

Tips for Achieving Effective Visitation

Effective visits are best achieved by:

- Focusing on maintaining and building family relationships;
- Scheduling visits frequently enough that they decrease the trauma of separation for the child(ren) in care, for parents, and for siblings not in care;
- Reinforcing the permanency goal;
- Engaging children and their families, foster parents, and service providers in decisions about visiting throughout the placement period;
- Providing opportunities for family members to learn to interact differently in areas such as parent-child interaction, discipline, family routines, recreation, and sharing of feelings. It is particularly important that maximum opportunities are provided for parents to assume increasing responsibility for the child(ren) in areas where breakdowns previously occurred;
- Providing opportunities that are appropriate to the child(ren)'s and parents' current developmental capacity, while also supporting further developmental growth;
- Giving constant attention to preparing children and their parents for a better functioning relationship when the child returns home;
- Involving the foster parents and others in visits in ways that support and encourage the parents' sense of parental responsibility and ability;
- Assuring that post-visit discussions occur with parents, with the child(ren) as age appropriate, the foster parents, and relevant others. Such discussions assist in assessing the appropriateness of the visit plan at a point in time and provide an opportunity to prepare family members for the next visit. They also provide information regarding progress toward the permanency goal, remaining stress points, and additional services that may be indicated to support progress;
- Making reasonable efforts to reduce, and when possible eliminate, all obstacles to visiting, such as difficulties with transportation and with child care for children remaining in the parents' custody. When obstacles are eliminated, family members' use of visiting can be more fairly and accurately assessed; and
- Carefully documenting family members' progress or lack of progress as demonstrated through visits. In this way, visits provide evidence either that the family is moving toward the permanency goal, or that the family appears to be unable to move toward the permanency goal when opportunities to do so have been provided.