

# Making the Most of Visits with your Child

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► **Bring Toys and Games.** If you are seeing your child in an agency, the room may not be like a home environment. Some parents bring games, coloring books, activity books, crayons or other quiet toys for children. Play some soft music and bring books to read to your child. You can even bring your own visiting blanket so you and your children can sit down on the floor with Legos and blocks.

► **Make Visits a Time to Bond.** During the visit, you want to interact. It's not like visiting at a hospital- get involved with your child, talking, holding and hugging your child. It's a time to strengthen the bond you have with your child. Don't use your visits to complain about the situation or dump your feelings on your child. That takes quality time away from your child.

► **Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep.** One of the hardest moments is when children ask, "When am I coming home/to live with you?" or "When are you coming home?" Be as truthful and honest as you can be, while keeping in mind the child's age. Tell your children, "I wish I could take you home right now, but I can't. I'm working on it, and I'll take you home as soon as possible." Don't make promises that you can't keep. If you say, "You'll be home next week," and it doesn't happen, your child won't know who to trust, or what is true and what is false.

► **Your Child May Act Out Emotionally.** It's normal for a child to feel angry or scared about being in foster care, being away from a parent or seeing you in prison, and to act up as a result. When parents hear that a child is acting up, they start thinking, "Why is this happening? Is someone hurting my child?"

They feel powerless. Let your children know that you love them and care about them even when you're not together. You also want to let your child know that there's nothing they can do to get home faster. Some children act out because they believe that if they act bad, the system will say, "This child is too bad, we better send the child home to their parent."

► **Build a Relationship with the Caregiver(s).** Follow the caregiver's rules as much as possible. Don't say negative things about the foster parent or caregiver. Remember, they care about your child too! Ask questions about your child's interests, health and any concerns you may have. Thank the caregiver for all they are doing for your child.

► **Help Your Children Say Goodbye.** Parents and their children don't want visits to end. Children have a hard time because they don't understand what's happening. Don't prolong the visit. Help your children say goodbye and let them know you'll see them soon. When it's almost time to leave, help your child get ready to go. Say, "It's time for us to go now. Please take care and remember I love you. I'll see you soon." Say goodbye and leave your child with the caregiver.

► **Stay the Course & Continue to Visit.** Sometimes parents say, "It's just too hard to visit my children while I am in treatment/ jail/under supervision." But the child welfare agency is not going to say, "Take all the time you need, and your child will be there for you when you are ready." You need to prove to the agency that you care about your child. You and your child will feel better if you spend more time together. Do your best to bond with your child, and the visits will get easier. Consistency is key!