

# Preparing Children for Visits

1. Social workers need to address the child's knowledge gaps created by placement away from his/her family.
2. When explaining the reasons for placement and the expectations for behavioral changes, the social workers must demonstrate respect for a child's family, heritage, and history.
3. Social workers need to respect a child's defenses when seeking information about abuse/neglect and when preparing him/her for re-entry.
4. Social workers should be prepared with personal information about the child's past to help the child understand what has happened, sort out misinformation, and prepare for his/her future.
5. Attention should be given to enhancing verbal skills to aid the child in effectively communicating feelings, problems, and needs after return.
6. Attention must be given to varied and frequent sibling contact which is a necessary ingredient for maintaining the child's essential connections to his/her own history and family and which will ease the transition back into the home.
7. In assisting the family in fusing individual experiences into a single family history, the social worker should create a forum for addressing and acknowledging individual experiences, changes, and expectations brought about by placement.
8. Before a child is returned, the social worker must assist the child in understanding the safety plan and insure an opportunity for practicing the plan.
9. In assessing the safety of the home environment and appropriateness of reunifying a family, close attention needs to be given to the children's desires and concerns regarding reunification.

10. Key points to keep in mind when preparing children for visits are:
- Children get preoccupied with details and self-interest. Be sure to inform them about things like: where and when they will eat lunch; whom they will see; and whether there will be toys to play with or other things to do.
  - Use references to time that are meaningful to them: “You will be there on the day you don’t go to school,” or “You will be back in time to watch Sesame Street.”
  - Address any concerns the child may have about personal safety: “I will be with you, or just in the next room, during the whole visit,” or “You can leave anytime you wish, here is the number to call.”
  - Help children to identify how they might feel once they are together with family members: “Some kids are nervous when they meet with their parents, other kids are excited, some are sad. How about you?”
  - Elicit the child’s fantasy of what visiting with family will be like. Correct any misinformation: “Only Mom will come this time; Dad will be coming next time,” and respond to feelings.
  - Use play, drawings, puppet shows, and other forms of communicating with children.
  - Children can be helped by being given permission to demonstrate to family members the way in which they have changed and grown during placement. This can ease a sense of divided loyalty between parents and foster parents. “Let’s be sure to talk with Mom about how well you can read now.”