



Best Practices for Family Time in Colorado: A Data-Informed Approach to Drive Outcomes

Separation of families during a child welfare case can cause emotional, developmental, and physical [trauma](#). During times of separation, it is crucial that families receive regular and quality time together, including between parent(s), children/youth in placement, and siblings.



What is Family Time?

Family time refers to the opportunity for families to interact together in meaningful ways when children/youth have been removed from the home during a dependency and neglect case. It is also known as “parenting time” or visitation.” Family time involves parent to child/youth interactions, sibling interactions, and whole family interactions to promote family strengthening and cultural connections. ([Reference: 2509-1-7.000.2](#))

A New Era of Family Time in Colorado

In 2023, [House Bill 1027](#) (Parent and Child Family Time) passed. This legislation brought sweeping changes to how family time is implemented in Colorado, with the goal of moving toward a community-based model that promotes home-like environments and use of kin for supervision.

“Family time is the most important thing in a child welfare case.”

– County Human Services Staff

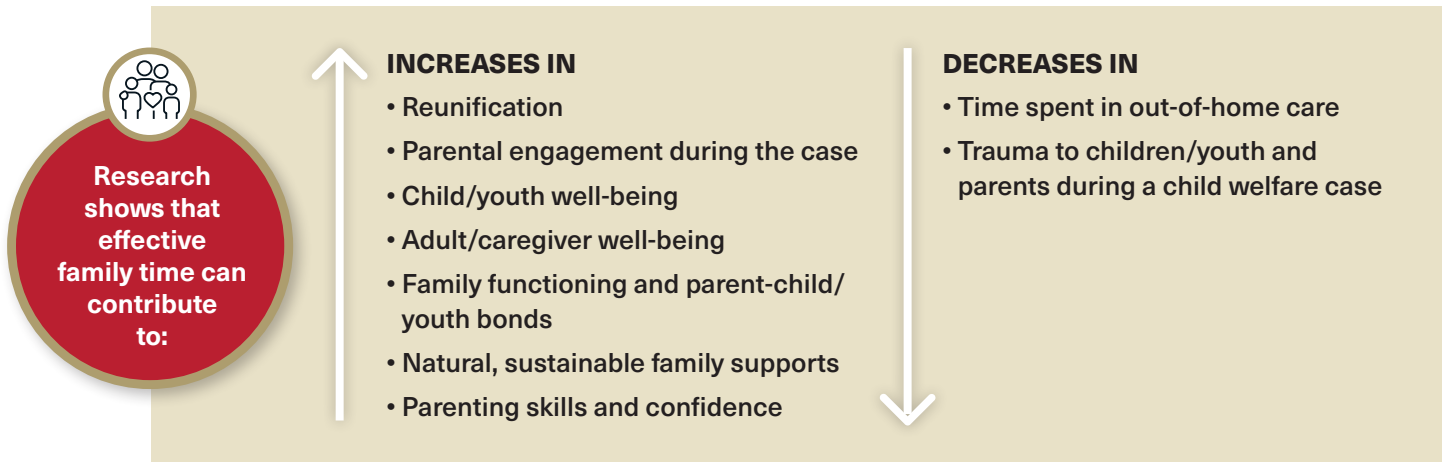


The Evidence Behind Recommendations

House Bill 23-1027 authorized a leading-edge study to develop data-informed best practice recommendations and build capacity for family time in Colorado. The [High Quality Parenting Time Task Force](#) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to fulfill this legislative opportunity. National research evidence, a statewide survey to Colorado counties, the voices of providers and families, and administrative child welfare data were used to develop best practice standards.

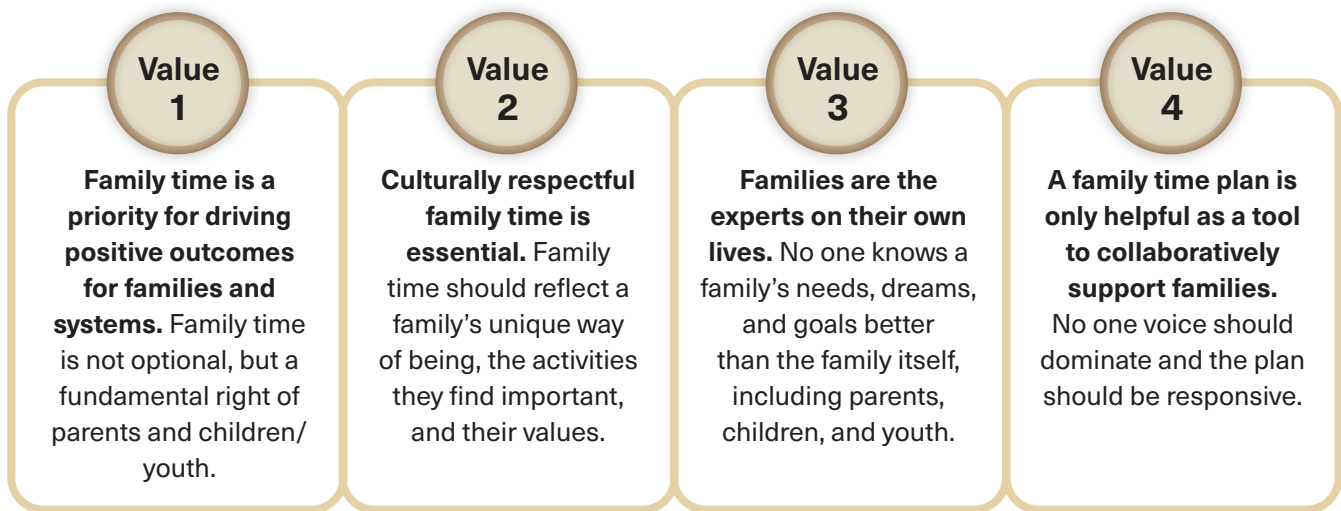
Family Time is Essential to Child, Youth, and Family Well-Being

Family time is essential to achieve positive outcomes during and after a child welfare case, and a fundamental right of families.



Shared Values

Recommendations are anchored in shared values around how family time shapes the lives of children, youth, and parents involved in child welfare. Shared values create a common mental model of what quality family time looks like.



Best Practice Recommendations for Family Time

Three categories of best practices emerged: 1) plan development; 2) implementation practices; and 3) infrastructural supports.

Recommendations are complementary and act as guiding principles that Colorado is striving to achieve. Best practices always allow for variation and flexibility to meet the unique needs of each family and case.



A. Recommendations for Iterative Plan Development

These standards guide how to approach development of the family time plan and keep it responsive to emergent needs.

Recommendation A1. Establish a shared understanding of “least restrictive” to inform creation of the family time plan and any proposals to further restrict.



Innovative Idea!

Build a bench of kin to support family time, from supervision to transportation.

Understanding Restriction as a Continuum of Options

	Least Restrictive ←————→ Most Restrictive					
Setting (location)	In the parent’s home	In the kin’s home	In the community (e.g., park)	In a county human services building	In a monitored facility (e.g., county jail)	
Supervision level	Unsupervised	Monitored / intermittent supervision	Supervision		Supervision with security present	
Format (method)	In-person	Video Call	Phone Call	Messaging	Email, recordings	
Type of supervisor	Nobody	Kin or other informal supports	Third-party family time provider	Human services staff	Probation Officer or Facility Guard mandatory presence	Therapeutic supervision

Recommendation A2. Create individualized family time plans that prioritize least restrictive environments with a high threshold for restricting.

Recommendation A3. Invite, document, and respect family culture and values from case start and throughout family time.

Recommendation A4. In-person family time—for the purposes of preserving and strengthening family ties and cultural connections—is the priority expectation. Supplement in-person family time with additional opportunities for parent and child/youth interactions.

Recommendation A5. Uniquely address sibling contact and other key relationships in the family time plan.

Recommendation A6. Prioritize parent and child/youth voice in development of the family time plan, with professionals helping to make desires feasible.



“I had a case where dinner time together was one of the most important values for the family. Honoring this pushed us to find ways to get the family time to include meal time, so the children would not lose this tradition.”

- Family Law Judge

Recommendation A7. For children/youth who refuse in-person family time, explore the underlying reasons for refusal and engage trusted supports to help the child/youth and parent move forward.

Recommendation A8. Minimize and mitigate missed family time by parents through realistic expectations and appropriate supports. Chronic missed family time alone is not a reason to further restrict.

Recommendation A9. Revisit the family time plan routinely using a 360 review lens and update as needed.



“The family is the expert on the family. If you let them guide development [of the plan], it helps build trust and meets their goals, makes it more possible for them to succeed.”

– Third-Party Family Time Provider

B. Recommendations on Family Time Implementation

These standards guide implementation practices related to frequency, setting, activities, and supervision.

Recommendation B1. Prioritize in-person family time immediately after removal.

Recommendation B2. Implement in-person family time consistently, frequently, and for adequate duration, with consideration for child/youth age and the family’s goals.

Guidelines for Frequency and Duration of Family Time, by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Duration*
0 to 24 months	3 to 5 times per week	At least 60 minutes
2 to 5 years	2 to 4 times per week	1 to 2 hours
6 to 12 years	1 to 3 times per week	1 to 3 hours
13 to 18 years	1 to 2 times per week	1 to 3 hours

* Duration refers to “per each family time encounter” and not a total duration for the week. These are minimums based on national evidence that shows more frequent family time leads to less time in out-of-home care and higher quality family relationships. Minimums should be adjusted based on specifics of the case.

Innovative Idea!

Partner with local organizations to secure discounts and access to community activities.

“Family time is a way to maintain connection and minimize trauma, especially for kids in those first few hours and days when it all goes down [removal]. A video call is not enough.”

– Human Services Staff

Recommendation B3. Hold family time in community settings and prioritize usual child/youth and parent activities and cultural values.

Recommendation B4. Use kin options for supervision whenever possible. Kin also have other important roles in facilitating family time.

Recommendation B5. Explore group supervision and monitoring models in community-based spaces while accounting for family confidentiality.

Recommendation B6. Offer family strengthening supports that align with and complement family time.

Recommendation B7. Use information gained from family time to promote learning and communicate successes, not to punish.

Recommendation B8. Offer parents and children/youth supportive coaching before, during, and after family time relative to their goals.

“Why not focus on our strengths as a family? Not just what we are doing wrong. We did family therapy and saw some growth and trust being built.”

– Lived Experience Expert

C. Recommendations on Family Time Infrastructure

These standards guide capacity building so that best practices can be feasible and sustainable.

Recommendation C1. Provide shared messaging and tailored implementation materials on the purpose, requirements, and best practices of family time for all participating parties.

Recommendation C2. For each case, clarify responsibilities in family time and align roles, using a team-based approach.

Recommendation C3. Provide kin who supervise family time with adequate support and manageable expectations.

Recommendation C4. Assist parents with transportation to and from family time.

Recommendation C5. Develop realistic scheduling standards for family time that reflect parent and child/youth obligations.

Recommendation C6. Build capacity for more regular family time, including evenings and weekends, by using multiple supervisor options.

Recommendation C7. During placement assignments, prioritize keeping siblings together and placing children/youth in the same geographic area as their parents.



Innovative Idea!

Use community intermediaries to help distribute funding.



“Everyone engaging in family time should be trained in some level of coaching and motivational interviewing.”

– Human Services Staff

Recommendation C8. Make technical updates to the child welfare data system (Trails) to align with and support changes to family time.

Recommendation C9. Develop a collaborative protocol for corrections and county departments of human services to ensure family time is available to incarcerated parents.



"Family time is absolutely a key component to reunification!"

– County Human Services Staff



Innovative Idea!

Creatively address transportation barriers through partnerships with [rideshare companies](#), [CarePortal](#) providers, and [HopSkipDrive](#) for youth.

Building Capacity for Sustained Implementation

It is imperative that adequate funding is in place to support implementation of family time. Costs, potential funding sources, and innovative ideas for resourcing must be taken together to inform a feasible funding structure. Ongoing evidence building on implementation can help measure outcomes over time and data can be used for ongoing learning and continuous improvement.



Innovative Idea!

Leverage Family Engagement Meetings to regularly revisit the family time plan and identify opportunities to strengthen.

Co-Owning Recommendations

Best practice recommendations require a collaborative approach where policymakers, systems, communities, and families co-own implementation and contribute through their unique role.



Details and the data behind each practice recommendation are included in the full [strategy report](#). Funding structure considerations are also included.



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