

VISIT COACHING QUICK GUIDE FOR CHILD WELFARE PROFESSIONALS

INFANTS AND TODDLERS (AGES 0-3)

SUMMARY

Visit coaching is fundamentally different from supervised visits because of the focus on the strengths of the family and the needs of the children. Visit coaching supports families to make each visit fun for their children and to meet the unique needs of each child. *(Beyer, 2008).*

PRINCIPLES OF VISIT COACHING

- **EMPOWERMENT:** Visit coaching builds on the family's strengths
- **EMPATHY:** Visit coaching supports families to meet the unique needs of their children
- **RESPONSIVENESS:** Visit coaching helps families manage the conflict between adult and child needs
- **ACTIVE PARENTING:** Visit coaching helps families learn how their child's behavior is shaped by the adult's words, actions and attitudes

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHILDREN 0-3

- **Plan for the visit:** Child's unique needs are the primary focus of the visit. Identify specific needs around attachment, development and sense of security, and build these into planning, scheduling, and also choosing the environment and activities for each visit. Support parent's focus on their child through involvement in visit planning.
- Emphasize the importance of back and forth interactions. A parent attunes to their child's attachment needs by back-and-forth responsiveness such as looking into their child's eyes, rocking, singing and talking.
- Increased frequency in visits to support attachment needs (supports maintaining and building attachment).
- An age-appropriate length of visit will help prevent overwhelming an infant or small child (2 hours or less).
- Arrange visit in a home-like environment if possible.
- A parent meets their child's need for play with music, books and toys that fit the child's age and elicit the parent's full attention.
- Provide opportunities for parents to co-regulate with the infant/child. A parent meets their child's need to learn how to self-calm by patiently doing something relaxing and naming feelings out loud before a child escalates.
- Help parents to understand that children communicate their feelings through behavior. Support them to be able to figure out the child's needs behind the behavior, and help them manage their own feelings about removal so that it does not disrupt their attention during family time.
- Empathize with parents about their sadness in missing developmental milestones and help them stay current with their child's development and needs.

TIPS FOR TRANSITION INTO VISITS:

- Prepare parent for visit as per visit coaching plan (Parent has taken charge of family time by identifying each child's needs and activities to meet those needs, and uses pre-visit time to put away their own issues so they do not get in the way of attuning to each child's unique needs).
- Work with Resource Family in providing a consistent routine for bringing infant/child to the visit. Resource Family and Parent have positive interactions in front of the infant /child.
- Have a regular and consistent greeting ritual (song, physical greeting activity like hugging or high five, etc.). Ideally this should be an activity that the child has known with the parent before removal if at all possible. If not, creating a new one and repeating it frequently to build familiarity will work as well.
- Whenever possible, have the visits at the same location. The child must be prepared for what to expect.
- Whenever possible, there should be the same toys available, whether they are at the visit site or brought by the parent / resource family.

TIPS FOR TRANSITIONING OUT OF VISITS:

- The last 20 to 30 minutes should be spent with transitioning out of the visit in mind (i.e., the parent starts by mentioning the visit will be ending). However, care should be taken to avoid over-preparing for the transition, as this can raise anxiety as well.
- If the last activities are very active, there should be some time given to calming down and focusing on physical and emotional regulation before ending the visit (i.e., move from playing with a ball to activities like drawing, stacking blocks, reading, soft singing and activities with slow rhythmic movements).
- The child needs to take away a simple idea about what they will do together in the next visit.
- A parent meets their child's need for support by attuning to their child and making the transition process easier for them to comprehend, as well as framing the next visit as something to look forward to.
- It is normal for children to protest the end of a visit, sometimes through behaviors that are upsetting and seem uncharacteristic to the parent. A parent meets their child's need for empathy by listening to and labeling their feelings ("It is making you sad to say goodbye.")
- Have a regular visit closing routine, similar to the beginning of the visit. This can be a song, a discussion about the plan for the next visit, integration of the resource family for a positive transition, etc.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT AGE-APPROPRIATE AND DEVELOPMENTALLY SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES:

- **ZERO TO THREE: Age-based tips for 0– 36 months**
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/your-child-s-development-age-based-tips-from-birth-to-36-months>
- **CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL: Developmental Milestones / Developmental Tracker (0-60 months)**
<https://www.cdc.gov/features/developmental-milestones-matter/index.html>
- **FIRST FIVE CALIFORNIA: Parent Resources and Activity Center**
<http://www.first5california.com/activity-center.aspx?id=16>

TIPS AND ACTIVITIES WITH BABIES/TODDLERS:

FEEDING / SNACKS

- Newborns and infants need back and forth communication and physical closeness of feeding at every visit. Parents are encouraged to **talk** or **sing** to the baby while feeding, especially in a soft and calm voice.
- With older infants, feeding continues to promote attachment. Parents can also engage infant in **self-feeding**. **Talking** is important in these interactions as well: Parents can **teach** child about the food, support the use of their hands/fingers, and tell stories, sing, etc.
- For 1–3 year olds, food can be used to help children **learn** about eating by exploring different tastes, smells and textures. A child may feel safest when having the same snack on visits. Parents should **talk** about any new food, **explain** it, **model** tasting it, and support the child in trying it as well.
- Creating a **regular ritual** for snack time is very helpful. A parent and child can set a table or space for the snack, a child can be given some task in the activity (i.e., child can help pass out crackers, child can have a turn at feeding the parent, etc.).
- It is helpful to coordinate information between the parent and the resource family so that snack and meal time are fairly consistent. **Consistency** for babies and toddlers supports development and a sense of security.

PLAY ACTIVITIES

Infants – the key to play for infants is back and forth interaction with a parent. Talking, singing, expressing positive feelings, use rhyming, etc.

- ⇒ Rocking, rhythmic movements, gentle dancing.
- ⇒ Rattles or other noise makers. Encourage baby to reach or use hands/arms to hold and shake the toy.
- ⇒ Play peek-a-boo.
- ⇒ Tummy time: Place baby on tummy with toys nearby. Encourage baby to hold head up.
- ⇒ Encourage self-soothing by rocking, singing and reassuring baby.
- ⇒ Use lap time for looking at pictures in books and/or holding and playing with various toys.

9 months to 2 years – Interaction remains key, but physically active play is more important.

- ⇒ Point and name objects.
- ⇒ Pat-a-cake, finger plays, songs.
- ⇒ Point at pictures in books and name and/or mimic the sounds for the illustrated subjects.
- ⇒ Naming feelings in play, in stories, etc.
- ⇒ Encourage pretend play
- ⇒ Support development of physical skills; walking, balance, rolling a ball or toy back and forth, dancing, etc.
- ⇒ Drawing: Support to hold a crayon and scribble freely.
- ⇒ Self soothing: taking deep breaths (practicing belly breaths), blowing bubbles, rocking baby dolls, etc.

2 to 3 years – Continued support for physical skills, and focus on language and social skills. Continue all of the above and some activities below.

- ⇒ Games with turn-taking, rules and social interaction.
- ⇒ Problem solving activities like building a block tower or bridge, and pretend play with cars, people, animals, etc.
- ⇒ Reading, singing, rhythmic movement/dance including clapping, stamping, use of instruments.
- ⇒ Art: pens, pencils, finger paint/clay; beginning use of scissors, cutting and ripping, and gluing/pasting.

TRAUMA, CHILD DEVELOPMENT, AND VISITS

- Children have unique and developmental and separation related needs in visits that a parent must meet.
- Each child responds to separation uniquely. The parent has an essential role in helping their child adjust to the loss of everything familiar.
- The beginning and end of visits is especially hard on children 0-3 because they cannot ask why they are visiting and why they are being separated again. If unmet, these separation-related needs slow down typical development.
- The parent's special support for each child adjusting to separation makes a difference, especially meeting the child's needs for comfort and feeling a sense of belonging to their family. What matters most is that each child "**feels felt**" by the attunement of their parents to the child's internal world.
- Both parents and caregivers require guidance to appreciate and meet children's separation-related needs because of their feelings about removal—this is often amplified for kinship caregivers when there is multigenerational trauma.
- Children learn to manage their emotions by their parent attuning to their feelings. This is especially important because in the compressed world of parenting in visits, child behaviors can take center stage. **As coaches, we support parents in attuning to the feelings and needs behind their child's behaviors.**