

As part of Coventry's work to rethink language and the impact behind the words used, 'Family time' is used as an alternative to 'contact' when discussing this with the family.

There is no definition set out in statute for what constitutes supervision, every case is unique and based on what is recommended in the court. While supervision will be kept within the family where possible, the level of monitoring and intervention will depend on the facts of each case and risks present. The contact arrangement and risk assessment will determine whether the supervisor is always in sight, the frequency of meeting and where the family time will take place, such as in the community or at a contact centre.

The Local Authority has no right to intervene with the right to respect for private and family life, under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998, unless where necessary to protect the rights of others. This is where a risk assessment and evidence such as bail / license conditions provides the evidential basis for intervening to make contact safe for the child and the welfare and human rights of a child outweighs the parents right to family life when looking at how contact can take place safely.

Where a child is in the care of the Local Authority, the authority has a duty to allow reasonable contact (Section 34 of the Children Act 1989). Supervised Contact arrangements will be undertaken for children who are: Looked after, under a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order or subject to a Supervision Order. All contact outside of this will need to be supervised within the appropriate area teams.



### Purpose of Family Time

The purpose of all family time is to:

- Promote and maintain the relationship between the child and parent/relative whilst the child is placed with alternative carers
- To ease the feelings of loss for parents and child/children.
- Ensure that the child/children, parents, and other participants are safe when they meet for family time and that the child's developmental needs are being met.
- Help develop parenting skills (if able) through assessment and support.
- Help inform making long term decisions about child/children.
- If the child/children is/are in long term care the contact can help them understand what has happened and keep links to their past.

The purpose of supervising family time is:

- To ensure the child is safe from physical /emotional / sexual harm that has been identified posed by the parent / family member



## One Minute Guide

### Family Time

April 2022

#### The Supervisor's Role

- The role of the supervisor and level of supervision they provide will be specific to each case and depend on what is set out in the contact agreement and risk assessment.
- Where possible, those supervising the family time should be known to the child and the family.
- If family time is part of an ongoing assessment, the supervisor may offer advice but otherwise should not take an active role unless there is a risk to the child's safety. They should not engage in any conversation about the child's case.
- In the event of problems emerging, the supervisors must be clear who to contact (including 'reserve options') and what details they will need to share.
- The supervisor must immediately report to the social worker any concerns about the parents' conduct during the family time.



#### Consider when making arrangements:

- The child's wishes and feelings in relation to family time, using advocacy and communication services if necessary.
- The wishes and feelings of the parents and the child's carers, so far as reasonably practicable.
- Any special needs of the child or parent, such as whether the building is accessible.
- Whether the proposed venue is within a short travelling distance from the placement address of the child and whether it is accessible to the parent via public transport.
- If proposed venue has panic alarms or other staff members available.
- If the attendance of the parent poses a risk to other users of the building.
- If the room is child friendly, appropriate, and safe for the age of the child and the activities planned.
- How best to enable the parent to build upon their skills with the support of the supervisor.

### **Risk Assessment**

A written risk assessment must be completed and approved before supervised family time begins. This assessment must take account of all factors that could impact on the success of supervised family time and relevant safeguards including:

- Any history of abuse or threats of abuse to the child, other carers, or staff.
- Previous incidents of disruption or threats to disrupt contact or failure to co-operate with conditions agreed for supervised family time.
- Previous incidents or threats of abduction.
- Previous incidents of coercion or inappropriate behaviour during family time.
- The transient or unsettled lifestyle of parents, as opposed to long-standing local connections.

Where any of the above features in the risk assessment, and supervised family time is to continue, the risk assessment must state the specific measures to be put in place to minimise risks. The risk assessment must be reviewed at least every six months, or sooner, if any incident or report identifies concerns.

If a parent's behaviour prior to, or immediately before family time raises concerns, the risk assessment should be revisited. If it is considered that the planned family time may place the child at risk of physical or emotional harm, this should be cancelled, and a review arranged.

### **The contact agreement should:**

- Be clear about where the family time must take place and whether any flexibility is allowed for activity or movements within or away from the agreed location.
- Detail the frequency, timing, and structure of family time.
- State the adults who will be allowed to attend for supervised family time and supervisors should be asked to apply that strictly.
- Detail the arrangements for ending the session.
- Be clear about whether the person(s) having contact are permitted to give the child food, drinks, gifts, or money.
- Be clear about areas of conversation that should be avoided.
- Detail ground rules about use of language, secrecy, whispering, false promises.
- Detail expectations about punctuality.
- State clearly the circumstances in which the session will be cancelled or terminated.
- Detail how regularly the parent should see copies of the notes.
- Detail any agreements or restrictions on contact via text message, email, social networking sites.
- Inform how to make a complaint.

The parents, carers and any other person involved in the contact should have copies of the agreement as well as any notes made during sessions.

### **Cancelling Family Time**

There must be sufficient compelling grounds to restrict contact as this could give rise to a parent seeking to bring judicial action for breach of human rights without sufficient assessment or evidential basis upon which to restrict contact. There are no timescales set out in law in terms of how long a Local Authority can restrict contact save for in cases where a child is in the care of the Local Authority (i.e. under an Interim Care Order or Care Order). In those circumstances the Local Authority may refuse to allow contact where it is necessary to do so to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. The refusal must be decided upon as a matter of urgency and must not last more than seven days (Section 34(6) Children Act 1989). Where it is considered that the child's contact with the parents should be suspended or terminated, the social worker must be consulted, and legal advice should be obtained.

Where contact does not take place the child's social worker should be consulted in advance. If this was not possible, the staff/carer must inform the social worker as soon as possible and confirm in writing the decision to cancel and the reason.

If parents consistently fail to attend contact, a review of contact and the agreement should take place.

The social worker and his/her manager should keep contact arrangements, including the continuing need for supervision, under regular review.

### **Key Contacts and Further Information**

- [Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)
- [Coventry Children's Services Procedures Manual](#)