**Family Time Between the Child, their Family and Others**

**Standards and Regulations**

**Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (England) 2011:**

* [Standard 1 - The child’s wishes and feelings and those significant to them](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_one.html);
* [Standard 9 - Promoting and supporting contact](http://www.minimumstandards.org/fost_nine.html).

**Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care:**

* [Standard 2 - Understand your role as a foster carer](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf);
* [Standard 4 - Contact Between the Child and Their Family](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/files/fost_care_tsd_standards_guid.pdf).

**See also:**

* [Babysitters, Day Care and Overnight Stays](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/babysitters.html);
* [What Decisions Can I Make?](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/what_decisions.html)

For many children, relationships with their family members, previous carers, friends and others are highly valued. On-going contact (known as family time) can be very important in helping children develop their sense of identity and understand their lives.

Research has shown that maintaining links between a child and their family increases the possibility of them returning to their family home.

Arrangements for  family time with family and friends will be set out in the [Placement Plan](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/placement_plan.html). This will detail where, when and how family time will take place including whether it will be supervised. Family time may take place in the foster home but more likely somewhere else depending on what might be best for all those involved.

The child’s social worker will provide you with the necessary information including any assessment of risk for those involved. The child’s welfare is the paramount consideration at all times when planning family time. The child’s views / wishes will be sought, and this may involve using advocacy or other ways to help understand the child’s views. It may be useful for you as carers to find out how children you are looking after stay in touch with family and friends (including by using their mobile phone, any social networking sites and apps, and games consoles such as Xbox or PlayStation) so that you can offer advice on how to do this safely.

Family time arrangements should be focused on, and shaped around, the child’s needs. The child’s welfare is the paramount consideration at all times.

We expect carers to transport foster children to and from family time unless stated otherwise in the child’s Care Plan. Your weekly allowance includes an element for travel and we expect that you will budget this to cover normal travel costs for the child. Excessive mileage may be claimed if it is linked to the child’s Care Plan, but it will require approval from your supervising social worker’s managers – see [Money Matters and Insurance](https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/bradford/money_insurance.html) for more detail of how to make your claim.

The fostering service, through your supervising social worker, will give you practical advice and support including financial help where needed to make sure family time is appropriate and safe.

Face to face meetings and visits will generally be the best way of maintaining relationships, but other means such as letters and email, phone calls, text messaging, video calls and photograph exchanges can also play a part.

You should also talk to the child’s social worker to explore how electronic communication, such as video calls, can support positive relationships for children. Children should be supported to ensure they are safe online rather than this form of family time being avoided. [Childnet](https://www.childnet.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Foster_Carers_A4_Online_Final.pdf%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) have produced some helpful information to help foster carers consider family time with a child/young person’s family through the use of social media and digital devices.

It is important that children from mixed race backgrounds or who are not a cultural match but living with you, maintain their links with their family, friends and community so that their cultural history is encouraged, developed and valued.

It is not unusual for children to ask to have family time with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with before being taken in to care. If this happens speak to the child’s social worker.

You should record the behaviour and reaction of the child before and after family time. This may identify patterns which can contribute to future decision making.

You should discuss family time in your supervision meeting with your supervising social worker so that problems can be identified and hopefully resolved.

Family time can increase a child’s sense of security when the people who are important to them are comfortable with each other. This can also help parents and other family members to feel less awkward and threatened.

The child may be allowed to visit their birth parents at home. These visits, which may include staying overnight, must be planned in advance, with the child’s social worker.

Sometimes the child may appear anxious and upset by a visit. This may be because the visits:

* Remind them of feelings of loss and separation;
* Remind them of feelings about past experiences;
* Highlight feelings of divided loyalties.

If you have any concerns at all you must speak to the child’s social worker.

 **Confidentiality**

Working with birth parents is an important part of fostering. A vital element of this is trust and confidentiality.

In sharing the care of a child, you will receive a lot of confidential information which you may wish to share with those closest to you, discuss this with the child’s social worker in the first instance.

You may also talk to other carers about children you are caring for perhaps in general or to seek support. You should remember to treat any discussions in confidence and children should never be specifically identified or named.

 **Problems with Family time**

Family time can cause distress and upset for a child/young person and you are often the person who has to deal with this when a child feels confused, angry or disappointed. You may also have mixed emotions when this happens. You should be offered practical support to help facilitate appropriate family time.

You may feel that the family is letting the child down, but, there could be many reasons for this.

* The family may feel guilty or angry that their child is in foster care;
* A child may have been placed in an emergency when the family was experiencing problems;
* Parents may feel angry that their children are living with you if this is against their wishes and resent having to comply with plans they don’t agree with;
* Parents can also worry that you will take their place in the child’s life and may have heard in the media about foster carers wanting to adopt fostered children;
* Parents may also feel they have let their child down which can impact on their motivation and reliability.

These reasons and feelings can lead to parents behaving in ways which appear inappropriate during family time. They may be very emotional, give the children unrealistic messages or make promises.

Understanding the parent's experience can help to make sense of the situation for the child as well as the family.

Any restrictions on communication by the child with their parents should be agreed by the child’s social worker and reviewed alongside the child’s wishes and feelings.

If you feel that changes should be made to family time to protect the child from [Significant Harm](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/significant_harm.html), the child’s social worker should be told immediately or within 24 hours. If the child returns from family time and you are concerned in any way about something that has been said or done particularly if you think it has harmed the child in anyway, you must report this to the child’s social worker or a duty worker in their office immediately or within 24 hours.