

## TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

### VISITS WITH PARENTS

Parent and child visits are important. They can help a child better understand the parent's life and may provide the child the opportunity to experience the parent's love. Here are tips to help you keep visits safe and healthy. If the visits are ordered by the court, make sure you follow the order. If they are required by a state agency, talk to the worker about the level of supervision required and how you will manage any problems.

#### Preparing for a visit:

- Talk with the child about what to expect. You do not need to say anything bad about the parent, but you can discuss the possibility that the visit may not go as hoped.
- Have a plan to do something fun with the child just in case the parent does not come.
- Set rules for visits ahead of time. The child or parent may suggest rules, but you set rules for the health and safety of your household and children in your guardianship.
- Decide what level of supervision is needed for the safety of the child (see below)

#### Visit Supervision:

- Be sure you are there for the beginning and end of visits. Help them get a good start and end with good-byes and reassurance.
- For some children's safety, you need to be there at all times.
- You may decide it is safe enough for unsupervised visits. Start by allowing more privacy for short activities, like playing a game or taking a walk. Know where the parent and child are going and when they will return.
- You may not be comfortable having the visits at your home. Some people meet at a restaurant or a library.
- You may not be comfortable supervising the visits especially if you are expected to provide documentation for a court hearing. There are agencies that provide visit supervision, usually for a fee.

#### Visiting a parent in jail or a drug treatment center:

Talk to the child about where a parent is living and why. Tell the child what to expect, how the parent might look, and what the setting will look like. Encourage the child to talk about any feelings or fears before this visit.

#### Behavioral Problems:

Visits with parents make many children act differently than normal. A child may become clingy, excited, shy, angry, or sad. They may even hit others. Listen to the child talk about the visit and the behavior that followed. Help the child deal with stress in healthy ways like writing down feelings or talking about them, exercising, being with friends, or alone in their room. Focus on the child's strengths and encourage healthy ways of comforting, like a blanket or stuffed animal.

#### Remember:

The best advice may be to do more listening and less talking. Talk about the happy feelings when they see the parent and agree that some things are hard. You are helping the child and yourself deal with a long process of working on their relationship with their parent. It may be difficult to encourage the visits when you are struggling with your own feelings. Be sure to find support for yourself, so you can be patient with your family.

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