

**Factors to Consider *BEFORE* Limiting, Suspending,
or Terminating Parent-Child Visits**

Parent-child visits are a critical part of permanency planning, and of treatment and recovery. Visits can also be a tool for building positive relationships between parents and foster parents, which is always in children’s best interest, protecting them from feeling torn loyalties and increasing the likelihood these relationships will continue no matter what the permanency outcome. But visits can also be emotionally painful, challenging, and difficult—a reality which is often misused as a reason to limit or suspend visits.

The chart below lists some common reasons for moving to limit or restrict visits, as well as less commonly considered explanations and adjustments to make *before* visits are limited or reduced. Because visits can be so critical to children’s well-being, sense of self, and need for attachment and belonging, reducing or terminating visits should be reserved for when the visits pose a safety or well-being threat, and even here, reinstating visits should be re-assessed as circumstances change over time.

<i>Basis of Request to Restrict Visits</i>	<i>Possible Explanation</i>	<i>Suggested Adjustment/ Response</i>
Child’s behavior during visits	Child is not comfortable in visiting environment; child has not seen parent for some time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider activities, snacks, games that might make the child more comfortable; allow the child to bring familiar items with them for the visit. • Consider changing the visit location. • Ensure that visits happen regularly and consistently. Explain importance of this to all parties.
Child’s behavior before or after visits	Child’s attachment to parent/ separation anxiety	Increase the frequency and consistency of visits.* Research shows that children’s negative visit-reactions subside over time when visits are regular and consistent. <i>*A child’s physical & emotional safety during visits should always be assessed first.</i>
	Unknown visit escort or difficult visit transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using a visit coach, visit host, or someone the child feels comfortable with as an escort. • Consider changing visit location to minimize child’s stress.
	Child’s torn loyalties between parent & foster parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize to the parent and foster parent the importance of their getting along for the sake of the child; • Remove or wean foster parent out of visits—this should be parent-child time.
Awkward interaction between parent and child	Visiting is not natural; clear expectations & purpose of visits have not been conveyed; visit location may be uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with parent before visits to help prepare, discuss feelings, offer support, and help parent plan for visits in advance with activities, snacks, songs, games. • Explain the purpose of visits: that the parent is “in charge” and should <i>parent</i> as comfortably as possible in this difficult situation (caseworker or other visit supervisor is there to observe and support, but not to replace or judge parent). • Consider changing visit location to be more comfortable and “natural;” ask parent for suggested visit locations.
Parent says he/ she is not interested in visits; gives reasons for why the visit shouldn’t happen; or sabotages visits before they happen.	Parent’s underlying feelings of anxiety, fear, embarrassment, anger, feeling incompetent or judged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak with parent to “unpack” their not coming to visits—what is this really about? What underlying feelings are driving this? • Emphasize importance of visits <i>to the child</i> and to their reunifying, if that is the plan: is there a supportive person the parent would like to bring with her/him during the visit (at least at first)?

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Parent's passivity and non-responsiveness during visits	Parental depression; need for parenting support and modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess for parental depression and refer for services. • Provide visit coach to model parenting techniques and support parent to strengthen skills in meeting child's needs. • Encourage parent to think of visit activities in advance.
Parent waives right to visits; states children not interested or better off without visits	Parental despair / frustration that young child refuses their approaches; or, older children seemed bored, disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parent to patiently build attachment and relationship with children; explain that it takes time and persistence. • Encourage parent to bring a supportive person with them. • If visits are chaotic with multiple children with different needs, consider having some separate visits or helping parent during visits to have some alone-time with each child.
	Parental ambivalence about visits; doubting own ability to meet children's needs; questioning desire to resume full-time care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the support of someone parent trusts or who is involved with visits, help parent identify and talk about ambivalence before and after visits; convey that <i>ambivalence and doubt are normal</i>. • Assist parents in identifying children's needs but also their own strengths as a parent; arrange visits to build on these strengths. • Consider referral for Options Counseling for parent who expresses doubts about resuming care of children.
Parent's or caregiver's inconsistent visit attendance	Scheduling conflicts	Revise the visiting schedule so as not to conflict with child's, parent's or foster parent's schedule (to extent possible)
	Ambivalence on the part of foster parent (fear of losing the child, anxiety about future, mis-understanding children's pre/ post-visit behaviors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about and try to address foster parent's concerns. Explain the importance of visiting and reasons behind child's pre- or post-visit behaviors; offer suggestions for how to minimize these. • Find ways to mediate a more positive relationship between foster parent & parent, including encouraging the exchange of child-focused information. • Meet with parent to encourage her/ him to recognize foster parent's role in caring for child, see her/ him as an ally, and express appreciation.
Older children state they do not want to visit	Scheduling conflicts or awkward visits	Change visit time; build activities young person is interested in or involved with into the visits; consider involving 3 rd party who youth has a relationship with, or who can mediate such as family therapist, visit host, or visit coach.
	Unresolved anger towards the parent; fear or discomfort re: parent's past behavior, and/ or young person's current living situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parent to invite child/ youth to express feelings. Provide support to parent for problem-solving and reassuring child. • Suggest alternate or additional ways for youth to communicate with parent—letters, poems, songs; talking to 3rd party while parent is present. • Prepare parent for supportive, child-focused ways to respond (especially if information shared is painful, arouses guilt or defensiveness in parent). • Emphasize importance of child's/ youth's safety in current situation and create safe space for sharing information. • Consider referral for family therapy.

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