One minute guide

Contact Service / Family Time

Date: November 2024 Version 1

What is 'contact' or 'family time'?

- 'Contact', or some people prefer to call it 'family time', is for children and young people to stay in touch with their families and the people who are important to them.
- The local authority has a duty under the Children Act 1989 to promote contact when children are looked after/subject to care proceedings, and courts must consider this before making an order.
- Children and young people are encouraged to be part of their plan, identifying who is important to them. This might be with parents, anyone with parental responsibility, brothers, sisters and other significant family and network members; where it is safe to do so and as set out in their plan.
- The Nottinghamshire contact service is countywide and split into three areas (North, Central and South), with six contact venues in total. Three contact service team leaders manage the service and contact support workers supervise and support family time.

Types of family time and how we support this

- Family time promotes relationships when children are living away from their birth family. It is a time and space where children see people important to them. It is for children and their families to have fun, make memories, and may contribute to a social worker's assessment and life story work.
- **Direct** family time takes place in a permitted venue within the community and is supported by a contact support worker who will stay during the session and promote the children's safety. They will record what happens and share this with the social worker. Contact support workers have knowledge of child development, so they can help adults such as showing them how to look after and play with their children. They will step in if needed to ensure the experience is safe and positive for the children. Contact support workers can also provide advice and guidance to parents based on their knowledge of the local community.
- Care plans might refer to **indirect** family time. This could include cards, letters, phone and video calls.
- Contact is discussed, reviewed, and agreed by the social worker and independent reviewing officer, (also known as an IRO). A social work assessment can determine if family time can move to becoming unsupervised.
- Contact support workers help the transition from children's family time being supervised by the local authority to being supervised by their main caregiver, such as their kinship carer, or foster carer.
- In Nottinghamshire we offer drop in advice and guidance for kinship carers, recognising that managing family time can often be challenging. We also work closely with the Kinship Charity who offer support and training opportunities to our kinship carers.

Requesting family time and what happens next

- Social workers will submit a 'contact service request' on Mosaic (Nottinghamshire's recording system) for the child or group of children wanting family time. Within this, they tell us how often and for how long family time should take place, and who can or cannot attend. They include anything we need to be aware of to support the family and keep everyone safe.
- The contact service provision request will consider the area that the child lives in as well as their education arrangements to find the most appropriate venue for family time to take place in. We are led by the needs of the children.
- We encourage care givers to be actively involved in the arrangements, offering transport and supporting family time, where possible. Once the arrangements are agreed, the social worker will be informed of a start date and will be asked to share this information with the child's family members and carers.
- On the first day of family time, family members are asked to arrive before it starts, to talk through a 'family time agreement'. This explains what the family can expect during family time and what is expected of them, as well as what they can expect from us, to keep everyone attending safe and make sure the time spent together is as positive as possible.
- We try to allocate the same contact support worker. Sometimes the worker will change, and we aim to let you know when this happens. This means they get to know the family and offers consistency.
- We attend looked after reviews where we share a summary of what has been working well and if there could be anything better about family time. A review of arrangements could include recommendations for both an increase or decrease in family time.

Our practice standards and learning from feedback

- Looked after children in Nottinghamshire are regularly consulted in relation to their experiences of family time. Some prefer to use the term 'family time' whilst others refer to their arrangements as 'contact'. This is kept to personal preference.
- What is most important to the children that use our service is their continued connection and relationships with people who are important to them.
- We have purchased toys and equipment based on feedback from children and their families. We continue to want to make their experience relaxed and fun, and for it to feel as safe as possible.

More information

Online procedures chapter
Blank Family time agreement form

Key contacts

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