYF Social Worker communicates the parameters.
- **Unsupervised (transportation only):** The Visit Specialist provides transportation to and/or from visits with the parent. The visit itself is unmonitored and the parents are allowed to be alone with the child.

Foster parents are allowed and encouraged to provide transportation to and/or from visits. If this is something you are able to do please let us know!

What to Expect

Getting started, our Family Visitation Specialists generally reach out to foster parents to get an understanding of the child and family's schedule. We will do our best to accommodate your schedule requests to minimize issues such as missed nap times and missed school but please note that due to the number of schedules being coordinated we are not always able to meet all schedule requests.

Preparing for visits:

- It is helpful if you can provide a "visit bag" with snacks, meals, extra clothing, and diapering supplies. If the parents are able to provide these items we will let you know but often they are not. We want to ensure your child has everything they need. Many families have a bag specifically for this purpose they use for every visit.
- Please feel free to add a few toys to the visit bag and anything else the child might want to share with their parents such as an art project, cookies they made, etc. If age appropriate, the child can help choose these items.
- Let your child know the visit schedule and express positive/caring emotions about their time with their parents.

Visit Cancellations:

Visits may be cancelled for many reasons and it can be difficult for children when this happens. When a **visit is cancelled**, comfort and assure the child that it is not their fault. Show them that you are there to listen if and when they want to talk about their feelings. Explain the reason without using blame (e.g.: explain that the parent couldn't make it to the visit or that the visit coordinator needed to reschedule the visit). Usually, parents are required to confirm their visits prior to the visit time and the Family Visitation Specialist will contact you to let you know if the visit was confirmed or cancelled. If visits are missed a number of times Amara may be unable to continue providing them, if this happens you will be informed by the Visitation Specialist.

Before and After Visits:

It's not uncommon for children to have difficult or negative emotions and/or behavior before and after visits. Seeing their parents can bring up a variety of feelings about the past and the present and children often exhibit their complicated thoughts and feelings externally. Knowing what to expect can help foster parents anticipate how to best support the kids in their care.

Common behavior before and after visits:

- Anxiety
- Sleep disturbances
- Excitement/hyper activity
- Unrealistic expectations of the visit/parent
- Sadness, ambivalence, or/and anger
- Disappointment
- Acting out or withdrawal (tantrums/isolation)

Please keep in mind that changes in the child's behavior before or after a visit do not necessarily mean that anything negative is happening during the visit. More consistent visitation is better for the child's transitions and Amara will do what we can to increase consistency for the child and your family.

It's good to check in with your child about their visits and it's best to keep your comments and questions simple and positive; "You saw your mommy today! Did you have fun?", "I heard you went to the park with your daddy, did you show him how high you can climb?"

What information will you get about the visit?

Due to confidentiality you will not be provided with all information about what takes place on a visit.

You will be provided with the information below:

- Where it took place and who was there
- What the child ate and if they slept
- When their diaper was changed or when they were taken to the bathroom
- If there were injuries or incidents

Communication with biological family

When safe and possible, Amara encourages communication between foster and biological families to best meet the needs of the child. If the child's DCYF Social Worker does not object, we will provide a notebook for you and the parents to share information/news/and notes about the children. If you are already in contact with the child's family and do not need this service, please let us know.

In order to keep a record of their time together, we also provide photos from visits to children and parents, if the parents consent and it is appropriate. These photos will be printed periodically and provided to both the parent and the child, as well as maintained in Amara's electronic records system.