



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

April 16, 2021

Encourage out-of-home caregivers to include parents in their children's events any time it is safe.

Inform parents of events such as:

- medical and dental appointments;
- educational meetings;
- extracurricular activities;
- holiday and cultural events;
- haircuts;
- back-to-school shopping; and
- prom or homecoming preparations.

To encourage success:

- talk with the parent about what they might say, ask, observe, or do during the event;
- arrange transportation for the parent if necessary;
- explore any concerns the out-of-home caregiver may have;
- start small, such as a notebook that goes back and forth to visits or by exchanging emails;
- arrange a meeting to alleviate any misconceptions that the out-of-home caregiver or parent may have.

If the parent has been charged of a crime with a child victim, review court orders for child contact restrictions.

Maintaining Parent-Child Relationships through Shared Parenting

Keeping parents involved in routine care and important events supports timely reunification and transition of the child back to the home.

- Shared parenting between the out-of-home caregiver and the parents can decrease the child's time in out-of-home care.
- Parents have a need and right to know and participate in decisions about their children's medical, dental, educational, and behavioral health needs. Encouraging parents to attend meetings and appointments allows them to gain information first hand.
- Attending appointments allows the parent to maintain the parental role and supports the parent to make and keep track of appointments, ask questions about the child's needs and services, and make decisions.
- By attending appointments, the parent becomes familiar with the child's service providers, which can support continuity of care when a child returns home.
- Parents should remain or become the experts about their children. Their participation can ensure children have appropriate services and supports, and promote child well-being.
- Parents often grieve when they miss important milestones in their children's lives, like a first birthday party or Kindergarten graduation. When parents are present for these important events, children and parents have shared memories, which supports their life-long attachment.
- The DCS Specialist can use these contacts to observe and gauge the parent's protective capacities, behavioral changes by the parent, and determine if the parent is able to consistently meet the child's needs.
- When reunification is imminent, evaluate if efforts to encourage this type of contact should be increased by both the DCS Specialist and out-of-home caregiver. If safe, parents can be allowed to arrange, transport, and facilitate the appointments. This allows the parent to demonstrate readiness to behave protectively and be a full-time parent again.

Strategies for overcoming barriers:

Talk frequently about the goal of family reunification and how the parent's involvement can support child safety, permanency and well-being post-reunification.

- Encourage open communication between the out-of-home caregivers and parents, such as phone contact.
- If the caregiver is licensed, include the Licensing Specialist in discussions of shared parenting.
- Discuss with out-of-home caregivers their level of comfort with shared parenting.
- Include shared parenting goals in CFT and TDM discussions.

Discuss how the *Shared Parenting Journal* can be used to increase communication and build relationships between the parent and out-of-home caregivers

Utilize community resources such as the Family Involvement Center, the KARE Center, Arizona Children's Association and AASK.

Encourage children to stay connected with their parents.

- Ask the child to draw pictures, write a story, or call and e-mail the parent.
- Help the child to talk about important events in their life.

When considering parent-child contact outside of scheduled parenting time, ensure the child's safety and well-being.

- Make certain there are no court orders, aggravating circumstances of abuse or neglect, or victim's rights needs that prevent contact.
- Unsupervised contact should only occur when safe and appropriate for the child. The DCS Specialist and Program Supervisor should discuss and plan for any safety concerns that need to be managed.
- Consider the level of supervision needed to ensure the child's safety. If safety is a concern, assess the ability and willingness of family supports, relatives and out-of-home caregivers to manage safety concerns during the contact. In the child's safety plan, clearly identify and document the actions expected of each responsible adult during parent-child contacts.
- During contacts with the out-of-home caregiver, discuss the necessary safety actions to ensure understanding.
- The DCS Specialist should ask and allow for the child to express any thoughts and feelings regarding contact outside of scheduled parenting time, before and after the contact occurs.

Out-of-Home caregivers play an important role in keeping children connected to their parents.

Talk to out-of-home caregivers about the benefits of shared parenting, and how the child, parents, and out-of-home caregiver all benefit.

- Shared parenting reduces conflict and promotes well-being for the child, parents, and out-of-home caregivers.
- Shared parenting allows out-of-home caregivers and parents to communicate and make decisions together regarding the children. It also allows for fewer attachment conflicts and placement changes (Palmer, 1995 and 1996).
- When children see their out-of-home caregivers and parents working together, they feel better about having a relationship with both families.
- Children who see a cooperative relationship between their parents and caregivers are generally happier, and may have fewer emotional and behavioral issues, which is a relief to their out-of-home caregivers.
- Shared parenting can result in the child returning home more quickly.
- When safety is not a concern, arrange for the parents and out-of-home caregiver to meet to discuss the child's strengths and needs. The child will benefit from having loving adults who are on the same page.
- Model empathy for parents and the situations that they face, such as poverty, lack of resources, racial disparities, and mental health issues.
- Encourage out-of-home caregivers to build bridges by listening to parents' stories without shaming or blaming.
- Out-of-home caregivers may hesitate to have contact with the parents. The DCS Specialist should explore the reasons for this hesitancy. If the caregiver is licensed, work collaboratively with the licensing specialist if barriers continue. If the child is placed with an unlicensed kinship caregiver, help the caregiver identify supports that assist to overcome barriers.
- Out-of-home caregivers are key to safe and permanent reunification, and can provide support during and after the reunification transition.

Content in the Practice Guidelines was adapted in part from: Leathers, S.J. (2002). Parental Visiting and Family Reunification: How inclusive practice make a difference. *Child Welfare*, 81(4), 595-616 and Palmer, S. E. (1996). Placement stability and inclusive practice in foster care: An empirical analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 18, 589-601.

When in-person contact between the parent and child is not possible, explore other options to keep the parent informed and involved.

- Regularly provide information to the parent about the child's medical, educational, and behavioral health status. Share photographs, videos, and other insight into the child's daily life. This will keep the parent informed about the general status of the child.
- Discuss with the out-of-home caregiver the availability of telephone or video calls between the child and parent.
- Encourage the parents to send cards, letters, and gifts to the child.
- If in-person participation is not possible, arrange for parents to attend meetings such as CFTs, school, or medical appointments via telephone.
- Remember that parents may have competing important demands that make it difficult to attend the child's appointments and events. Parents may be working through substance abuse treatment, trying to stabilize, or have an inflexible work schedule. Don't assume that a parent's lack of attendance means he or she does not care or love the child.
- If reunification is nearing and the parent is having difficulty attending appointments, discuss and address the barriers.