

# Parental Visitation: The Path to Reunification

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Parental visitation is a strong predictor of reunification. It is critical to promote security and to strengthen the parent-child relationship. In addition, visitation facilitates the attachment between the foster parents and children while maintaining the connection with the biological parent(s).

The Department of Family Services (DFS) Visitation Center provides a safe, supervised, child-friendly environment which supports the child, the foster family and the natural family. Visitation plays a key role in connecting parents with their children's respective foster parents.

## **The First Visit**

The first visit normally occurs at the DFS Visitation Center and is focused on the child (or children). Parents are able to express their concerns about their children and have them addressed immediately by DFS staff.

This first meeting is normally an emotional one. Greetings are exchanged between the parents and the children's caregivers, and information is shared addressing the specific concerns of the parents—are the children eating, sleeping, missing their mother and father? Parents talk about their children's favorite toys, foods and their medical needs. More importantly, this is an opportunity for reassurance from the caregivers that the children are being well cared for and that they miss their parents.

## **Building Trust, Providing Peace of Mind**

Over time, these visitations can also provide peace of mind because it shows parents that their children's foster family will work with them to ensure that the bond between parents and children continues. This relationship often continues beyond the visitation process. Many foster parents maintain contact with their foster children long after reunification with their parents has occurred. Parents with whom caregivers have developed a lasting relationship will maintain weekly phone contact, offer assistance and even babysit.

Many foster parents are "regulars" at the Visitation Center and express support for the parents and reunification with their children. We encourage foster parents to be understanding of the parents' needs and the process that they go through before reunification is granted.

An hour of patience and unselfish love goes a long way in supporting the parents and their quest for reunification.