

Revisiting Visitation Practices as They Apply to and Inform Reasonable Efforts:  
A Case for Progressive Visits

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The primary purpose of Visits

To meet the child's developmental and attachment needs.

Secondary purposes

- A. To teach and assess a parent's ability to safely parent their child.
- B. To determine the final permanency plan.

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What informs Visitation Practices

- Federal law
- California law
- Evidence Based practice
- Research
- Best practices (See "Guiding Rules for Visits")
- Common practices (How does your community view, implement and value connection planning?)

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## Federal Laws

- Adoption and Safe Families Act
  - Visits/connections are measured in the CFSR and are lined to improved outcomes for children
    - Permanency
    - Safety
    - Well-Being
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act
  - Sibling must be placed together and if not must have visits
  - Must locate extended family and offer them opportunity to care for child or have contact
  - Keep children in same school
- Reasonable/Active Efforts
  - Visits are a reunification service

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## CA Laws

- Require providing older children two phone calls to family within one hour of detention
- **Require providing sibling contact – even for siblings with no prior relationships (must be addressed in court report)**
- Allows the possibility of visits with parents and others even after .26 hearing (PPH)
- **Allows for the possibility of the court granting further time for reasonable effort services, past the 12 months in care, if reasonable visits have not been offered**
- Require that the caregiver allow a child phone calls and in a private location

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## Connection Planning Not just visits with custodial parent

- With everyone important to the child (birth parents, siblings, extended families, friends, and pets)
- Living with siblings
- Face to face, phone, letters, computers
- Activities: School, religious, medical, sports, cultural, teaching family culture, etc.
- Contact with caregivers after reunification

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## Goal of each Visit

- The visit allows the child to be safe and is held in the most natural and home-like location possible.
- Children and parents may feel *discomfort* before, during or after a visit. **A child should not be traumatized or reabused by visits.**
- Help the child handle grief, loss, and adjustment to foster care.
- *Progress until the family can have successful, unsupervised, overnight visits; in the family's home; with all the people who will live with the child and during times or stresses that mimic the maltreatment*

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## Five Steps to Developing a Planned, Purposeful and Progressive Visit/Connection Plan

1. Child Development and Parenting Skills
2. Type of Maltreatment
  - Level of Supervision
3. Time in Care (Concurrent Planning)
  - Initial Placement
  - Reasonable Efforts
  - Final Permanency Decision
  - Post Permanency
4. Family Culture
5. Other Factors
  - Addiction, mental health, special needs of parent or child

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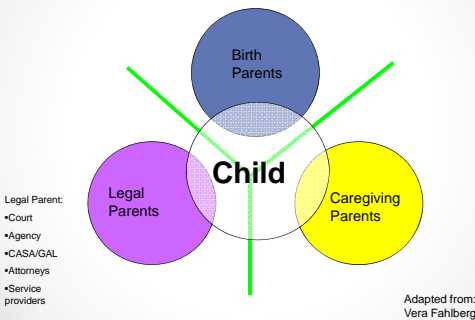
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## The Three Roles of Parenting



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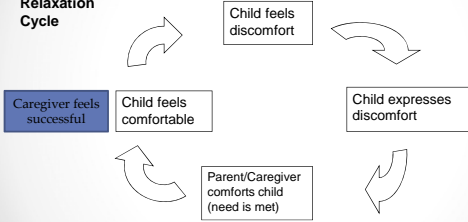
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# Attachment and Bonding

Arousal  
Relaxation  
Cycle



- When cycle is done many times and bonding occurs
- Caregiver bonds also – not just the child

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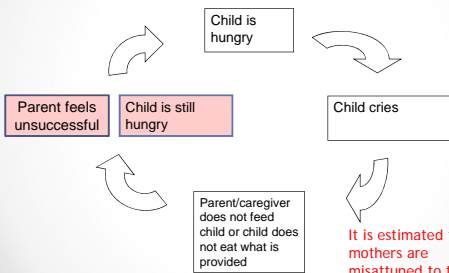
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# Unhealthy attachment Trauma Impacts



It is estimated that mothers are misattuned to their infants 66% of the time (Tronick, 2003)

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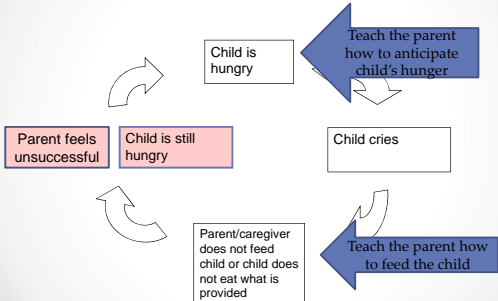
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# Interventions to improve attachments



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## Progressive Visits

- Visits usually start as supervised visits with many restrictions on location, activities, etc.
- **When the parent and child are successfully interacting during visits, the plan should allow for ONE element to be changed at a time.**
- Slowly increase the parent's responsibility and move toward unsupervised visits, in the parent's home, while safely testing the parent's ability.
- **One change allows for accurate assessment of success or failure.**
- When there is a failure or repeated problems, go back to more supervised or structured visit to determine what will make the visit more successful. Try to only change one element at a time even when there has been a problem.

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## Elements of a Visit/Connection Plan

- Purpose
- Frequency
- Length
- Location
- Who attends
- Activities
- Supervision
- Responsibilities
- What to have at the visits

Plan should be included in each court report and discussed during hearing. Plan for how progress will occur between hearings. Concurrent progress should be made in treatment AND visits. If not, a review should occur.

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## Mix of visits

In a given week a family may have a mix of visits

- A visit at the child's school to talk to the teacher about school progress (observed by teacher)
- Attending the child's ballgame and watching from the stands (observed by coach or no formal supervision)
- Attends religious service with grandparent and has time with parent with other adults present (supervised by grandparent)
- Teaching visit with parent and child regarding how to discipline the child (therapeutic)
- Nightly phone calls by child from foster home (supervised or not by foster parent)

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## Reward and Punishment

- Visits are NEVER to be used as a reward or punishment for the parent or the child.
  - Research shows that doing this does not lead to parents attending treatment.
  - Children will get the message that relationships are based on having good behaviors and thereby are conditional.
- This includes things like the following:
  - If you are clean and sober, then you get to have a visit.
  - If you follow the rules of the house, you get to have a visit.
  - When you complete your treatment, you will get to have more visits.
  - If you make your husband move out of the house, then you can have unsupervised visits.
- **Visit plans and progress are based on behaviors AT the visit! Not behaviors in treatment or outside of visits.**

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## Resources

- Information Gateway – [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)
- National Resource Center for Family Connections Permanency Planning – [www.nrcfcp.org](http://www.nrcfcp.org)
- CA Clearinghouse on Evidence Based Practices <http://www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org/>
- Rose Wentz [www.wentztraining.com](http://www.wentztraining.com)

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