

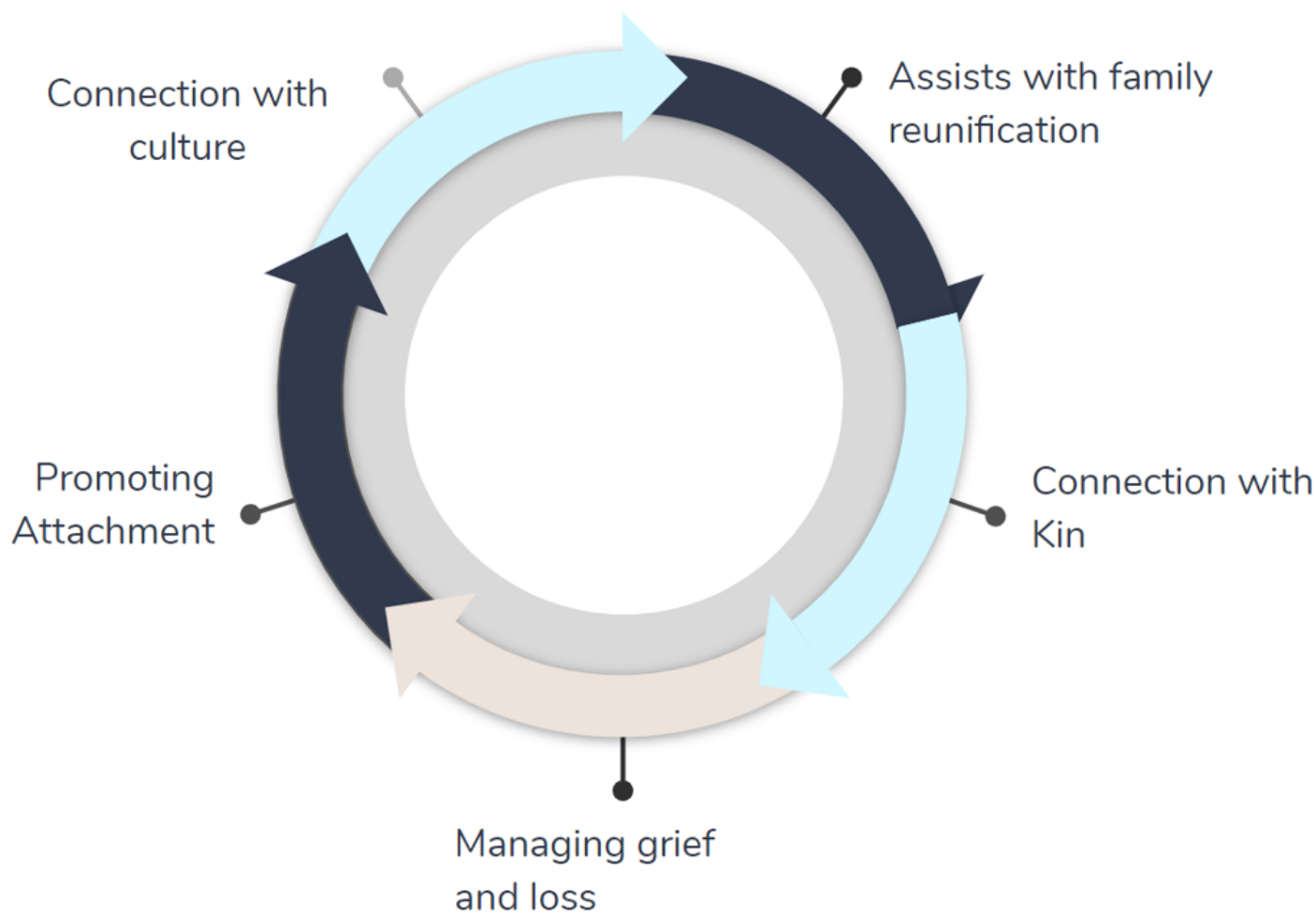


PLANNING FOR FAMILY VISITS

Continuum Consulting Australia PTY. LTD.

When a child cannot live with their biological parents, they continue to belong to them; this isn't about ownership, rather the child being intrinsically connected to their birth family. Whether in out of home care during an interim proceeding, or in long term care having regularly scheduled visits, family visits are essential to maintaining children's sense of connectedness and identity with their biological family.

THE PURPOSE OF FAMILY VISITS

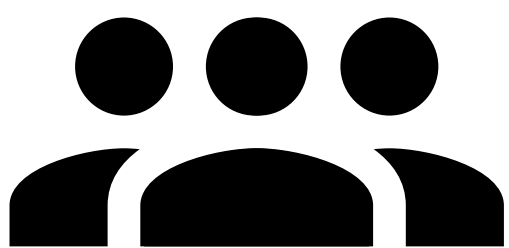


- Promoting the child's rights to maintain connection to people who are significant in their lives.
- The purposes of family visits can be to assist with family reunification, connection with kin, managing grief and loss, promoting attachment and connection with culture, or a combination of these.
- The purpose of family visits will change depending on the emotional and developmental needs of the child.

TYPES OF FAMILY VISITS

Not all family visits are face-to-face. We can use creative approaches that are more suited to developmental, emotional and geographical needs.

Face to face



Phone calls



Video calls



SMS



Emails



THINK ABOUT...

Locations

The location of the family visit can have a big impact on the success of the visit. Things to consider when planning a visit: does the environment support interaction; is it over- or under-stimulating; does the child feel safe there; are there appropriate amenities available? For example, accessibility, nappy changing facilities, toilets.

Activities

Ideal activities are ones that allow family members and children to engage and that are regulatory for the child. For example, swinging, rocking or jumping. Being pushed on a swing allows a child to feel the family members presence without expectations of eye contact or conversation, while regulating the child.

CONSIDERATIONS

Safety: Physical and Emotional

When planning for family visits, the child's emotional and physical safety is a priority. Safety is determined through:

- Listening to the child.
- Seeking alternative views and opinions.
- Observation of the child's behaviour and interactions.
- Understanding the impacts of trauma.
- Understanding relevant history of the child.

Best Interests of the Child

Family visits should be focused on meeting the needs of the child. This will impact decisions around:

- Who is involved in family visit
- The purpose of the visit
- The type of family visits (phone calls, face to face)
- Supervised or unsupervised
- Frequency and duration of visits
- The venue and activities

Collaboration in Planning and Decision Making

Research suggests that family visits are more likely to work if the family is actively involved in planning and decision making. The aspects to consider within this are:

Who?

- Children
- Family
- Carers
- Court orders
- Caseworkers
- Psychologist & counsellors

Why?

- Adherence to plans
- Feelings of value
- Relationship building
- Conflict resolution

Reviewing Plans Regularly

Many aspects will change over time, this will include:

- Age
- Developmental stage
- Incidents
- Life events
- Family circumstances
- Placement changes

Documentation

What to document?

- Date
- Time
- Location
- Who can attend
- Plan for confirmation
- Behavioural agreement

Why keep documentation?

- Life Story work
- Evidence for court
- Reduces confusion
- Assists with managing conflicts
- Informs decision making

PREPARING THE CHILD AND THE FAMILY

- Remain child focused.
- Have photos displayed around the house.
- Talk positively about family members.
- Include the child and family in the making of plans.
- Talk about the visit, who will be attending, where it is going to be, how long they will be there and what activities may happen.
- Ask scaling questions about feelings.
- Talk about previous family visits.
- Confirm with the family the day prior to the scheduled visit.
- Confirm if there are any rules or boundaries in place for family time.
- Create a repair ritual for after a visit.

PREPARING YOURSELF

- Remain child focused.
- Manage and reflect on your emotions.
- Leave enough time to arrive on time.
- Be attuned with the child.
- Debrief afterwards if required.



ATTUNEMENT

Attunement is how we read and respond to the communicated needs of others. Children are attuned to their caregivers and will therefore respond to their caregivers emotional state. When we are calm and strong, children are reassured and will also feel calmer and stronger.

Being aware of attunement, and our own regulation and feelings, when preparing for and straight after family visits, we can better support children to regulate leading up to, during, and after family visits.