

The Fostering Relationship Visitation Model



After eight years and thousands of families, the Visitation Center is transitioning to a new model for family visits. The concept of visitation, maintaining relationships, and reunifications is constantly evolving. Our new model, "Fostering Relationships," is the result of years of research focusing on children, families and reunification.

The Fostering Relationship Model

Research supports that visitation should be the parent engaging, seeing and enjoying the time with their children. Our current program is observing, documenting and correcting the behaviors of our parents. We have all witnessed the problems that are associated with our current structure. We observe tension between parents and foster parents. Our "no shows" and "cancellation" rate seems to increase each month. Children experience trauma and distress after not seeing their parents for an extended time and lastly the number of families who seem to languish in the system. These are but a few of the current model issues that we encounter on a regular basis which brings us to the Fostering Relationship model.

The Fostering Relationship model removes the punitive side of visitation. In its place is a support system between the case manager, caregiver and the visitation staff. Highlighting this is the mentorship role that the visitation staff is being trained into as well as the supporting role that caregivers will now take during the visitation hour.

The Visitation Hour

Visitation staff will meet with the parent 20 minutes prior to the scheduled visit, encouraging them and addressing their expectations of the visit. Parents expect their children to come running and greet them and when this does not occur, the parents will likely feel hurt, disappointed or angry. The time before each visit allows for mentoring staff to discuss what to expect during each visit. The visitation hour gives the children time to readjust to their parents being supported by the comfort they have

established with the caregiver. This allows the children, in time, to come to the parents and give their affection as opposed to forcing that interaction from the child.

Caregivers will now take a supportive role during the visitation hour. The first five visits consist of a semi-private room between the parent and the caregiver. During these five one hour sessions the foster parent takes on a supportive role with the parent by encouraging, supporting and helping the parent respond to their children with sensitivity. The final outcome is hopefully an enhanced relationship between the parent and the caregiver.

Community Visits

Community visits would be the next logical step in the development of this relationship. Visitation staff will no longer be involved with individual visits but will be available for support and guidance if needed. After five supervised visits between the parent and the placement, a meeting will be held to decide if community visits is the next option. Safety issues are one of our primary concerns. These will all be taken into consideration when moving from the five supervised visits with the caregiver to unsupervised visits in the community.

If community visits are not an option, the family will move to an unsupervised setting within the Visitation Center. Caregivers are encouraged to continue to support the family either by active participation or periodically checking with the family. The outcome of the Fostering Relationship Model is to reduce trauma to children, enhance parental engagement and encourage parents to successfully reunify with their children.

The Visitation Center staff stands ready to help you be successful, develop a stronger relationship with your families and work towards faster reunification of children with their parents. Please contact your case manager to get started.