

### **Timeliness at facilitated family visits**

I want you to sit back, relax and focus on thinking about something, can be someone or something, that is important to you, that has value to you and that gives you enjoyment. Now imagine that someone you perceive as being bigger than you, or having more power than you, comes along and grabs up your special someone or something, and tells you when and how you can have access to it! Think about the emotions and physical response your body is feeling.

The point of the above exercise is to demonstrate the feelings and responses that birth family and children have around their experience of family visits. This can be a highly anxious time for both sides for several reasons. For this purpose, that is why planning for family visits is of the utmost importance and keeping to those plans, where possible, provides, continuity, consistency and provides a sense of control to adults and children who are vulnerable and exposed to a system where the balance of power is sometimes out of kilter.

When a family visit time is set, carers often spend time preparing the children for the visit. It may have been sometime since the children have last seen their parents, this is an event that produces anxiety, escalation of emotions or behaviour regulation issues for a carer. When a facilitated contact worker is late, this adds further to a child's level of anxiety. The questions they may be thinking are: does that mean less time with mum and dad; does that mean mum/dad will be late; are mum/dad going to be upset because I am late, just to provide a few examples.

For the parents, late arrival at visits, has the potential to escalate behaviour, as the parents are already being told when they can see their children and how and late arrivals exacerbates this. The purpose of a family visit is for the family to spend quality time together building relationships, if the time starts late, there are emotions associated with that can impact the quality of that time.

From an organisational perspective, the domino effect of being late to family visits, affects children, families, carers, caseworkers and managers. It is extremely important that once you are aware of the allocated contact time that you check that you have the resources required, such as the car and correct car seat restraints, that they are fitted correctly. That you check your travel via google maps or similar to ascertain the amount of travel time required to collect cars, children and reach venues. There are times when unavoidable issues occur, but should this happen, advising someone early is the key so all the relevant parties can be made aware and prepared in advance.

Being respectful and allowing people dignity in difficult situations is the cornerstone of building relationships with children and the people in their circle of care.