



# ARIZONA DEPARTMENT of CHILD SAFETY

April 16 2024

Due to involvement with DCS, parenting time may be an emotionally difficult time for the child and parents before, during and after the session. It is normal for the child, to demonstrate symptoms of stress such as sadness, moodiness, irritability, or aggressiveness;

The younger the child, the greater the chance to observe these stress indicators through behavior as they may not have the verbal skills to describe how they are feeling;

Parents may feel pain, anger, guilt, anxiety, stress, and humiliation about the loss of their child;

Parents may worry about what the child is feeling and experiencing;

Parents may not know how to perform all necessary parenting tasks, and they may feel very uncomfortable and "unnatural" during monitored parenting time.

## Supporting Child and Family Well-Being through Parenting Time

### The benefits of parenting time for child and family well-being

- Parenting time meets the child's developmental and attachment needs.
  - ▶ Attachments are connection between the child and their parents or caregivers that endure over time, are interpersonal in nature, and aide in the development of a sense of self.
  - ▶ Maintaining connections with the many people they know and continuing activities from their daily lives prior to entering out-of-home care, help the child achieve a sense of normalcy. This will also help the child handle grief, loss, and adjustment to foster care.
- Parenting time supports and strengthens the parent-child relationship.
  - ▶ Frequent meaningful parenting time:
    - Increases parent motivation to change
    - Strengthens the parent's connection to their child
    - Positively impacts child well-being and family outcomes
  - ▶ Parent-child connection and contact ease the pain of separation, support the child's adjustment to the new placement, and increase the likelihood of successful reunification.
- Parenting time provides an opportunity for the parent to demonstrate their new parenting skills and enhanced protective capacities.

It is recommended that the first parenting time event occur within 48 hours of out of home placement, unless there is a clear and present safety threat to the child.

### Ways to support families during parenting time:

- Help parents prepare for parenting time, by discussing expectations and reviewing the Parenting Time Guidelines (CSO-3462), talking about appropriate items to bring for parenting time, and appropriate activities to engage in during parenting time. Asking parents what they like to do as a family can begin the planning process while honoring their family culture.
- Schedule parenting time to include natural parent-child interactions such as eating and playing together; attending religious or cultural activities; or attending school, medical, or after-school events. Normal daily activities support bonding and help to pass on culture, tradition and values. Further, keeping the parents familiar and involved with the child's normal activities can also ease reunification transitions, and is less disruptive to the child's routine.

**Resources:**

For assistance and consultation regarding Family Contact Plans and parenting time, please reach out to the DCS Permanency Practice Advisors at [ConsultationandResearch@azdcs.gov](mailto:ConsultationandResearch@azdcs.gov)

Additional Information *Parenting Time Supports for Families (CSO-3549)*.

- Plan parenting time based on the child's developmental age; including family-friendly spaces that allow parents the opportunity to engage in daily activities of care to meet the needs of their child such as: mealtime, routines, play and activities for attunement and co-regulation.
- Prepare parents to succeed by sharing feedback in a strengths-based way, and offering suggestions to implement during the next scheduled parenting time. Also encourage parents to have a healthy support system to lean on after and in between parenting time, as parenting time can be emotionally difficult.
- Encourage the out-of-home caregiver to prepare the child for parenting time by speaking positively about parenting time, ensuring that the child has what they need (medicine, comfort items, clothes, etc.), and transporting the child and meeting the parents so that the child can see both parents and out-of-home caregivers working together in a positive way. See Bridging the Gap (CSO-1543) for more ways to encourage communication between out-of-home caregivers and parents.
- Make sure to remain in communication with the child and out-of-home caregivers regarding behavioral reactions to parenting time. Refer for support for the child or caregiver as needed. Parenting time can be confusing and difficult for the child. Help caregivers understand there could be a variety of reasons for the child's reactions after parenting time. These reactions are not necessarily due to a negative experience during parenting time but may be connected to feelings of sadness and re-experiencing separation and loss with each goodbye.
- Discuss parenting time with the child in developmentally appropriate ways during monthly contact to ensure that the child's needs are met regarding parenting time. Refer for appropriate services and supports for the child if needed.
- Observe in-person parent-child interaction during parenting time. This will assist in supporting any changes to the parenting time plan, as well as, informing the family's progress towards achieving their permanency goal. Keep in mind that you should not discuss the case with the parent and child during parenting time, as this conversation should occur individually during monthly contacts.

Consider the age and developmental level of the child when determining the frequency and duration of parenting time.

Age of Child	Recommended Frequency of contact	Recommended Duration (to increase as contact progresses successfully)	Opportunities for contact in addition to in-person face-to-face time	Additional considerations
Infants (Birth -12mos)	3-5 x per week	60 minutes +	Family pictures; voice recordings from the parents; videos of the parents; clothing with the scent of the parents	Consistency is key; work with the OOH caregiver to maintain the same schedule/routine during parenting time. A Shared Parenting journal can be utilized.
Toddlers (12-24mos)	2-4 x per week	60-90 minutes +	In addition to above, short age-appropriate telephone conversations, read age-appropriate books by video or phone calls on a set schedule	Consistency remains important; maintaining a similar schedule with the OOH caregiver is important for the child.
Preschoolers (2-5 years)	2-4 x per week	60-120 Minutes +	In addition to above; nighttime calls to parents to say goodnight and/or listen to a bedtime story	Consistency remains important; maintaining a similar schedule with the OOH caregiver is important for the child.
School Agers (6-12 years)	1-2 x per week	1-3 hours +	In addition to above; allow child and parent to communicate through monitored computer-based contact, email, text	Whenever possible, do not remove the child from school for visits. Utilize school and /or extracurricular events as parenting time opportunities.
Adolescents (13-18 years)	1-2 x per week	1-3 hours +	Same as described above	Involve the youth in the development of the parenting time plan. Consider age-appropriate needs when discussing the parenting time plan. Youth may prefer virtual contact and phone calls, over in-person contact due to their schedule and routine such as spending time with friends, work or involvement in extra-circular activities. Whenever possible, do not remove the youth from school for visits.