

Visitation for Children Out of Their Homes

The Center on Children, Families, and the Law,
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Goals for Today: What we can Discuss

- Goals for Visitation
 - Child Well being
 - Parent-Child Relationships
 - Keeping parents involved

What We Can Discuss

- More goals for Visitation
 - Helping parents with confidence
 - Aid observation and evaluation
 - Helping to implement reunification
 - Helping to implement termination

Strategies for Visitation

- Planning visitation
 - The practical planning
 - Phases of visitation
 - Preparing parents and children for visits
- Assessment-- Problems, amendments, feedback
- Roles for everyone in the case

Goal: Child Well Being

Child well being is the first priority

Lessons from attachment

- * Not complete before about 7 months
- * Attachment classification can change
- * Infants need lots of contact
- * Foster parents probably should be encouraged to form attachment

Goal: Child Well Being

More about attachment

- * Based on how children react to stress
- * Classifications: Secure; Insecure, avoidant, resistant; Anxious-disorganized-disoriented

Goal: Child Well Being

More about attachment

Disruptions when parent leaves for a few weeks

- * Child passive, sad, detached
- * May begin to function normally again
- * When parent returns, child avoids then clings

Goal: Child Well Being

- Someone must be sensitive to sadness, detachment, despair, guilt, fantasies
- Consistency is good: Use the same supervisor and transporter
- Preparation and explaining
- Followup

Goal: Child Well Being

- Sibling relationships are very important
 - Need to understand the relationships
- Children need to live with siblings if they can
- Children need to visit with siblings if they do not live together

Goal: Parent-Child Relationship

Need to establish, maintain, or strengthen relationships

- * Need to assess motivation and information, plus relationship quality
- * Need to plan to address deficits in motivation and information

Goal: Parent-Child Relationship

Need to structure visitation to accomplish goals

- * Didactic opportunities during visits
- * Therapy during visits
- * Assessment by professionals of relationships

Goal: Involving Parents

Parents should be intimately involved

- * With child's individual care needs
 - * parent must see the child for him or herself
 - * Parent must learn to get information from the child-- emotional and factual

Goal: Involving Parents

Parent should:

- * Participate in medical and mental health treatment
- * Participate in school, community, cultural, church activities
- * Helping reduce the family's isolation
- * Child support

Goal: Making Parents Confident

- Dealing with the parent's emotions-- grief, rage, trauma, failure-- Maintaining hope
- Helping the parents accept what is wrong with their parenting

Goal: Making Parents Confident

- Understanding the importance of their role as a parent
- Instilling confidence in the parent to do their job appropriately

Goal: Assessment of Risk

- Supervisor should assess risks observed during visitation
- Parents should understand the supervisor's role during visits
- Assessment should be part of the checklist for supervisors
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Goal: Assessment of Risk

- Visitation should include a time for analysis and feedback to the parent
- There should be ground rules for feedback that take defensiveness by the parent into consideration

Goal: Gauging Progress

Visitation is best place to assess the progress of rehabilitation

- * Should test the team's understanding of what the parent should learn
- * Good debriefing of visit should include consideration of the progress of the plan

Goal: Gauging Progress

- * Requires consistency of supervision
- * Requires concentration on the visit

- * Course corrections should not include punishment or reward-- Changes should be based on safety, best interests of child

Goal: Visits to Prepare for A change in Permanency Goal

If reunification is going to happen visits should begin planning

- Visitation should increase
- Parent and child should discuss changes in responsibilities
- Plan for handling lapses

Goal: Visits to Prepare for A change in Permanency Goal

- For reunification
 - Making sure the parent and others listens to the child's feelings
 - Talking out practical matters
 - Negotiating a safety plan
 - Talking about loyalty and obligation

Goal: Visits to Prepare for A change in Permanency Goal

- When termination is the change
 - Classic “goodbye” visit preceded by meticulous preparation
 - Know how child and parent feel about the change
 - Discussing loyalty and obligation and what they mean after the change

Strategies: Overview

- Planning of phases
- Assigning roles
- Planning practical details
- Management
- Planning for special situations

Strategies: Phase Planning

- Beginning: Before the plan is in place
 - Including assessment and voluntary services period
- Middle: Working the plan
 - Didactics and assessment
- End: Implementing permanency

Strategies: Phase Planning

- Team meetings needed before first phase
 - Roles
 - Rules
 - Goals
- Flexibility-- The role of the court

Strategies: Phase Planning

- Middle: Working the plan
 - Team meeting when the plan is received
 - Discussion of intrusiveness
 - Goals
 - Preparing for visit, debrief from visit
 - Planning for problem resolution
 - Change--building more responsibility

Middle: Working the plan

- Change as the plan is accomplished--building more responsibility
- Visitation should be progressive
- Should be staged
- Advantages: requires assessment and communication

Strategies: Phase Planning

- End: Implementing permanency
 - Another team meeting
 - Not just visitation but also implementing the permanency plan generally

Strategies: Roles

- Team meetings ought to include discussions of who does what and why
- Everyone ought to have a role, including the GAL, counsel for the parent, and judge-- and the siblings
- Consistency, consistency, consistency

Strategies: Practical Planning

- List of issues is in the handout
- Overriding issues:
 - Frequency and duration-- age
 - Protocols for visitation suggest more frequency, less duration for younger children-- **See Handout**

Strategies: Practical Planning

- Visitation by other means--Telephone, Letter
 - Does it count?
 - How is it controlled?
 - How is it monitored?

Strategies: Practical Planning

- Overriding issues:
 - Supervision-- Clarity: parent and supervisor having the same ideas
 - Intensity of visit-- Many parents do not know how to interact, building in modeling may be necessary

Strategies: Practical Planning

- Overriding issues:
 - Staging-- Must coordinate reunification date, plan activities, visitation, school, and many others
 - Moving from stage to stage--include an explicit assessment of progress based on safety

Strategies: Management

- Reasonable efforts: How much hand holding is reasonable?
- Motivation can be learned
- Start with lots of help and then increase the parent's role

Strategies: Management

- Planning for supervision
 - Communicating about supervision
 - Making agreements about criticism
- Setting clear limits--being explicit
- Setting conditions precedent to moving to the next stage are important

Strategies: Management

- The supervisor should have some idea when to flag things that happen
- Communicating to the rest of the team should be periodic and precise
- Reports should be descriptive rather than just conclusions
- The team should read the reports

Strategies: Management

- Feedback as teaching
 - The supervisor must communicate teaching as the goal rather than correction
 - Feedback can not be a closed loop between the supervisor and the parent
 - Leaving the matter open-ended and consulting the worker or GAL may help the consideration method of tutoring

Strategies: Management

Dealing with problems

- * Communicating problems tests the relationship with the parent and the ability of the supervisor
 - * Specifics are required
 - * Examples are needed
 - * Solutions or remedies must be offered

Strategies: Management

If a problem jeopardizes the schedule

- Anyone should be able to call a team meeting
- Anyone on the team can call for a revision of the schedule, with reasons

Strategies: Management

- If County attorney, GAL, or HHS determines the schedule must change:
 - All parties informed of facts and reasons
 - Any party can appeal to the court
 - Revision presumed to be correct if offered by HHS, pending court's decision

Strategies: Special Cases

- Parents in jail
 - Probably need some type of evaluation of child before visits
 - Supervisor needs to coordinate with prison

Strategies: Special Cases

- Parents in mental hospitals, other institutions
 - Proper evaluation for safety is needed
 - An evaluation for emotional concerns for the child should be undertaken
 - There should be a conversation between the therapist for the parent and the therapist for the child