

Purpose of Family Interaction

The primary purpose of family interaction is to preserve and strengthen family relationships, whenever possible.

Wisconsin Ongoing Services Standards, June 2017

Ongoing Services Standards spell out additional purposes of family interaction. They include:

- Facilitating _____ of children to their families
- Assessing and addressing _____ during family interaction
- Assessing and working with the family to _____
- Minimizing _____ for the child/ family caused by separation
- Establishing, enhancing, and maintaining _____
- Establishing and facilitating _____, when appropriate

Key concepts to remember:

Family interaction is a time where parents have the opportunity to:

- demonstrate their abilities
- evaluate their own parenting capacities
- work to improve skills
- gain knowledge and/or skill in areas of parenting where there are deficits

In Parents' Own Words



1. Emotions:

Content/Information:



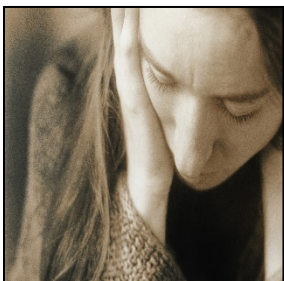
2. Emotions:

Content/Information:



3. Emotions:

Content/Information:



4. Emotions:

Content/Information:

Cycle of Fear



Types of Loss and the Ability to Cope

Maturation Loss

Day-to-day losses as we grow

Catastrophic Loss

Traumatic / life-altering losses

Polyvagal Ladder and Co-Regulation

Soothed and Social

Flight and Fight

Freeze

What is co-regulation?

Families in Crisis

A family's ability to adapt and successfully resolve a crisis is related to:

1. Their perception of the crisis
2. Resources they have to cope with the crisis
3. Other stressors

Loss and separation affect the family interaction process.

Stages of Grief

Shock/Denial

The person appears compliant and disconnected from the event, as if the loss were of little significance. The person may deny the event or deny his or her feelings about the event. This may last a few hours or days.

Anger or Protest

Usually the first emotion expressed following denial. May be diffused or directed at whomever or whatever is thought to be responsible for the loss.

Bargaining

A final attempt to regain control. To the degree that the person feels himself to be responsible for the loss, he may resolve to change behavior.

Depression/Sadness

Expressions of despair, futility, listlessness, or withdrawal. May involve reckless behavior ("I have nothing left to lose").

Yearning

"Pangs of grief" and longing for the lost person.

Resolution/Acceptance

Most people cannot tolerate intense psychological pain for extended periods of time. If supported, and if previous relationships were strong and positive, the person will frequently be able to develop other relationships.

(Adapted from Rycus, et al., 1988; Maciejewski et al., 2007; Kubler-Ross, 1969)

Grief Responses

What grief behaviors would you expect to see before, during, and after a visit? What strategies can you use?

	Feelings Experienced	Responses Before Visit	Responses During Visit	Responses After Visit	Helpful Strategies
6-Month-Old	Confused; excited; scared; numb – flat affect	Picks up on and responding to the adult's energy; not wanting to get into car seat; unhappy with schedule disruption; fussy	Recognizes parent - their smell and voice; hard to soothe; may seem scared or confused; wants to be held; clingy; tight muscles	Sleepy; not sleeping; cries; fussy; wants bottle/pacifier; overly cuddly	Support hellos & goodbyes – allow extra time if needed; encourage parent to read cues and take things at baby's pace; assure frequent contact
2-Year-Old Child	Excited; sullen; confused; hyper		Recognizes parent; comforted by or fearful of familiar voice or smells; acts scared or confused; reluctant to interact or let go of parent; hyperactive	Sullen; muted responses; sad; cries; begs for parent; hard to soothe; seems unaffected; passive; sleepy; extra active; disrupted sleep	
10-Year-Old Child		Acts out; pushes limits; brags; acts reserved; feels sick or pretends to be sick	Uses FI to get what they want or need out of parent; high-highs/low-lows; attention-seeking; brags about caregiver or home to parent	Sad; pulls inward; displays resentment; regression in behaviors; disrupted sleep; "you're not my parent"; pushes limits or breaks rules	

16-Year-Old Child	Excited; uninterested; guarded; anxious; curious; wishful	Good mood; acts out in FH or school; brags; feels skeptical parents will show up; sleep disturbances	Laughing; quiet; on their phone; ask parent about their progress or use/sobriety; asks about family or pets; take parenting role – <i>“You need to get a job.”</i>		
Foster Parents	Nervous; worried; curious; hopeful; resentful	Acts inconvenienced; asks caseworker lots of questions; prepares child; appears anxious	Late or early for visit; drops off child and leaves quickly; avoids seeing parent; reluctant to leave; rejuvenates self/self-care; multi-tasks or runs errands		
Child’s Parents	Excited; nervous; fearful; angry; scared; worried; optimistic; curious	Gathers child’s toys/clothes/books to bring; buys snacks or gifts; drinks or uses; arrives early or late		Asks for additional time; cries; rushes away afterward; gets upset; relapse; processes with supportive friends/family	

Developmental Impact of Loss

Each child is unique in their response to grief and loss. This understanding is largely influenced by the child's developmental level and chronological age. But remember that there can be tremendous overlap among age groups because children move from one developmental level to another at very different rates.

Birth to Two Years

The loss of an important caregiver impacts the infant's sense of security and well-being in the world. Children of this age are sensitive to changes in routine and stress in their environment. The child may display excessive crying, writhing, rocking, biting and other anxiety related behaviors.

Ages Two to Five

Preschool-age children may have feelings of sadness, anxiety, insecurity, irritability and anger. Children at this age don't understand loss, especially permanent losses. They may equate death with sleeping or being away on a trip, that it is temporary and can be reversed or believe their thoughts or behaviors caused the death of their loved one. Some children may act as if nothing happened, while others may exhibit regressive behaviors, such as bedwetting or excessive clinging.

Ages Six to Nine

At this age, children are able to understand loss. They may develop fears associated with their own death or the death of loved ones. Feelings of insecurity may be expressed in a reluctance to separate from caregivers. Some children may be hyperactive, aggressive and disruptive, while others are withdrawn, and sad. Children may have nightmares, difficulty sleeping through the night, or display regressive behaviors.

Ages Nine to Twelve

Fears and worries associated with the loss may be heightened by the physical occurring within their own bodies. Children this age understand that death is final and that it happens to everyone. Ironically, they may have a strong need to control their feelings while at the same time they have great difficulty doing so. Because friends are so important to this age group, preteens may feel socially isolated, lonely, confused, scared, guilty and self-conscious.

Adolescents (Ages Thirteen to Nineteen)

Teens may have a need to feel "strong", in control of their emotions and "indistinguishable" from their friends. They may hide or numb their emotions of grief by engaging in risk-taking behaviors, such as reckless driving, alcohol and drug use, sexual promiscuity and defiance of authority. They may be unable or reluctant to express their feelings with others. The death can cause strong feelings of sadness, loneliness, confusion, fear, guilt and anxiety for the grieving adolescent. They may become more easily distracted, experience sleeping and eating disturbances, perform better or worse in school, and display strong emotional mood changes. Like adults, adolescents may have difficulty coping with the loss for months or years following the death.

Family Interaction Overview

What makes Family Interaction *so complicated?*

Planning Family Interactions

Family interactions are more successful when they are:

Pre-planned

Scheduled

Monitored

Facilitated

Evaluated

Discussed (feedback)

Source: Child Welfare League of America, 1988

Frequency of Family Interaction

Consideration of Developmental Stages

Infants and Toddlers

Young School-Aged Children

Adolescents

Youth Transitioning into Adulthood

How Frequent Family Interaction Enhances Child Well-Being

- Essential to strengthening and maintaining family relationships; is important for parent-child attachments.
- Parent-child relationship plays a critical role in early childhood development, including brain formation and development.
- Decreases sense of abandonment that children often experience when removed.
- Can reduce trauma for children.
- Positive correlation between parent-child visitation and children's well-being while in placement care.
- Overall improved emotional well-being and positive adjustment to placement.
- Lower levels of depression and "acting out" behavior.
- Strongly associated with shorter placement time and faster family reunification.
- Helps prepare families for the transition from out-of-home care to returning home and increases the likelihood of lasting reunification.



Sources: Smariga, 2007; Mallon & Hess, 2005; Hess, 2003; Haight, Kagle & Black, 2003; McWey, Acock, & Porter, 2010; Weintraub, 2008; Haight, Kagle & Black, 2003; and Smariga, 2007.

Locations for Family Interaction

	Advantages	Disadvantages	When is this appropriate?	Other Considerations	Possible activities
Child and Parent's Home	Most natural; familiar; if parent has moved recently it eliminates mystery about where parent is living; overnight visits				
Family Member or Relative Care Provider's Home		Puts relative in the middle; high stakes if doesn't go well – could damage relationship with natural supports			
Foster Parent's Home			Have conversations with parent and FP – reach agreements; set expectations for all involved		
Public Setting				Does parent have skill needed? Can safety be assured?	
Agency Setting					Reading; homework; games; puzzles; play; pretend; songs; dance

Developmentally-Related Visit Activities

Age	Developmental Task	Developmentally-Related visit Activities
Infancy (age 0-2)	Develop primary attachment	Meet basic needs (feeding, changing, holding, cuddling)
	Develop object permanence	Play peek-a-boo games
	Basic motor development (sit, reach, stand, crawl, walk)	Help with standing, walking, etc. by holding hand, play “come to me” games
	Word recognition	Name objects, repeat name games, read picture books
	Begin exploration and mastery of the environment	Encourage exploration; take walks; play together with colorful, noisy, moving items
Toddler (age 2-4)	Develop impulse control	Make and consistently enforce rules
	Language development	Read simple stories; play word games
	Imitations, fantasy play	Play “let’s pretend” games; encourage imitative play by doing things together such as “clean house,” “go to store”; play together at park; teach to ride tricycle; dance together to music
	Small motor coordination	Draw together; string beads together
	Develop basic sense of time	Discuss visits and visit activities in terms of “after breakfast,” “after lunch,” “before supper,” etc.
	Identify and assert preferences	Allow choices in activities, clothes worn, foods eaten
Preschool/ Early School (age 5-7)	Gender identification	Be open to discussing boy-girl differences; be open to discussing child’s perception of gender
	Continuing development of conscience	Make and enforce consistent rules; discuss consequences of behavior
	Develop ability to solve problems	Encourage choices in activities
	Learning cause-effect relationships	Point out cause-effect and logical consequences of actions
	Task completion and order	Plan activities with beginning, middle, end (e.g., prepare, make cake, clean up); play simple games such as Candyland, Go Fish
	School entry and adjustment	Shop for school clothes together; provide birth certificate, medical record required for school entry; go with child to visit school, playground prior to first day; accompany child to school
School-age (age 8-12)	Skill development (school, sports, special interests)	Help with homework; practice sports together; demonstrate support of special interests such as help with collections; attend school conferences and activities; work together on household tasks
	Peer group development and team play	Involve peers in visit activities; attend team activities with child
	Development of self-awareness	Be open to talking with child
	Preparation for puberty	Discuss physical changes expected; answer questions openly

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Relationships Make a Difference

What **qualities** does a person possess if they are someone you can turn to for comfort, advice, encouragement, or to just vent?

What does research indicate that **parents want from workers**?

What does research tell us about the **significance** of worker-parent relationships?

What are some ways workers can help the child's parents and the care providers begin **building a relationship** if they do not know each other?

Why is it also important to **bring parents and relative caregivers** together for a meeting?

What other **stakeholders** might we need to educate about the benefits of family interactions?

Supporting Resource Parents

Be transparent. Make the importance of resource parents' role in family interactions clear, starting during the licensure process onward.

Facilitate pre-placement visits between the resource family and the child's parents whenever possible.

Schedule a face-to-face meeting, including the care providers and parents, right away to discuss expectations and logistics of family interaction. Keep in mind the parents' and the resource family's schedule and needs when planning times and locations.

Keep care providers abreast of any anticipated changes to family interactions.

Normalize behaviors. Explain what kinds of grief responses care providers can realistically expect to see on the part of the child's parents and children before, during, and after family interaction.

Help care providers strategize ways to cope with and be helpful with those behaviors/grief responses.

Explain to resource families the types of family interaction issues and concerns you want them to bring to your attention. Help them understand the difference between safety and non-safety concerns.

Discuss how they will handle any family interaction-related problems and make sure they know you are open and available to discuss any concerns they have.

Encourage and support the relationship care providers and parents have. Let care providers know that you will take on the authority-figure role when it comes to decisions the parents might not like.

Avoid overcomplicating resource families' ability to support family interactions by placing too many children from different families or too many special needs children in one home.

Acknowledge and show appreciation to care providers for their efforts to support family interactions and work with the child's parents.

Connect resource families to their Foster and Kinship Care Coordinators for:

- ongoing education, particularly about the reasons for and effects of family interactions
- peer support that connects resource families to each other and to local and state foster parent associations and kinship support groups

Sibling Interactions

Benefits of Placing Siblings Together

(Groza, et al., 2003; Webster, Shlonsky, Shaw, & Brookhart, 2005)

- Sense of safety / well-being
- Stability
- Improved emotional and behavioral health
- Fewer placement / faster reunification

How are we doing as agencies in honoring these sibling relationships?

Ongoing Services Standards – Our Responsibilities

- **Establishing, enhancing, and maintaining** child, **sibling**, and family **attachments** is one of the stated purposes of Family Interaction.
- Facilitating face-to-face contact with siblings is the **responsibility of the agency worker**.
- Family interaction for siblings includes **face-to-face** contact **at least one per month**.
- **Additional** family interactions between siblings **must be encouraged** (such as: telephone calls; letters; emails).

Ideas for Sibling Activities:

Self-Reflection

As you review today's information:

Which factors are you already paying attention to when setting up family interactions?



What ideas do you think could make family interactions even more successful?

Which idea(s) do you plan to try first?

Family Interaction with Non-Custodial Parents

What are some of the benefits of promoting interaction between non-custodial parents and children?

What keeps us from achieving these benefits?

Each non-custodial parent's story is different.

How do we build connections between non-custodial parents and their children?

Incarcerated Parents

What are our obligations in cases with incarcerated parents?

Nationally, _____ children have a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison.

In Wisconsin, nearly _____ children have parents who are incarcerated.

What are the benefits of assuring family interaction between children and incarcerated parents?

Factors versus Barriers - What gets in the way of keeping children and their incarcerated parents connected?

Ways to promote family interaction so children can stay connected to their parents:



Family Interaction Considerations in Cases with Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence cases are complex. What factors make these cases challenging?

In cases with domestic violence, what needs to be taken into consideration?

The agency must consider a plan for unsupervised family interaction unless there is a court order or documented concerns for child safety or safety of other family members.

Strategies for providing family interaction while also providing victim and child safety:

Ways to support parent and child interactions with the victim/survivor:

Ways to support parent and child interactions with the batterer:

Parental Protective Capacities

Definition:

*Personal qualities or characteristics that contribute to vigilant child protection.
Strengths specifically associated with one's ability to provide and assure
a consistently safe environment.*

Types of Parental Protective Capacities:

Behavioral

Cognitive

Emotional

For Ongoing Child Protective Services, there are three questions that direct case planning.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

When should we assess protective capacities?

How do you assess protective capacities in families?

How do you assure protective capacities continue once reunification has occurred?

Emotion Coaching

What is Emotion Coaching?

Inside Out (video clip) by Disney/Pixar

Characters:

Riley Anderson - 11-year-old whose life is upended by a family move (not shown)

Bing Bong - Riley's old imaginary friend who cries candy tears

Rocket Wagon - basic red wagon with two brooms (boosters) & cardboard (wings)

Joy & Sadness - two of Riley's emotions

Benefits of Emotion Coaching

- Helps children regulate physiological arousal
- Enhances peer relationships
- Improves academic performance
- Decreases behavioral problems and physical illnesses
- Makes children less violent and aggressive
- Serves as a buffer for future traumatic losses

Source: Gottman, 1997

Five Steps to Emotion Coaching

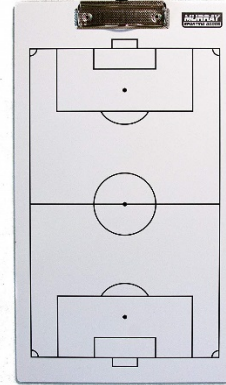
1. Be aware of the child's emotions
2. Recognize the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching
3. Listen empathetically and validate the child's feelings
4. Help the child verbally label emotions
5. Set limits while helping the child problem-solve

Source: Gottman, 1997

Pre-Teaching Is Like Coaching

Coaching Responsibilities

- Hold accountable
- Challenge
- Motivate
- Teach
- Support
- Encourage individuals to support each other
- Help develop a strategy for success
- Help achieve and celebrate successes



Phases of Coaching

Pre-event

Event

Post-event



Pre-Teaching Steps

The concept of pre-teaching is simple yet powerful.

Pre-teaching refers to helping families, children, foster parents, and others to think about and practice ahead of time the skills needed to handle issues before the issues arise.

Pre-teaching is generally done around potentially troublesome situations that require concrete actions, skills, or behaviors.

Pre-teaching can be applied to help manage the conclusion of visits, to enhance a parent's ability to provide supervision during visits, and to help develop other skills that must be demonstrated by parents during family interactions to accomplish the goals of the case plan.

Source: Gottman, 1997



Step 1 - Identify potential issues and situations

Step 2 - Think about the natural responses to potential issues

Step 3 - Explore best responses

Step 4 - Practice

Step 5 - Feedback

Effective Feedback

Feedback is most helpful when it is both **specific and positively stated**. It is easier to stop doing something that is counterproductive when a more helpful behavior can be substituted, so positively stated feedback is useful feedback.

- Ahead of time, let the person know that you will be giving them feedback.
- Share with them the purpose for giving feedback.
- Ask how they would like to receive feedback.
- Establish feedback rules with the parents input.
- Start out with the positives. First address what went well.
- Choose your words carefully. Say, “Here is a different way” or “another way” or a “quicker way” as opposed to a “better way.”
- Consistently check to ensure you are on the same page and they understand your feedback. You can do this by asking them to tell you what you have said in their own words.
- Accompany your feedback with rationales that align with the individual’s way of thinking. For example the rationale, “If you continue to have outbursts at the end of the visits, your foster parents may ask you to leave,” is not a good rationale to use with a child who believes that if his foster parents kick him out he can go home.

Pre-Teaching Observation Sheet

How did the worker demonstrate respect?

How did the worker recognize and validate strengths when “exploring best responses”?
[Step 3]

What strengths-based language did the worker use while “practicing”? [Step 4]

What made the feedback effective? [Step 5]

Meaningful Documentation

What are the benefits of documentation?



Family Interaction Plans:

Who

When

Where

What

Case Notes:

Pre-Event - Goals and Planning

Event – Information

Post-Event - Evaluation, Feedback, Planning

When Others Supervise Family Interaction

The caseworker retains responsibility when others supervise family interaction. Why is it important for caseworkers to supervise at least some of the family's time together themselves?

Others who oversee family interactions - benefits and considerations:

- In-House Staff
- Contracted Services Employees
- Resource Families
- Relatives
- Tribal Members
- Others

How can you set up opportunities for success when others supervise family interactions?

Johnson Case Scenario 1

Case Study: The Johnson Family

Mother: Tina Johnson (34 years old)
Father: Karl Johnson (33 years old)
Child: Sydney (10 years old)
Foster Parents: Chris & Casandra Rogers

Sydney Johnson has been in custody for nine months following a substantiation of neglect by the court. Ms. Johnson neglected her child during her involvement in illegal drug use. Her drugs of choice were methamphetamine and alcohol. On numerous occasions the child was left alone overnight and once for an entire weekend. Sydney was taken into custody following police involvement after she was found begging for food one Saturday afternoon.

You are the new worker for the case, which was recently reassigned when her previous worker left the agency. You have been working with the family for the past month but have had limited success in breaking the ice with Ms. Johnson. She attends the family interactions, but has little to say and does not seem to want any interaction with you. Ms. Johnson also attended most but not all of her parenting classes, where she participated minimally. After previously having sporadic attendance, she has recently begun participating in a treatment program for her addiction. While she is following through on specific parts of her case plan, you see little evidence of a change in her parenting style or insight into her situation.

During the last several interactions you have noticed that mom provides very little structure or guidance, and is hesitant to discipline Sydney. In fact, she leaves most of the discipline to you and chooses not to intervene when Sydney acts out. Sydney's foster parents report that after each family interaction, Sydney comes home very agitated and is easily "set off." The foster parents have requested a reduction in visits because of the effect they have on Sydney. They say they are having a hard time managing Sydney's "melt downs." At the end of today's visit, Sydney cries and begs to come home with her mother. Her mother tells Sydney to stop crying and calm down.

The next family interaction will take place in one week at Ms. Johnson's apartment.

Johnson Case Scenario 2

Continued

Karl and Tina were divorced when Sydney was 11 months old, after a short marriage. Karl says he and Tina were a bit of a mismatch from the beginning. After the split up Karl moved away and worked second shift, but when he was in town he tried to stop by to see Sydney. Tina was seldom home, and moved a couple times. Sometimes Karl didn't know where she and Sydney lived.

Eventually Karl stopped trying to see Sydney. The last time they spent time together was when she was 5-years-old and she came to his parents' home for Thanksgiving dinner.

There have been a few phone calls with her, when he has had Tina's current phone number, and he has sent Sydney birthday cards with a \$20 bill in them every year. Twice the cards have been returned, stamped with "Return to Sender. Not deliverable as addressed. Unable to forward." He has always paid his child support.

After repeated attempts you finally connect with Karl, who expresses he is hesitant "to get involved in Tina's situation". After talking with you, he agrees to reconnect with his daughter but he seems nervous about it. "It's been a while. We don't really know each other."

A family interaction time is set for two weeks from now at the county's Family Center, located within your office building. You are meeting with Karl on Monday to prepare him for the visit. He is coming to your office.

Karl will need help managing his apprehension and preparing to reconnect with his daughter. **You will help Karl practice how to reintroduce himself to Sydney and explain his renewed involvement in her life.**