

# WHY IS FAMILY TIME IMPORTANT?

A Resource for Parents written by Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter Peer Parent Expert

## Why is Family Time Important?

Family time is more than just seeing your children – it's about healing and belonging.

Spending time together **helps children:**

- know who their family is and gives them a sense of belonging
- stay connected to their culture and community
- build and maintain lifelong relationships with those who love them
- feel reassured, loved and safe when they see their parents are still there for them.

**For parents,** family time is your opportunity to:

- heal together through being present and consistent in your children's lives
- add value to your children's lives by being a part of their learning, growth and identity
- support your children with what they are going through, listening and helping them make sense of their experiences
- keep your parenting role, even though you can't be there with them all the time
- practise and grow your parenting skills and connection with your children
- Show the courts that you can care for your kids.

When you are working towards having children return home (restoration), **family time is especially powerful**. It is one of the most important tools you have to rebuild trust, nurture your bond, and prepare for your assessment for your children to return to you.

Even if restoration is not the current plan, **family time still matters**. It keeps the door open for children to know their parents, stay loved and connected, and carry that bond into their future.

**“At first, family time was unbearable. I counted the minutes until it started, and then counted the minutes until I had to say goodbye again. My child was angry, clingy, and confused and so was I. Some visits felt messy and heavy, and I went home questioning everything. But we kept showing up. Little by little, family time became the place where trust rebuilt. Where my child saw I didn’t disappear. Where we remembered how to be together. That time even when it hurt, is what made her coming home possible.”**

## **How often will I get to see my kids?**

It will be different for every family. The amount of family time you have will depend on your circumstances, your child’s needs and the conversations you have with your caseworker.

- In most cases, parents will spend time with their children within the first week of them entering care. Early on, family time may happen two to three times a week for a couple of hours.
- You should let your caseworker know which times work best for you
- If distance or something else makes it difficult for you to get to family time, ask your caseworker for assistance to get to family time
- Video calls can be a good way to check in with your children in between family time, ask about adding these as a part of family time
- If the court decides restoration is possible, family time usually increases so children and parents can spend longer, more natural time together to get ready to return home

- If the court decides restoration isn't possible, it's important to keep having as much family time as possible, after final orders family time sometimes changes to once a month, talk to your solicitor early about your options to prevent this.
- Talk to your caseworker and solicitor about this when the care plans are being written and before the Children's Court makes a final order.
- Talk with your solicitor about a section 86 for more family time if final orders have been made.

## When does family time happen?

- Family time is usually scheduled during weekdays, but it can sometimes be on weekends or after hours.
- You, your caseworker and your children's carer will make a plan around times that are suitable for your children's schedule.
- If you feel the plan needs adjusting, for example if you're noticing something does not suit your children, talk to your caseworker and request changes in writing.
- If you're not sure what to write, ask someone to help you.
- Extra family time can happen on or near important days for example Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas Day, Easter, birthdays, cultural days, NAIDOC week etc.
- It's important you let your caseworker know what's important to your family and these should be written into your family time schedule.

## Where will I have time with my children?

Family time should happen in a place that supports you and your children to connect and feel comfortable.

At first, family time usually happens in a room at a DCJ office. These rooms usually have toys, books, lounges and change tables. They are not the ideal location, but the idea is to move on as soon as possible.

Ask your caseworker when you will move to a natural, child- focused environment.

The locations should be part of the plan you make with your caseworker, it's important you're a part of these decisions. You know what works for you and your children.

The most important thing is that family time gives you and your children the best chance to connect and enjoy each other.

Some examples of family time locations include parks, libraries, local cultural areas swimming pools and your child's sporting activity.

## Who else comes during family time?

This time is important for you and your child, but you may like to include other people in the family in some of your family time, e.g. other family.

Talk with your caseworker if there are other people you would like to include.

At first, your family time will be supported by a paid worker, we call this supervision.

The worker will bring your children to family time and support the family time so that you and your children can focus on being together.

Their role is to help things run smoothly and make sure everyone feels safe and comfortable. Workers can also give encouragement and guidance as you continue to show and build your parenting skills. You can ask them for support if you need.

The worker might be a family time worker, a caseworker, a casework support worker, or a contact worker from another organisation.

In some cases, a carer or another family member may also support family time.

Who attends family time depends on your family's situation. Your caseworker will talk with you, your children, and your family about the best way for family time to happen, including the types of supports or supervision.

When you feel like supervision is no longer needed, talk with your caseworker and ask what they need to see from you to make this possible.

Having someone supervise your family time can be helpful to show the court your connection with your child and parenting skills.

Whoever is supervising your family time will be recording what happens from their perspective. We have attached a copy of a blank family time report so you can understand what is being looked at.

## What is the difference between a caseworker and family time worker?

### Caseworker

Your children's caseworker is your main contact person at DCJ. They work with you

to:

- arrange family time – work with you to decide the time and location
- create a Family Action Plan for change (how you and DCJ will work together to make the changes needed for DCJ to be satisfied your children can go home)
- create an OOHC Case Plan (how your children will be supported while they are in OOHC)
- Caseworkers and their managers are responsible for making many of the decisions about your children, such as family time arrangements and where your children live.
- Your caseworker can supervise family time

You, your children, and your family should be included in these decisions. If you are worried about family time or feel you are excluded from creating these plans, talk to your caseworker or their manager. Make sure you do this in writing through email and in person at a meeting. Ask someone for help with writing if needed.

## Family time worker

A family time worker's role is to support family time. They:

- bring children to and from the family time
- are present during the visit to support your time together
- write a record of the visit, which is shared with the caseworker. Ask your caseworker for a copy of each family time report so you can see what is being written
- can advocate for you to have more family time.

Family time workers can't make decisions about your children's care; their focus is

on supporting you and your children during family time.

If you're unhappy with your family time worker or you feel they are not appropriate for your family, email your caseworker and let them know why you feel like this, try and use specific examples around how you and your children are not being supported.

## Can I receive financial support for family time?

Family time can include financial support to help you and your children enjoy

meaningful activities together. This financial support will be part of your children's financial plan.

It's important to ask your caseworker about what financial support is available. These funds can sometimes cover part or all of the cost of activities your children enjoy, such as:

- going to the park, play centre, or movies
- celebrating birthdays with a special day out
- cultural or community events

Talk with your caseworker about planning for how best to use family time financial

support. The goal is to make visits more natural, enjoyable, and supportive of your children's connection with you, your family, and your culture.

## How can I support my children's learning during family time?

Research suggests education outcomes for children in OOHC are poor. Without a parent there to advocate for their education needs school work can be a struggle. You can keep supporting them by:

- Ask about school – what they're learning, which subjects they enjoy, how they're going with friends
- Celebrate achievements – praise their efforts on homework, assignments, or sports etc.
- Help with learning activities – read books together, practise spelling or times tables
- Share your knowledge and skills – teach them a recipe, a cultural story etc
- Show consistency – remind them you'll keep asking about school and cheering them on each time you see them

If you're concerned about their education talk with your caseworker about how you can work together to get on top of it.

## What if I can't make a family time visit?

Family time is important for your children, but we understand that sometimes things come up, you may be unwell, or unexpected events may make it difficult to attend occasionally. If this happens, the most important thing is to [let someone know as soon as you can](#).

- If you are sick on the day of your visit: call the main CSC phone number to let them know
- If you know in advance you can't attend: talk with your caseworker ASAP. They can look at changing the time or day where possible
- If you are running late: call the office so your children aren't left waiting and wondering
- If you miss a visit without letting anyone know, the time usually can't be made up.

Your caseworker will check in with you afterwards to see what happened and how you can be supported to attend in future.

## What if my children can't make a family time visit?

Sometimes children may not be able to come to family time, for example, if they are sick or already have something important planned. When this happens, the visit may need to be changed or postponed.

Your caseworker should talk with you about the reason and try to make a new time where possible. If another visit can't be arranged, it's important that you are kept informed and, where possible, given another way to connect, like a phone or Video call, so your children still know you are thinking of them.

Your family time should never be cancelled because of lack of family time workers. If this happens make a complaint

Email: [complaints.unit@dcj.nsw.gov.au](mailto:complaints.unit@dcj.nsw.gov.au)

Phone: 1800 000 164

## What is being written about me?

Family time workers take notes during visits so **there is a record of what happened.**

These notes are written up afterwards and sent to your caseworker.

Notes include:

- what activities you and your children did together
- how you and your children interacted (for example, playing, talking, showing affection)
- how your children responded during the visit (for example, happy, tired, etc..)
- what went well in the visit
- challenges or areas where extra support might help you or your children



- practical details (time, location, who attended)
- what support they offered
- [The 6 Dimensions of family time examples the worker witnesses](#). So, you know what the caseworker is looking for we have attached them on our home page.

#### [What happens with the notes:](#)

- a written family time record is created after each visit
- record is sent to your caseworker
- Always ask for a copy of the record so you can understand how your family time looks to other people and reflect on strengths and weaknesses
- if your case goes to court, these records are shared with lawyers and court

[It can feel intimidating when notes are taken in front of you](#), but these can be a supportive document that can become part of your evidence for restoration.

[Its](#) a very good idea to also write your own notes. This helps you:

- reflect on how the visit went for you and your children
- notice what went well and what you want to keep building on
- show your progress and strengths in your own words
- add your voice to the record, so it's not only the worker's perspective

You should send your records to your caseworker ([by email](#)) so they can

be kept on your file alongside the worker's record. This means, your reflections and experiences are part of the official record of family time.

**“Before I understood the six dimensions of family time, the reports felt confusing and cruel. I’d read things like ‘*limited insight*’ or ‘*capacity not yet demonstrated*’ and think they were saying I didn’t love my child when that wasn’t true at all.**

**Learning the six dimensions helped me see what the system was actually measuring: not my love, but my consistency, my responsiveness, my boundaries, and how my child was coping.”**

**“Once I understood that, I could finally read family time reports without collapsing.**

**I knew what they were looking for, where I was doing well, and what I needed to show next. It didn’t make the process fair – but it made it readable, and that gave me back some power. It was very important I got copies of all reports so I could understand what was needed for restoration.”**

For more information or to find out more about our services visit <https://finclusionh.org>

#### **Contact Information:**

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