

## Guidance in relation to supervised family time (FAST)

### Legal Framework

A local authority has a duty to endeavour to promote Family Time (contact) between children who are Cared for by them and their families under Schedule 2 Children Act 1989 unless it is not practicable, or it is not consistent with the child's welfare.

In addition, the Human Rights Act 1998 Section 8 defines the right to family life, and a failure to promote Family Time 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.

In some situations, in order to promote Family Time consistent with a child's welfare it must be supervised.

### 1. General Principles

Supervised Family Time should be planned with a purpose. It needs to take into account the capacity of the people involved to cope emotionally with the arrangements.

It is essential that supervised Family Time arrangements are dynamic and flexible so that they can develop in response to changing plans for a child's future. When the child's plan and circumstances change, Family Time arrangements should be reviewed and never allowed to drift.

It should be acknowledged that any supervision of Family Time, however skilfully done, can be intrusive for families and careful consideration needs to be given to the level of supervision required. The level and intrusion of supervision will depend on its purpose.

For example, the supervision may be to prevent immediate harm to the child, to prevent oral messages being passed to the child, to see that the child does not become upset, or to form part of an assessment of the relationship between child and parent. In the first two examples close supervision, perhaps by more than one member of staff, will be required. In the latter two examples the supervision may be more like discreet monitoring.

As with frequency of Family Time, the level of supervision required should be regularly reviewed to ensure that what is provided continues to meet a child's needs. The following should be regarded as general guidance as the correct level and frequency will only be determined by consideration of a child's individual needs taking the full circumstances of the case into account.

Where Family Time is extended as part of a plan to gradually return the child to the parents' care, the [Placements with Parents](#) should be followed.

For foster carers providing short breaks, the foster carer must maintain Family Time as agreed in the Short Break Plan.

Maintaining Family Time with siblings from both the same or different parents is reported by children to be one of their highest priorities ([The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review](#)). It is not always possible or appropriate to place sibling groups together. Where siblings cannot be placed together it requires the active involvement of all parties to facilitate contact Family Time between them.

## **2. Supervisors**

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

FAST is unable to supervise Family Time in private law proceedings or non-court work, except in exceptional circumstances, which will be agreed by a Service Manager.

A meeting with family members should instead be held to identify if there is anyone in the family that can take on the role of supervision / observation of Family Time.

## **3. Guidance for Referrals to FAST for Supervised Family Time.**

Priorities for the supervised family time service are:

- Interim Care Orders;
- Accommodated under Section 20 Children Act 1989;
- Long term Cared for children;
- Where the adult presents a risk to the child;

- When Observations are required, although this may be a timed piece of work.

Referrals for supervised Family Time will be discussed between the Social Worker and their manager prior to referring to FAST. The referral form should be completed in full giving particular weight to risk factors for all concerned; the focus remaining on the impact on the child and advising what action can be taken to minimise the risks. **Referral form.**

#### **4. Referral should then be sent to FAST (generic inbox details to be added).**

Once the referral has been processed an email to the social worker and manager will be sent notifying of next steps or further information, FAST may require up to 5 working days to set up sessions.

Good practice normally requires that the social worker will observe at least one Family Time every three months as a minimum standard. If the specific needs of a child are such that observation of the session by the allocated social worker is required more often, this will be agreed by the responsible social care team and FAST.

Social Worker will notify FAST of the dates they intend to observe Family Time in advance. This should give at least 7 days' notice unless there are specific circumstances such as an order from court requiring it to take place sooner.

All changes of family time arrangements should be emailed to the Child and Family Worker in advance.

In situations where rehabilitation is possible, parenting advice, support and guidance may be offered to parents within sessions at the Social Worker's request. This will be offered for a time limited period with feedback given to the parent in relation to strengths and areas of improvement. It is very important that the Social Worker indicates at the point of referral whether rehabilitation home is a realistic possibility.

#### **5. Frequency of Family Time**

Frequency will vary in line with the child and families individual needs. 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.

## **6. Supervised Family Time agreement (contract)**

Prior to the commencement of supervised Family Time, a planning meeting will take place between FAST and the adult(s) involved in the Family Time sessions. The Child and Family Worker will aim to meet and introduce themselves to the child, parent, foster carer and school/nursery.

The supervised Family Time agreement will outline, dates, times, venues, expectations of family members attending. This agreement will clearly outline the consequences of failed or negative Family Time. A copy of this will be uploaded to the child's electronic records and sent to the parent. FAST Family Expectations for Supervised Family Time.

When a session is missed by a parent or other relative, the Social Worker will be informed as soon as possible and will then discuss the reasons for the missed Family Time with the family and feedback to FAST.

In the event of three missed sessions (either consecutive or indicating a pattern of specific day non-attendance) without satisfactory explanation; FAST will notify the Social Worker and their manager to review the arrangements to ensure that any detrimental impact on the child is understood and responded to.

If following this the pattern of absences continues; this will be addressed within the planned review.

If it is considered to be in the child's interests it may be proposed that Family Time will be reduced to a level that the parent can sustain in line with the terms of the agreement; it will be the responsibility of the Social Worker to advise the parent of this and allow time to make representations, if necessary to a court.

FAST will close their involvement following a 4 week period in cases that parents are not engaging. Notification of this will be sent to Social Worker and their manager. A re-referral can be made should the situation change.

## **7. Replacement Sessions**

Where arrangements are changed through no fault of the parents, such as due to the unavailability of providers, if possible a replacement session will be arranged. The responsibility to make new / alternative arrangements lies with the relevant personnel involved, ensuring details regarding the new

arrangements are shared with all parties. **We are not able to provide a service on public holidays.**

## 8. Reviews

It is important that regular reviews of arrangements take place in order to consider progress and/or issues.

If a plan of permanence has not been achieved for the child; reviews will take place on a bi-monthly basis and will include the Social Worker and FAST practitioner alongside their respective team managers, these reviews will be arranged by the FAST Managers.

Reviews should consider:

- Quality of Family Time.
- Duration/Frequency of current arrangements.
- Child's life balance.
- Parents commitment.
- Child's Care Plan at that stage.

## 9. Levels of Risk

Supervised 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 a planning meeting between FAST and the referring team will be required, this will be arranged by the Social Worker. In circumstances where there is a disagreement as to the perceived level of risk there will be a Service Manager to Service Manager discussion to agree what safeguards are necessary to protect children, parents and staff.

It is very important that when significant decisions are made about current and future plans for children, FAST are contacted by the Social Worker to ensure that joint consideration of the impact this might have on the child and parent takes place.

### **Recording Supervised Family Time sessions**



During each supervised session, observational records are completed. Observations are led by the original areas for observation as highlighted by the Social Worker at the point of referral. These reports are then completed electronically on LCS.