



**My Forever
Family NSW**

Nurture Belonging

Preparing for family visits after permanency

2023

“Regularly scheduled visits are valuable as a means of helping the child maintain his or her sense of connectedness and identity with the biological family. Even when children cannot live with their biological parents, they continue to belong to them”.

- (Maluccio, Fein & Olmstead, 1986: 164)

WHAT IS FAMILY TIME

KEY MESSAGES

- Family time connects people who love and care about a child
- Spending time with siblings can enhance positive, healthy relationships and promote a child's family and cultural identity
- Family time is not a one-size-fits-all approach, it should be based on the child's needs
- When guardians or adoptive parents support and encourage family time, it can prevent a child from feeling the tension of 'divided loyalties'
- Carer qualities such as openness and empathy contribute to positive outcomes for children, as carers and birth parents can forge a new type of kinship network

FAMILY TIME CAN BE

DIRECT

- face-to-face visits
- phone calls
- FaceTime or Skype calls
- overnight stays



FAMILY TIME CAN BE

INDIRECT

- text messages
- talking through social media or exchanging gifts
- photographs, letters, online gaming and videos



BENEFITS OF FAMILY TIME

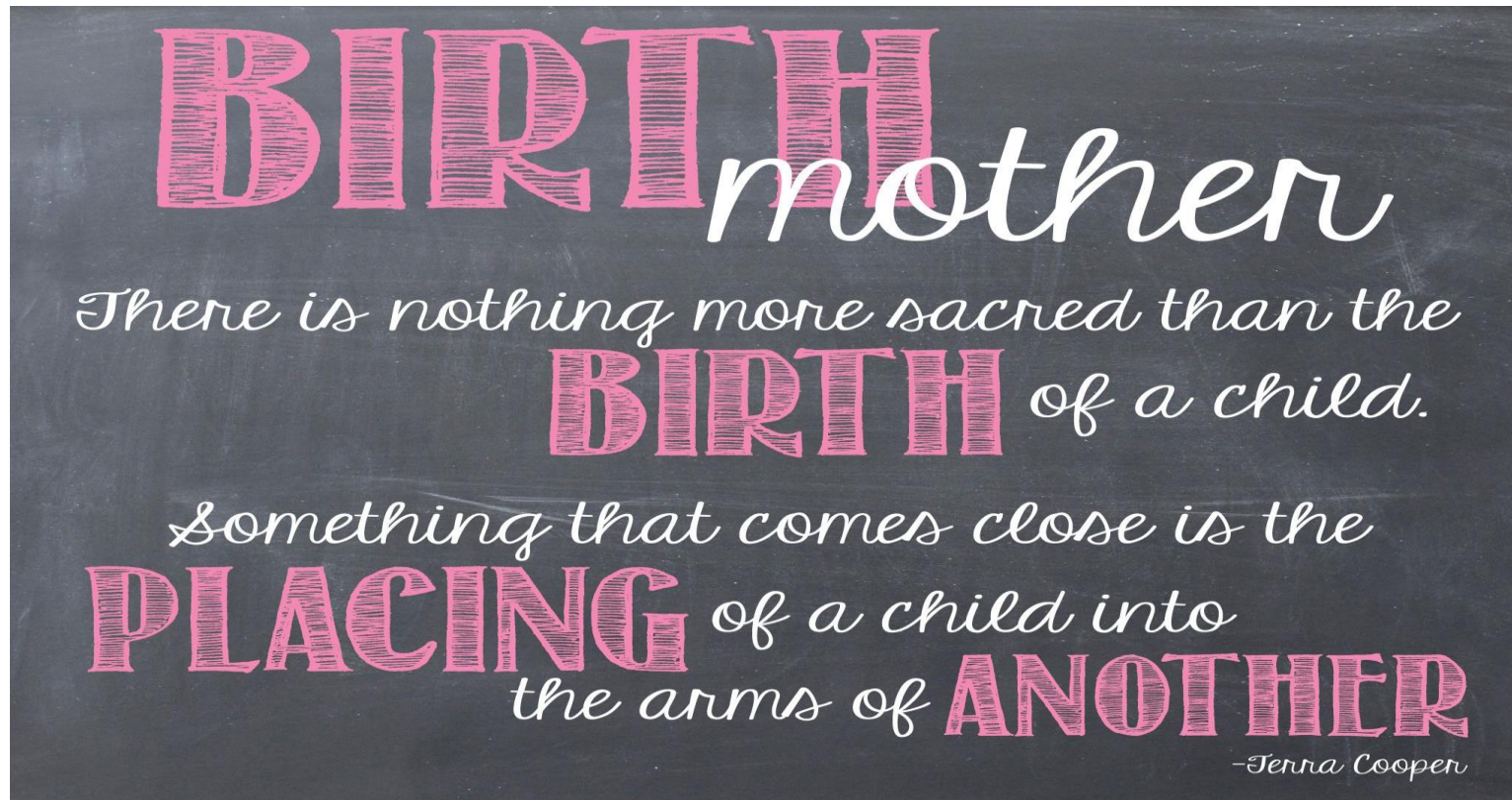
- Improves a child's sense of belonging
- Eases the pain of separation and loss for a child or young person, their family and significant others
- Can reduce the child or young person's sense of abandonment
- Eases stress of divided loyalties and loneliness
- Helps children process grief and loss
- Grows self-esteem
- Supports the child's identity
- Helps children feel valued and cherished
- Reduces the stigma of 'being in care'
- Children with life-long connections have improved future physical and mental health outcomes
- Helps children make sense of their life story
- Provides opportunities to create healthy memories
- Helps children to remain connected to their culture
- Provides children with diverse experiences
- Helps develop a large, lifelong network of support

SPENDING TIME WITH SIBLINGS

Due to their shared experience, sometimes siblings are the only people who truly understand. A brother or sister is sometimes the child's primary attachment in the family. Spending time with siblings can enhance positive, healthy relationships and promote a child's family and cultural identity (Sen and Broadhurst, 2011).



WHAT IS OPENNESS?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN FAMILY TIME

It is important to remember that some Aboriginal families have experienced traumatic interventions and overly intrusive supervision by agency staff.

Whenever possible, family time for Aboriginal children is supervised by Aboriginal practitioners, family/kin, or an Aboriginal community member who can create an environment where a child can get the most out of family time.

Whenever possible, family time for an Aboriginal child or a child with a CALD background includes cultural experiences in which they can participate in with their parents or family/kin.

FOSTERING LIFE LONG CONNECTIONS

THE BRIDGE



THINGS TO CONSIDER

FAMILY FINDING

- Highlights the importance of emotional permanency for children
- Seeks to connect children with birth family and other supportive adults
- Provides a sense of security and belonging
- Helps to develop the child's family tree
- Ensures that birth family connections are sustained, and significant family events are known and celebrated
- Limits children feeling a sense of isolation and loneliness

THINGS TO CONSIDER

SHARING INFORMATION

Family time works best when adults support a child to have relationships with all of the people who are important to them. Mutual acceptance of each family's role in the child's life – and empathy for each other's experience – are the keys to enabling these relationships.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

PREPARATION

- The type and frequency of connections should be determined by the needs of the child, including the child's wishes, age, maturity and the reasons why they cannot live with their parents
- Children, guardians, adoptive parents and families need to work together to agree on how they will be in touch and how often
- Support parents to set goals for family time, plan activities and reflect afterwards about what worked well for their family and what strengths the family feel they could build on next time
- open conversations can be helpful in understanding what worked well and what needs to be different for the next time

THINGS TO CONSIDER

LOCATION

- Face-to-face family visits should occur in comfortable locations that are familiar for children, where safe to do so
- Visits should occur at a location that allows families to interact with their child and provides access to age-appropriate activities
- Family time for Aboriginal children and young people should be held on Country

THINGS TO CONSIDER

FREQUENCY

After orders, guardians and adoptive parents are guided by the agreed care plan or adoption plan, including the expected frequency of family visits. Sometimes the Children's Court or Supreme Court make arrangements compulsory through a Contact Order (for guardianship) or a Registered Adoption Plan (for adoption). This can give parents reassurance about the minimum number of visits they will have.

WHAT IF FAMILY TIME IS NOT SAFE RIGHT NOW?

- Discuss any safety or risk concerns with the caseworker when thinking about guardianship and open adoption
- Keep a record of all times contact was attempted
- Make continuous and genuine attempts to facilitate contact between the child and their birth family.
- A guardian or adoptive parent's dedicated attitude towards family time is at the center of guardianship and open adoption

TIPS TO KEEP FAMILIES CONNECTED

WRITE LETTERS	SHARE THE CHILD'S LIFESTORY BOOK
CALL THE CHILD'S FAMILY TO PLAN VISITS	COMMIT TO VISITS AND ALWAYS ATTEND
DISPLAY PHOTO'S OF CHILDS FAMILY AROUND HOME	INCORPORATE SYMBOLIC DISPLAYS SUCH AS FAMILY PHOTO'S AND SHARED RITUALS.
PROVIDE UPDATES TO THE CHILD'S FAMILY EG HEALTH, EDUCATION	TAKE PHOTO'S AT FAMILY VISITS AND MAKE A BOOK TO SHARE
FIND LOCAL CULTURAL EVENTS OR EVENTS THAT ARE SIGNIFICANT TO BOTH FAMILIES	PROVIDE ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE ONE ON ONE INTERACTION EG UNO, CONNECT FOUR
SPEAK OPENLY AND POSITIVELY ABOUT BIRTH FAMILY	
REQUEST CULTURAL INFORMATION FROM THE FAMILY EG FAMILY RECIPES, TOTEMS	



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THANK
YOU

