

Family Time

With Parents, Siblings and Other Significant Family & Friends

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1. Introduction

Supervised contact ensures the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of a child. It also assists in building and sustaining positive relationships between a child and member of their non-resident family. This is called Family Time.

The Family Support Service provides Family Time sessions for children, young people and families within Knowsley.

2. General Principles

In delivering Family Time services the following principles will be adhered to:

- Family Time is essential for children to maintain an attachment and sense of identify with their family of origin.
- Family Time must always be for the benefit of the child and not the parent/relative or friend.
- The child's voice, their views and feelings should be paramount.
- Family Support Workers have a duty to respond where it is perceived that Family Time is having a negative impact upon the child.
- In all cases consideration should be given as to whether family members, friends, foster carers or special guardians can appropriately assist in supervision of Family Time, but not where it might place the safety of the child or proceedings in jeopardy.
- Family Time sessions should take place in venues that are appropriate for children and young people; given their ages and who they are meeting up with.
- Maintaining contact with sisters and brothers from both the same or different parents is reported by children to be one of their highest priorities and every effort must be made to ensure this is supported.
- Family Time arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure that this continues to meet children's needs.

3. Legal Framework

Local Authorities have a duty to provide Family Time/Contact with children and young people looked after by the Local Authority and their family. The Children's Act 1989 emphasises the responsibility of the Local Authority;

- To safeguard and promote the welfare and upbringing of children and young people within their area by their families (Section 17);
- To allow reasonable contact between a child in care of the Local Authority and their families (Section 34).

Family Time contact ensures the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of a child. It also assists in building and sustaining positive relationships between a child and members of their non-resident family.

This requires Family Support Workers to intervene immediately if necessary and can work professionally in a planned way with families at times of distress.

In addition, the **Human Rights Act 1998** defines the right to family life, and a failure to promote contact at the correct level both in terms of frequency and level of support provided could be argued as contrary to this, if it was disproportionate and without good reason. Additionally, **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 9** states: respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests".

The duty to promote Family Time/Contact is also a requirement in both the Children's Home Regulations and the Fostering Services Regulations. These requirements are applied within the **Children's Homes Regulations including Quality Standards (2015) (Standard 14)** and the **National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) (Standard 9)**.

4. Referrals to the Family Support Service

Priorities for the Family Support Service are:

- Interim Care Orders.
- Accommodated under Section 20 Children Act 1989.
- Long term Looked After children.
 - This can include placement support, children placed with parents or rehabilitation to home.

In all cases consideration should be given as to whether family members, friends, foster carers or special guardians can appropriately assist in supervision of Family Time, but not where it might place the safety of the child or proceedings in jeopardy.

Once the most beneficial frequency and level of Family Time has been assessed, and family assistance considered inappropriate, the following steps should be taken:

- The referral should be made in ICS - **Make a Family Support Referral**. The referral should include the level, type, frequency and structure of the Family Time contact.
- The referral must include details of known risks in relation to both the adults and children involved in the contact and identify actions that have / or need to be taken to reduce these risks.
- Referrals are then sent to the Senior Family Support Workers tray for approval.
- Once the referral has been processed and allocated the Family Support Worker and Social Worker will arrange a joint visit with the family to draw up a Contact Agreement.
- The Family Support Service will be advised of any proposed changes to volume or frequency of Family Time sessions at the Care Planning Meeting.
- Where a case is being heard in court at the Final Hearing stage the Family Support Service will liaise closely with the Social Worker regarding changes to family time arrangements / newly identified risks. A new Family Time Contract will be produced to reflect all changes.

5. Frequency of Family Time

Frequency of Family Time sessions will vary from case to case. It must be acknowledged that some children are involved in multiple Family Time arrangements which, if not carefully managed, allow them little time for anything else.

Frequency and duration will be informed by:

- Previous level of contact with child (non-resident parent / extended family).
- Purpose of Family Time session (e.g. assessments)
- Emotional capability of the child and parent to cope with the Family Time contact.
- Views of the child.
- The potential disruption and stress to the child caused by the Family Time arrangements.
- Ages of the children.
- Previous parental engagement with the Family Support Service.

When considering the frequency of the Family Time, the primary consideration will be the welfare and best interests of the child.

6. Approving and Planning Family Time

Family Time should be consistent with the child's Care Plan, which itself must take account of any Child Protection Plan or Contact Order that may be in force.

The purpose of the Family Time and how it will be evaluated must be made clear in the plan. 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 and each child's wishes and needs for Family Time should be individually considered.

The wishes and feelings of parents and the child's care givers must be ascertained before a decision about Family Time is made as far as its reasonable practicable to do so.

Family Time will be subject to regular reviews to ensure they are meeting the needs of the children and family.

7. Different Types of Family Time

All Family Time is to ensure children and young people maintain links to their families to promote their identity and relationships.

The Family Support service offer Assessment Family Time when a family are in court proceedings and these are to observe, assess and offer support and guidance.

Maintenance Family time is for families who have concluded court proceedings and there is a need for ongoing contact with their family. This can be supervised, partly supervised or unsupervised.

Family Time can be centre based, in the community or any other suitable venue including the home, if appropriate.

Family time is also inclusive of friends, extended family and significant people in the young person's life and this should be encouraged wherever possible in line with their wishes.

In consultation with MADE a family Time contract has been devised to ensure that the young people have a good understanding of the reasons for supervision and the role of the supervisor. The aim is to ensure that family time is a happy experience.

8. Recording Family Time Sessions

The Family Support Worker will provide detailed notes in ICS of the Family Time sessions that have taken place that week. This will include what has worked well within the Family Time session, what are the worries and what needs to happen. This will be in conjunction with the family's views of the Family Time session and the Family Support Workers assessment. These will be incorporated into the Social Workers assessment and submitted to court. The Family Support Worker may be required to attend court.

Recording standards are in line with KMBC case recording procedures.

The Family Time recordings are saved on the child's file in ICS.

A Family Time recording form has been devised for the supervisor to be completed and uploaded to ICS. This will ensure consistent and good quality recording.

Those facilitating Family Time should take photographs of the young people with their family and friends to capture what is happening during Family Time and to save their happy memories on their My Memories account, which they can access into adulthood.

9. Unsupervised, Facilitated or Supervised Family Time

Family Time can be unsupervised, partly supervised or supervised.

Unsupervised Family Time means that the contact takes place with no-one else there with a specific role to facilitate, support or supervise the contact.

Partly Supervised Family Time is where some support is provided for the session such as a room in the Family Support Service base or a Children's Centre, in the community or in the home.

Supervised Family Time involves someone allocated to be present throughout the whole session and where a written record is kept.

The Social Worker should consider whether Family Time will need to be supervised. It is then the responsibility of the Senior Support Worker to allocate the family to a lead professional.

10. Levels of Risk

Family Time often carries an element of risk and therefore careful planning is required. It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to complete the risk assessment as part of the referral document in the first instance.

Where the risk is deemed high in the first instance the Senior Family Support Worker will review the risks, followed by a professionals planning meeting prior to the Family Time contact commencing if required.

Whilst we try to respond to emergency requests as quickly as possible, it is vital that all risks are considered in full.

Any contact with someone who has perpetrated domestic abuse or violence must be fully assessed, putting the child's safety and interest first.

The risk assessment in relation to the arrangements for supervising Family Time must be reviewed at least every six months or sooner if any incident or report identifies concerns.

11. Review of Family Time Arrangements

The Social Worker and Family Support Worker should keep Family Time arrangements, including the need for supervision, under regular review.

Any significant reactions that the child has to Family Time should be reported to the child's Social Worker by those observing Family Time arrangements, for example a foster carer or special guardian.

The Family Time arrangements should also be reviewed in all Care Planning Meetings and at the child's Looked After review.

Where a **Contact Order** is in force and it is considered that the contact arrangements set out in the Order should be altered, the agreement of the child and the parents should be sought and legal advice should be obtained as to the need to seek a variation of the Court Order.

12. Core Hours of Delivery

The Family Support Service can be operated Monday to Sunday between 8.30am and 10pm but the core hours of delivery are Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm

The Family Support Service is unable to provide a service on the following Bank Holidays:

- Christmas Day
- Boxing Day
- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Easter Monday
- May Day
- Spring Bank Holiday
- August Bank Holiday

A limited service is offered on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

13. Service User Feedback / Consultation

The Family Support Service is committed to seeking the view of service users in relation to the quality of the service we provide and how we can make changes / improvements where appropriate.

Family Support Workers ask for the parent and child's views at each session and these are added onto the Signs of Safety forms, which are then saved to the child's ICS file.

Informal feedback is shared with parents at each Family Time review meeting.

In respect of overall monitoring and assessment of the case the Social Worker / IRO will seek the views of the child/ren involved in the Family Tim. This information will form part of the Family Time reviewing process whether as part of a CLA Review or a review of Family Time.

At the end of the Family Support Service involvement with a family a formal feedback form will then be completed about the service by the family.

14. Process for Family Time Contact

