

## Factors to Consider Before Limiting, Suspending, or Terminating Parent-Child Visits

Parent-child visits can motivate and support a parent’s recovery and be an important part of prevention planning. They are also (in most cases) critical to children’s well-being and healthy development during the parent’s treatment. **Visits should not be used as a form of punishment or reward**—they are a tool to support recovery and behavior change, not to enforce rules or impose sanctions. With the exception of a situation that threatens the child’s safety or well-being (such as parent who is actively using or experiencing a relapse), the following factors should be considered **BEFORE limiting or restricting parent-child visits**:

PARENT-related Basis of Request to Restrict Visits	Possible Explanation	Suggested Adjustment/ Response
Parent’s passivity and non-responsiveness during visits	<b>Parental depression; need for parenting support and modeling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess for parental depression and refer for services.</li> <li>• Provide visit coach to model parenting techniques and support parent to strengthen skills in meeting child’s needs.</li> <li>• Encourage parent to think of visit activities in advance.</li> </ul>
Parent waives right to visits; states children not interested or better off without visits	<b>Parental despair / frustration</b> that young child refuses their approaches; or, older children seemed bored, disengaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support parent to patiently build attachment and relationship with children; explain that it takes time and persistence.</li> <li>• Encourage parent to bring a supportive person with them.</li> <li>• If visits are chaotic with multiple children with different needs, consider having some separate visits or helping parent during visits to have some alone-time with each child.</li> </ul>
Parent waives right to visits; states children not interested or better off without visits	<b>Parental ambivalence</b> about visits; <b>doubting own ability to meet children’s needs; questioning desire to resume full-time care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the support of someone parent trusts or who is involved with visits, help parent identify and talk about ambivalence before and after visits; convey that <i>ambivalence and doubt are normal</i>.</li> <li>• Assist parents in identifying children’s needs but also their own strengths as a parent; arrange visits to build on these strengths.</li> <li>• Consider referral for Options Counseling for parent who expresses doubts about resuming care of children.</li> </ul>
Awkward interaction between parent and child	<b>Visiting is not natural; parenting sober &amp; clean may be new; treatment facilities may not feel like family environment</b>	Meet with parent before visits to help prepare, discuss feelings, offer support, and help parent plan for visits in advance with activities, snacks, songs, games. Consider changing visit location to be more comfortable and “natural”; ask the parent for suggested visit locations.

<b>PARENT-related Basis of Request to Restrict Visits</b>	<b>Possible Explanation</b>	<b>Suggested Adjustment/ Response</b>
Parent gives reasons for why the visit shouldn't happen, isn't a good idea; or, sabotages visits before they happen.	<b>Parent's underlying feelings</b> (anxiety, fear, embarrassment, feeling incompetent or judged).	Counselor or supportive party can speak with parent to "unpack" their not coming to visits; emphasize importance to a child and implications for their resuming caregiving, if that is the plan; is there a supportive person they would like to be with them during the visit (at least at first)? Incorporate these feelings into treatment plan.
Parent's inconsistent visit attendance	<b>Scheduling conflicts</b>	Revise the visiting schedule so as not to conflict with child's, parent's or foster parent's schedule (to extent possible).
<b>CAREGIVER-related</b>		
Caregiver's inconsistent visit attendance	<b>Scheduling conflicts</b>	Revise the visiting schedule so as not to conflict with child's, parent's or foster parent's schedule (to extent possible).
Caregiver's inconsistent visit attendance	<b>Ambivalence on the part of caregiver</b> (fear of losing the child, anxiety about future arrangements, misunderstanding or resentment re: children's pre/ post-visit behaviors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask about and try to address caregiver's concerns. Explain reasons behind child's pre- or post-visit behaviors and that these should get better with time &amp; support.</li> <li>• Find ways to facilitate positive relationship between caregiver &amp; parent, including encouraging the exchange of child-focused information.</li> <li>• Help parent appreciate &amp; express thanks to caregiver.</li> </ul>
<b>CHILD-related</b>		
Child's behavior during visits	<b>Child not comfortable in visiting environment</b>	Consider activities, snacks, games that might make the child more comfortable; consider changing the visit location; allow the child to bring familiar items with them for the visit.
Child's behavior before or after visits	<b>Child's attachment to parent/ separation anxiety</b>	Increase the frequency and consistency of visits.
	<b>Unknown visit escort or difficult transport</b> to and from visits	Consider using a visit coach or visit host, someone the child feels comfortable and is familiar with OR change visit location to minimize child's stress.
Children state they do not want to visit	<b>Scheduling conflicts or awkward visits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust visit time.</li> <li>• Include activities children are interested in or involved with into the visits.</li> <li>• Consider involving 3<sup>rd</sup> party who child/ youth has a relationship with, or who can mediate such as family therapist, visit host, or visit coach.</li> </ul>

CHILD-related Basis of Request to Restrict Visits	Possible Explanation	Suggested Adjustment/ Response
Older children state they do not want to visit	<b>Unresolved anger towards the parent;</b> fear or discomfort re: parent's past behavior, and/ or young person's current living situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage parent to invite child/ youth to express feelings. Provide support to parent for problem-solving and reassuring child.</li> <li>• Suggest alternate or additional ways for youth to communicate with parent— letters, poems, songs; talking to 3<sup>rd</sup> party while parent is present.</li> <li>• Prepare parent for supportive, child-focused ways to respond.</li> <li>• Emphasize importance of child's/ youth's safety in current situation and create safe space for sharing information.</li> <li>• Consider referral for family therapy.</li> </ul>
Children state they do not want to visit	<b>Child's torn loyalties</b> between parent and foster parent	Emphasize to the parent and caregiver the importance of them getting along for the sake of the child; remove or wean caregiver out of visits—this should be parent-child time.

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