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**Kent Family Time Principles**

1. **Family time between children who are looked after and their parents, sisters, and brothers, any relative, friend or other person connected with the child is prioritised**

* Due to Covid-19 pandemic, creative measures may need to be taken on order to follow Government guidelines which may include digitally mediated family time (via mediums such facetime, skype, MS teams etc) and/or time outside.
* Kent is committed to restorative practice. Having time with family members is consistent with our restorative principles and so should be undertaken in line with this approach
* Family time should not be seen as a reward or punishment. It is the child’s right to spend time with their family and friends (unless this is not in their best interest or would put them at risk).
* Maintaining family time with sisters and brothers from both the same or different parents is a high priority and every effort must be made to ensure this is supported
* Letterbox contact should be considered in those circumstances were face to face family time is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child’s wishes and welfare
* Other technologies should be explored such as video calling in those circumstances were face to face family time is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child’s wishes and welfare.
* Family time should take place in venues that are appropriate for children and young people; given their ages and who they are meeting up with. An office building is not usually a good place to have a family time experience.

1. **Family time is always for the benefit of the child and they have a choice about who they wish to see**

* Timing and frequency should depend on the purpose of family time and the child’s individual circumstances rather than placement type or legal order.
* Family time with significant people that has been lost should re-established unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child’s wishes and welfare.
* Where children have moved on from foster care givers, family time should be maintained unless this is not in the child’s interests.

1. **The ‘purpose’ of family time and these principles is always be explored and discussed with parents, carers, and children**

* Parents need to be clear about why family time with their child is important (i.e.: around maintaining relationships, giving children messages around being loved and cared for, key to their development etc).
* Parents need to know if observations of family time are part of an assessment and if so, what is expected of them and how they will know how it is perceived to be going.
* Parents might need time with a social worker to think about how they could answer difficult questions from the child (like when can I come home? etc).
* Parents need to know what social workers are telling children about why family time is happening in a certain way.
* Parents and children need to know when family time will be reviewed and how that fits in to the overall plan.
* When family time is observed as part of an assessment, the observer should arrange at least a 15-minute conversation after every session to feedback what they have observed, what went well and what the parents need to work on to improve*.*

1. **Supervised family time will be facilitated by someone familiar to the child (an extended family member/friend or a key worker/foster carer/care giver) wherever possible**

* Those best place to supervise will be identified as part of the involvement of the Social Connection service – when supervisees are provided by the LA it is the expectation that it is the same one whenever possible.
* Wherever possible foster carers should transport and support with family time arrangements, including supervision.
* Family time should only be supervised where it is necessary to ensure children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted.

1. **The role of the foster carer is to prepare children emotionally for family time and positively explore any post family time feelings**

* The role of the foster carer in family time should be carefully considered in the planning stages of family time in consultation with the supervising and allocated social worker.