

## FAMILY TIME PROCEDURE

SEPTEMBER 21

(Review September 2022)

### 1. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The following procedures should be read in conjunction with the [Family Time Policy](#). The procedures provide additional guidance to staff requesting, managing, and reviewing Family Time between children and their parents/carers.

### 2. GUIDANCE FOR REFERRALS FOR FAMILY TIME (IN HOUSE AND COMMISSIONED SERVICES)

Referrals must only be made with the approval of a Team Manager and when it has not been possible to facilitate Family Time with support from the family member(s), friend or foster carer. Priorities for the team are:

- Interim Care Orders;
- Long term Looked After children; up to a maximum of six times per year;
- Children/Young People whose parents (carers) may have restrictions placed upon them because of significant risk/harm that may present to a child. (These restrictions may be by virtue of an alternative court order or directions).

Referrals for Family Time will be discussed between the Social Worker and Team Manager prior to the Social worker making a referral to the Family Time Coordinator. The referral should include an assessment and evaluation that supports the application for the level, type, frequency, and structure of the Family Time. The referral must also include details of known risks in relation to both the adults and children involved and identify actions that have /or need to be taken to reduce these risks.

Consideration should also be given to whether a proportion of the Family Time could be conducted virtually online. This may be an option in cases where: there is a large amount of travelling required; there is a high amount of Family Time required (e.g. 5 days per week); the wider family wish to be involved in Family Time; the child misses pets at home, or the parent struggles to attend Family Time for one reason or another. Virtual Family Time should be facilitated through Microsoft Teams where possible, if this is not possible appropriate guidance should be provided to ensure the virtual methods used are safe and secure.

Referrals should then be sent to the Family Time inbox by the Social Worker with agreement for the level, method of Family Time and frequency of the request having been made by the Team Manager. All amendments that increase volume and/or frequency must also be approved in this way.

Once the referral has been processed an email to the case holder will be sent notifying of next steps or further information. The Family Time Coordinator may require up to 5 working days to process the request.

Referrals will include:

- Team Manager Agreement
- Date of review
- Whether a meeting with the family has taken place to ascertain whether there are any suitable family members who would be available to facilitate contact
- Observation requirements

- The potential / likelihood for rehabilitation – including anticipated date at which rehabilitation will be achieved
- What support is required to improve the quality of the parent/child relationships;
- Any specifics details in relation to child / parent such as assessments, special needs, drug/alcohol issues;
- Whether carers have been approached to facilitate / supervise contact/transport of children to and from contact.
- Transport arrangements.

### 2.1 FREQUENCY

The frequency of Family Time will not exceed three sessions per week for any one child when this is supervised by a family support worker and this will be provided for a maximum duration of twelve weeks. This will also apply for cases in proceedings. Any additional Family Time would need to be covered by the social worker, foster carer, or family/friend.

**In all cases, the allocated Social Worker will undertake 10% of the total amount of Family Time and details of this must be included on the referral form.**

If the specific needs of a child are such that observation of the family time by the allocated social worker is required more often, this will be agreed by the case-holding Team Manager and the Coordinator.

The Social worker will notify the Family Time Coordinator of the dates they intend to observe contact in advance. Any changes to these arrangements require at least 7 days notice if additional supervision is required from the team.

The Team Coordinator and commissioned Family Time Coordinator will be advised of any proposed change to volume, method, or frequency of sessions via email form forwarded to the Coordinators by the Team Manager.

All changes of contact details for children, parents or case holder should be emailed to the Coordinators in advance.

**Note:** Failure to do so will result in Family Time costs being charged against individual team budgets.

### 2.2 COURT PROCEEDINGS

The Coordinators for in-house and commissioned Services to be advised of any court dates in advance.

Where a case is being heard in court at the Final Hearing stage, the Social Worker will liaise closely with the Coordinators regarding changes to contact arrangements / newly identified risks. A revised agreement will be produced to reflect all changes.

In cases where rehabilitation is possible, parenting advice, support and guidance may be offered to parents within sessions at the Social Worker's request. This will be offered to the parent by the Supervisor for a time limited period with written feedback given to the parent in relation to strengths and areas of

improvement. It is very important that the social worker indicates at the point of referral whether a plan for rehabilitation home is a realistic possibility. This will enable the Family Time Team to contact the Social Worker to discuss the nature of any additional support required.

### 2.3 WRITTEN AGREEMENT

Prior to the commencement of Family Time, a planning meeting will take place to formulate a written agreement with those Adults attending Family Time.

The written agreement will outline dates, times, methods/venues, expectations of family members attending family time, etc. This agreement will clearly outline the consequences of failed or negative Family Times and should be attached as an appendix to any court Care Plan.

Once completed and signed by the parent(s), the written agreement will be forwarded to the social worker for their records and reference purposes and a copy is given to parents.

- a. When a Family Time session is missed by a parent or other relative, the social worker will be informed as soon as possible, (providers are expected to report missed sessions on a daily basis to both the Social Worker and the Coordinators). The social worker will then discuss the reasons for the missed contact with the family, discuss the possibility of virtual Family Time as an alternative to cancelling in future, and feedback to the coordinators.
- b. In the event of: two missed sessions without satisfactory explanation; sessions being cut short for reasons of parental lateness or leaving before the end of the scheduled session; or a pattern of missed sessions, Family Time will be held in abeyance. The Coordinators will notify the case holder of all dates of non-attendance. The Social Worker will then communicate to the family and advise relevant professionals including legal Family Time arrangements will be suspended until an urgent review meeting takes place to discuss their reasons for not attending, as their actions are detrimental to their child's needs.
- c. An urgent meeting will be held with adults involved to consider whether the level and duration of Family Time is appropriate and, in the child's best interests. Coordinators will be notified that the meeting has taken place and a copy of the amended written agreement forwarded. Coordinators will require 48 hours to reinstate the sessions.
- d. The parent(s) will be aware of this procedure through the initial letter from their Social Worker and the written agreement, which will clearly outline the agreed frequency of sessions, time, venue etc and will be reminded of it at the time.
- f. If it is considered to be in the child's interests it may be proposed that Family Time will be reduced to a level that the parent can sustain in line with the terms of the written agreement, or that Family Time may be conducted online, the parents should be informed of this by the Social Worker and allowed to make representations, if necessary to a court; we need to ensure our recommendations and rationale are shared with parents.

g. Parental lateness, (15 minutes or more, without communication), will be reported and the child will be returned to the carer. Parents may be asked to telephone to confirm that they will attend, particularly for new babies. This prevents unnecessary disruption to the child.

h. Some children, young people and their parents may wish to have Family Time using social media. This may be through telephone, text, Face Time, and other social media platforms. Any arrangements will be agreed and included in the written agreement document. Any arrangements made will be dependent on the age and individual circumstances of the child/young person.

See [Family Time – Parent/Carer Agreement](#)

### 2.4 TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS

Social Workers will be expected to include the arrangements for transport in the Referral Form. There is an expectation that carers will transport all children in their care to their Family Time sessions and remain with the child until the parents arrive, thus ensuring that the child is not left alone with a supervisor.

In exceptional circumstances, for example, the carer does not drive, alternative arrangements will be arranged to transport the child to and from their carers to have Family Time with their parents/birth family.

Parents/ Carers should be asked to consider Virtual Family Time as an alternative on any occasion when Family Time may otherwise be cancelled. For example: if a family member has no transport available, or cannot afford transport; if a family member is not well enough to travel, but could communicate remotely.

Supervisors will not transport families to and from Family Time sessions. It is the family's responsibility to make their way and fund their own transport to and from Family Time. Funding will be offered at the discretion of the social worker and the team manager, where it is evident that the family is experiencing financial hardship.

### 2.5 CHANGES TO FAMILY TIME ARRANGEMENTS

It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to inform the Family Time coordinator of any changes in advance. **(Minimum 7 days' notice for holidays and where possible 24 hours' notice for children who are sick).**

Changes to Family Time sessions may sometimes be necessary dependent upon the circumstances and the impact on the child. Any changes to Family Time sessions i.e. the day, time, method, and venue must be discussed by the social worker with the family/carers.

In instances where a child who is subject to Family Time arrangements is being taken on holiday by their carer, is unwell or where the parent or child has appointments and is not able to attend Family Time etc., it is the responsibility of the Social Worker to inform the Family time coordinator in advance **(Minimum 7 days' notice for holidays and where possible 24 hours' notice for children who are sick).**

In the event where Family Time must be changed outside of the court ordered arrangements, legal advice is to be sought, for example, ongoing reduction because of the negative impact of Family Time on the child.

Those having Family Time should be advised by the Social Worker of proposed changes. It is the Social Worker's responsibility to advise all parties involved about the details of the Family Time arrangements.

### 2.6 RISK ASSESSMENTS

It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to complete the risk assessment as part of the referral document.

Where the risk is deemed high the social worker must attend the Family Time Agreement Meeting prior to Family Time commencing.

Risk Assessments will be reviewed by the social worker and Family Time Coordinators at the Family Time review meetings and Care Planning meetings. Where risk levels change, this should be recorded and shared with all parties.

### 3. RECORDING

Reports are completed at every supervised family session by the supervisor. It is the responsibility of the social worker and or the Family Support Worker to ensure that all reports are read and uploaded onto the child's case file.

For cases currently in proceedings it is the social workers responsibility to ensure that records of Family Time are collated and shared with Legal Services.

The Coordinators for Family Time will ensure that the Written Agreements for all cases are uploaded onto the child's case file. (See [Family Time – Parent/Carer Agreement](#))

### 4. CONCERNS

Any concerns arising during Family Time will be brought immediately to the attention of the Coordinators and allocated social worker.

### 5. REVIEWS & MONITORING

In respect of the overall monitoring and assessment of the case, the Social Worker/IRO will seek the views of the child/ren involved in Family Time. This information will form part of the Family Time reviewing process whether as part of a CLA Review or a three-monthly review of Family Time sessions.

It will be an expectation that the social worker will obtain feedback from the child/young person and their parent/carer and incorporate into the review.

On occasions this may require the completion of a questionnaire. This will be used to inform future service delivery and quality of provision.

All social worker's, Team Managers, Heads of Service and Family Time services should demonstrate their commitment to undertaking reviews of Family Time arrangements on a regular basis.

### 6. FINANCE

Financial support to facilitate Family Time will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. It is the expectation that the parent/carer provides all necessary provision to support the sessions.

Any discretionary payments made will be in accordance with the Council's financial policy and arrangements.