



**Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab**  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

Using data to drive action



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

## Strategy Report

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- House Bill (HB) 23-1027 authorized a **statewide study** on family time practices.
- **The Colorado Lab partnered with the High Quality Parenting Time Task Force** to fulfill this legislative opportunity.
- **A mixed methods approach was used** to identify opportunities to strengthen family time and improve outcomes.
- This report provides **data-informed recommendations on best practice standards** for delivering family time and building capacity to meet standards.
- An **executive summary** accompanies this strategy report, designed to reach policymakers and cross-system leaders positioned to support activation.
- A **technical report** of study findings and methods is also available.

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## Executive Summary

### Developing Data-Informed Best Practice Recommendations for Family Time in Colorado

Separation of families during a child welfare case can cause emotional, developmental, and physical harm. 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. [House Bill 23-1027](#), Parent and Child Family Time, authorized a leading-edge study to develop data-informed best practice recommendations 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. A mixed methods approach was used to develop the recommendations and build capacity for successful implementation.

Study findings show that families are best served when family time is delivered through a community-based model with flexibility for the individual case. This includes using community and home-like settings, engaging kin (e.g., neighbors, relatives, friends) to supervise family time, and prioritizing regular child/youth and parent activities. Outcomes are improved when in-person family time—for the purpose of strengthening and preserving family ties—is of regular frequency and robust duration. Frequency and duration should match the age and developmental needs of the child/youth, as well as the parent’s goals. Achieving equitable outcomes requires family cultural values to be integrated into the family time plan and honored at every step. Structural barriers, such as lack of transportation for parents, must be addressed. Collaboration across systems and centering families as experts of their own life are driving factors for success.

Adequate resourcing for family time is necessary for the state and county departments of human services to achieve the best practice recommendations. This includes re-prioritizing and increasing funding toward a community-based model of family time, delivering implementation support to all types of supervisors, breaking down transportation barriers, and partnering with community organizations to provide access to activities that reflect family preferences and cultural values.

This strategy report outlines three categories of best practice standards: 1) plan development; 2) implementation practices; and 3) infrastructural supports. Recommendations are complementary and act as guiding principles that Colorado is striving to achieve. Implementing family time best practice standards can reduce trauma during child welfare involvement and improve outcomes for children, youth, and parents, including reunification success.

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Thank you to our partners who provided subject matter expertise and guidance on this project: The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force and Steering Committee; study participants; and the families who shared their stories to inspire change.

## Data Sources

### Mixed Methods Approach

The study uses data from four sources:

1. Statewide survey to all 64 counties in Colorado on current practices, implementation supports, data collection, and funding for family time.
2. Subject matter expert interviews on strengths, gaps, and opportunities to improve and build capacity for family time in Colorado.
3. Evidence review of the best available research evidence and grey literature on factors associated with quality family time and case-, person-, and system-level outcomes.
4. Child welfare (Trails) administrative data on distribution and structure of family time.

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## Note on Gender-Inclusive Language

The Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab affirms our commitment to the use of gender-inclusive language. We are committed to honoring the unique gender identity of each study participant. Throughout this report, we follow the guidance of the Associated Press Stylebook and the Chicago Manual of Style and use the gender-neutral, singular “they” when appropriate.

## Introduction

During times of separation, it is crucial that families receive regular and quality family time, including between parent(s), children/youth in placement, and siblings. A statewide study was done to develop best practice recommendations and build capacity for family time in Colorado.

### 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. ([Colorado Code of Regulations \[CCR\] 2509-1-7.000.2](#))

## A New Era of Family Time in Colorado

**House Bill 23-1027 (Parent and Child Family Time) authorized a leading-edge study to develop best practice recommendations for family time.**

**The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab to fulfill this legislative opportunity.**

Colorado has heavily invested in practices that strengthen families involved in child welfare using a collaborative approach. In 2023, [House Bill 23-1027](#) (Parent and Child Family Time) passed. This legislation reflects a [national movement to reduce trauma](#) during child welfare and improve outcomes by ensuring access to quality family time. This legislation brought sweeping changes to how family time is implemented in Colorado. The goal is to move toward a community-based model that promotes home-like environments and use of kin for supervision. This will require strong change management grounded in research evidence.

### What does “Kinship” or “Kin” mean?

By statute, kin means “a relative of the child/youth, a person ascribed by the family as having a family-like relationship with the child and/or youth, or a person that has a prior significant relationship with the child and/or youth.” Kin is intentionally not restricted to biological family to account for cultural values and continuity of relationships. ([CCR 2509-1-7.000.2](#))

HB23-1027 authorized a leading-edge study to develop data-informed best practices to strengthen family time in Colorado and build capacity for feasible implementation. The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force (Task Force) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) at the University of Denver to fulfill this legislative opportunity.

### Who is the High Quality Parenting Time Task Force?

The Task Force includes cross-system partners from the Division of Child Welfare; the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel; the Office of the Child's Representative; the Child Protection Ombudsman Office; county human services departments; family time providers; parents, kin, and youth with lived expertise; judicial representatives; and foster families. The diverse expertise of the Task Force was leveraged for study design and recommendations development.

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

The best available research evidence and state/national guidance makes clear that family time is not a “nice to have” or “special service” during the demands of a child welfare case. It is an essential component of achieving positive outcomes during and after a child welfare case, and a fundamental right of families.

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

- Human services staff

### Benefits of Effective Family Time

Research shows that effective family time can contribute to:

- Improved reunification.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Less time spent in out-of-home care.<sup>4</sup>
- Increased parental engagement during the case.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup>
- Improved child/youth well-being.<sup>8, 9, 10, 11</sup>
- Improved adult/caregiver well-being.<sup>12</sup>
- Improved family functioning and parent-child/youth bonds.<sup>13, 14</sup>
- Reduced trauma to children/youth and parents during a child welfare case.<sup>15, 16</sup>
- Building of natural, sustainable family supports.<sup>17</sup>
- Increased parenting skills and confidence.<sup>18, 19</sup>

The benefits of family time can be observed acutely during the case and longer-term in family strengthening. The goals of family time should be parent and child/youth directed, centering the family unit as experts in their own lives, to achieve positive outcomes.

## Study Approach

To develop recommendations on best practice standards and build capacity, a mixed methods approach was used. Both number-based data and narrative-based data were collected to tell a fuller story of family time strengths, challenges, and opportunities in Colorado. This included:

- **Statewide survey** to all 64 counties on current practices, implementation supports, data practices, and funding for family time (86% response rate). All Colorado Human Services Director Association (CHSDA) regions were represented; the nine counties who did not complete represent <4% of the state’s population. Table 1 outlines the sampling frame.
- **Subject matter expert interviews** on strengths, gaps, and opportunities to improve and build capacity for family time in Colorado (n = 36). Table 2 outlines the sampling frame.
- **National evidence review** of the best available research evidence and grey literature on factors associated with quality family time and case-, person-, and system-level outcomes.
- **Child welfare (Trails) administrative data** on distribution and structure of family time from January 2022 to June 2024.

The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force provided iterative feedback and meaning making during the development process and approved final recommendations.

**Table 1. County Survey Sample**

CHSDA Region	Number of Participating Counties	Response Rate
Metro Area	10 (of 11)	91%
Northeast	9 (of 10)	90%
Northwest	7 (of 10)	70%
San Luis Valley	6 (of 6)	100%
Southeast	13 (of 15)	87%
Southwest	10 (of 12)	92%
<b>Total Response Rate</b>		<b>86%</b>
<b>Percent of State Population Captured</b>		<b>96%</b>

**Table 2. Subject Matter Expert Interview Sample**

Subject Matter Expert Type	Sample Size
Rural county human services staff	n = 4
Urban county human services staff	n = 9
Family Time third-party providers	n = 5
Judicial and Legal professionals	n = 3
State agencies serving families involved in child welfare	n = 5
Foster families	n = 3
Lived expertise, including parents/caregivers, kin, and youth voice	n = 7
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>n = 36</b>

## Making Recommendations Actionable

Recommendations reflect key components of [family time legislation](#) and [rule](#). Related legislation on [kinship](#), [foster youth voice](#), and [incarcerated parents](#) was also integrated to promote alignment in the family strengthening and child welfare landscape. To keep recommendations actionable, Colorado’s [evidence-based decision making](#) approach was used (Figure 1). This approach ensures recommendations represent the balance of the best available research evidence, implementation context and community voice, and professional expertise.

**Figure 1. Evidence-Based Decision Making Approach**




## Data-Informed Best Practice Recommendations

In total, three categories of best practices emerged: 1) plan development; 2) implementation practices; and 3) infrastructural supports. Recommendations are complementary and should be applied in tandem. When recommendations are closely linked, their relationship is made clear.

An [executive summary](#) of recommendations accompanies this strategy report. The summary is designed to reach policymakers and cross-system leaders positioned to support activation.

A [technical report](#) is also available, detailing findings from each data source.

## Shared Values

Recommendations are anchored in shared values around how family time shapes the lives of children, youth, and parents involved in child welfare. These shared values surface assumptions that must be taken to heart for family time to drive positive outcomes. Together, shared values create a common mental model of what quality family time looks like.

1. **Value 1: Family time is a priority** for driving positive outcomes for families and systems. Family time is not optional, but a fundamental right of parents and children/youth.
2. **Value 2: Culturally respectful family time is essential.** Family time should reflect a family's unique way of being, the activities they find important, and their values.
3. **Value 3: Families are the experts** on their own lives. No one knows a family's needs, dreams, and goals better than the family itself, including parents, children, and youth.
4. **Value 4: A family time plan is only helpful as a tool to collaboratively support families.** No one voice should dominate and the plan should be responsive.

## Ensuring Flexibility and Responsiveness

Recommendations are not intended to be a strict manual or step-by-step implementation instruction. Rather, recommendations act as guiding principles that Colorado is striving to achieve. This distinction is important because every family is unique and every case is different. Best practices must allow for variation and flexibility to promote feasibility and equity.

### Standard Format for Recommendations

Each recommendation is formatted to underscore core components.

**Recommendation X: [actionable title]**

*Standard:* [short description on the best practice standard for this recommendation to be met].

*Description:* [more details about the standard].

*Rationale:* [select data highlights that illustrate the “why” of this recommendation].

*Key Considerations:* [implementation and related guidance when applying the standard].

## A. Recommendations for Iterative Plan Development

The first set of recommendations provides guidance on how to approach development of the [family time plan \(template\)](#) and revise as needed throughout the life of the case.

### What is the *Family Time Plan*?

A family time plan is a written plan to promote regular family time. According to statute, at a minimum, the family time plan shall address the following:

1. Frequency, length (duration), and location;
2. Persons who may be present;
3. If family time must be supervised, who will provide that supervision;
4. If informal resources are available and appropriate for transportation and supervision, as these resources must not compromise the child’s or youth’s mental, emotional, or physical health or safety; and
5. The child’s or youth’s additional opportunities to communicate with a parent, sibling, or other relative.

Ensuring family time incorporates best practices means the plan must be meaningful and responsive. It cannot be a “sit on a shelf” document but rather, a tool for collaborative support of families ([CCR 2509-1-7.301](#)).

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

**Standard:** Restriction is defined by four related factors: setting (location), supervision level (monitoring vs. supervision), format (method), and type of supervisor. Within each, a continuum of options exists from least to most restrictive (Table 3). Moving a family towards more or less restriction should be approached with all options on the continuum in mind.

**Table 3. Dimensions of “Least to Most Restrictive” (Continuum)**

Least Restrictive		←————→			Most Restrictive	
<b>Setting (location).</b>	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).	
<b>Supervision level.</b>	Unsupervised.	Monitored/intermittent supervision.	Supervision.		Supervision with security present.	
<b>Format (method).</b>	In-person.	Video call.	Phone call.	Messaging.	Email or recordings.	
<b>Type of supervisor.</b>	Nobody.	Kin or other informal supports.	Third-party family time provider.	Human services staff.	Probation Officer or Facility Guard present (even if not supervising)	Therapeutic supervision.

**Description:** Rule requires that child welfare caseworkers contact the county attorney to notify the court and request a hearing if ongoing family time is to be restricted or suspended. However, neither statute nor rule define “restrictiveness,” which causes unclear expectations across judicial, human services, and community providers. To remedy this, the first recommendation describes the core components of what makes family time more or less restrictive. The continuum recognizes that “least” or “most” restrictive is not a binary; families may move up or down the different dimensions during their case. Further, each dimension is independent; a family be less restrictive in one factor (location), but more restrictive in another (supervisor type).

### Unpacking “Therapeutic Supervision”

Most Colorado counties report using “therapeutic supervision” as the most restrictive form and findings indicate families experience it as highly restrictive. This practice is in conflict with [national literature that posits therapy](#) as a preventative measure. Colorado’s use of therapeutic supervision in family time can set an adversarial tone between parents and therapists versus one of collaboration, which may turn families off to therapy as a long-term support.

Therapeutic supervision typically refers to a mental health professional overseeing a parent’s time with their child/youth, most often in a facility or office. The therapeutic supervisor typically wields power to correct a parent’s behavior in the moment, end family time early, or place other stipulations. Because of the therapeutic focus, typical family activities and simply “being together” in a naturally occurring way are inherently limited. If therapeutic supervision is the primary or only family time, this can feel highly restrictive to families and hinder best practices.

**Rationale:** Study findings showed the lack of shared understanding on “restrictiveness” has created unclear and conflicting expectations across professionals and families. Required contact with the county attorney has been unduly burdensome because it is not clear what “more restrictive” means. While rule only requires reporting to the county attorney for format, location, or supervision level, study findings also showed that “who” supervises is a form of restriction.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Family time plans should be responsive to emergent family and case needs. Only ongoing (permanent) changes with greater restriction should require county attorney reporting. 2) One dimension of family time can be restricted (e.g., setting) without restricting another dimension (e.g., supervisor type). 3) Families may experience the continuum differently and their preferences should be considered. 4) The continuum refers to the specific encounter of family time. A security guard on the general premises of a community center has no bearing on level of restrictiveness, if not directly interacting with family time. 5) Probation officers or a facility guard are not typically supervisors, but their mandatory presence during supervised family time increases the level of restrictiveness. 6) The continuum may be especially helpful in the court system and used as part of a judicial bench card for family time. It can also be integrated into the Child Welfare Training Information System. 7) The continuum should be given to respondent parents and kin so they know their options. 8) Frequency is also an important component of restrictiveness and is addressed in a separate recommendation (B2).

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation A2](#) for guidance on when to restrict.

Consult [Recommendation B2](#) for guidance on frequency of family time.

Consult [Recommendation C9](#) for guidance on restrictions related to incarcerated parents.

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

**Standard:** Family time plans should start from the presumption of least restrictive in setting, method, supervision type, and supervision level. If restricting for child/youth safety, the safety concerns should be explicitly documented, the relationship to family time made clear, and an explanation of how the safety concern can be mitigated included.

**Description:** Child/youth safety is an essential factor when determining level of restrictiveness. Caseworkers should pay close attention to factors that could threatened safety during family time. However, “safety concerns” should not be used as a catch-all to unduly restrict family time. If restricting for safety, the specific concern should be named and how it will affect family time made clear in the court report. If the safety concern can be mitigated, family time should occur. If there is no way to mitigate and family time must thus be restricted, the report should include what steps will be taken to mitigate so less restrictive options can be achieved in the future.

**An example of this is substance use. Parental substance is not, by itself, a reason to restrict family time. Requiring a negative UA (urinalysis) as a pre-condition of family time is an unnecessary barrier and is not related to child/youth safety. The safety concern can be mitigated other ways, including by providing appropriate supervision.**

**Rationale:** Only 23% of counties reported developing family time plans with the assumption that parents do not require supervision. Counties claimed that because there is a high bar to removal, they assume there is a present safety concern that extends to family time. However, this philosophy is at odds with achieving least restrictive environment, which national literature shows is essential to effective family time. Removal is different from family time. As parents work through a treatment plan to achieve long-term safety, the underlying safety concern can often be mitigated in the short-term so family time can occur.

*“We are used to assuming supervision is necessary at the beginning, but [we are] starting to shift that to assume no supervision [is needed] and make justification for why [we should restrict].”*

- Human services staff

**Key Considerations:** 1) Parental substance use, mental health issues, or participation in treatment programs are not inherently safety concerns and should not be used as a restriction or stipulation of family time. 2) A child/youth showing difficult emotions or behavioral dysregulation around family time should not be automatically labeled “child emotional safety” and used as a reason to restrict. There may be other root causes to the child’s emotional state, and restricting family time may actually worsen their well-being. 3) A history of child welfare involvement or criminal activities should not be used to automatically restrict. How past factors affect current safety must be reasonable and clear. 4) Protection orders

and other legal restrictions should be considered in determining safety. 5) Professional safety is also important. While this recommendation focuses on child/youth safety, the safety of professionals and others involved in family time is also a factor. When there are concerns, options to mitigate should be explored. 6) Courts have a responsible to ensure proposed restrictiveness matches a substantive safety concern.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C8](#) for guidance on use of Trails to document the family time plan.

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

**Standard:** Family culture and values should be reflected and integrated into development of the family time plan, including location, supervision, activities, and goals. These values and practices should then be honored in implementing family time. To avoid cultural harms, core values must be documented immediately in initial contact orders and essential needs communicated to the child/youth’s placement.

**Description:** Reducing disparity and achieving equitable outcomes requires that culture and values be integrated into family time decisions. Professionals cannot avoid causing harm (and cannot build on strengths) if they do not know what is important to the family. Child welfare and other professionals need support to build confidence and skills in eliciting cultural values. “Not knowing how to ask” is not an excuse for silencing cultural values. It is also important that professionals examine their own beliefs. Some elements of a family’s culture (e.g., food and speech) may be in conflict with personal opinions on childrearing. It is vital that truly harmful practices (e.g., cow’s milk for a newborn) are distinguished from different family practices (e.g., Takis as an afternoon snack) and family time is not restricted due to judgment or differing opinions. While the complete family time plan is not due to the court until 30 days after removal, essential values should be understood and communicated to relevant parties (e.g., placement, judge, supervisor) immediately.

*“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

An example of avoiding harm is cultural food restrictions. Knowing a family is Jewish, for instance, and that they honor the Kosher diet can ensure the child/youth is given only Kosher foods and that family time is held at locations that respect this.

**Rationale:** Study findings documented numerous examples where cultural harms were done during family time in Colorado. The most commonly reported areas where family values were not respected included: a) food preferences and restrictions; b) treatment of hair, especially among Indigenous and Black families; c) tone and word choice when talking as a family; and d) family activities and ways of engaging (e.g., gift giving). Findings also show family time is critical to preserving traditions (big and small) and culture, which has extensive benefit to well-being during the case and upon reunification. Narrative data revealed Colorado professionals feel ill-equipped to respectfully discuss and integrate cultural values, resulting in superficial efforts and bias.

**Key Considerations:** 1) The family time plan should include a section to document family culture and values. This is necessary for transparency and shared understanding. 2) Many factors go into family culture, and it is not always easy for a family to express their unique way of being. Caseworkers should ask open-ended questions like “What do you enjoy doing as a family?” or “What mini-traditions do you have?” to elicit values, versus close-ended questions like “Do you have any culture you want to tell me about?” 3) Trust is needed to share closely held values, which is often not present due to the nature of child welfare involvement. Partnering with trusted supports in the family’s network—such as kin and peer specialists—can help improve family engagement. Trust also takes time, which requires revisiting culture and values regularly. 4) There may be other places where family values are asked about, such as “social history” in Trails. This can serve as a jumping off point for a conversation. 5) Family culture should not be stereotyped or assumed based on race and ethnicity, religion, or other identities.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation A9](#) for guidance on revisiting the family time plan regularly.

Consult [Recommendation B3](#) for guidance on ensuring family culture is respected.

**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.**

**Standard:** The family time plan should be based firstly on in-person interaction for the expressed purpose of spending time together and building healthy family connections. The plan should also identify additional opportunities for parents and children/youth to regularly interact outside of in-person family time. Phone calls, video calls, medical visits, texting, and extracurricular activities should be standard inclusions. These other forms of interaction should supplement—but not replace—in-person family time.

**Description:** Regular in-person family time is the priority. Its focus should be usual child/youth and parent activities done together as a family, whether a board game, a movie, or an outing.

While there may be other in-person interactions, such as attendance at medical visits, these have a different expressed purpose from family connection. As such, they are a supplement to in-person family time, not a replacement. Other forms of interaction (e.g., video call) should not be an exception or a “back-up” to in-person family time. Rather, supplemental methods should be built into the plan as a menu of options to ensure family interactions are robust and reflect usual ways of being, especially when geographic distance may prevent more frequent in-person time.

**Rationale:** Most counties reported they already use supplemental forms of family contact in many cases, including phone (92%), video (96%), texting (67%), medical appointments (88%), and school events (90%). However, narrative data revealed that the supplemental forms are too often used as justification to skip an in-person opportunity (e.g., “They just Facetimed. They don’t need to see each other again”) or replace it (e.g., “They went to the school concert. That was their family time this week”). Findings show that virtual formats can help maintain relationships, but alone are not the most effective means to preserve and strengthen family ties. Narrative findings also underscored the importance of in-person family time to support the shared goal of reunification and to avoid “big holes” for kids and parents in their lifetimes together.

**Key Considerations:** 1) When using supplemental in-person methods, like medical visits or family therapy, consider whether the provider can also act as the supervisor to reduce burden on other supervisor types. 2) Asynchronous methods (e.g. texting, Facebook messenger) are inherently unmonitored, but that does not automatically make them unsafe and prevent their use. Discussion on their use between professionals, parents, and children/youth can clarify expectations for all. Apps, such as [Talking Parents](#) or [Our Family Wizard](#), can also be explored to allow for external monitoring if needed. If monitoring tools are required by the county, the costs should be absorbed by the department, not by the parent or child/youth. 3) Consider child age and developmental stage when determining use of supplemental methods. 4) Other family time opportunities include band concerts, sports games, and the like.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation B2](#) for guidance on frequency and duration of in-person family time.

Consult [Recommendation B3](#) for guidance on ensuring usual parent and child-youth activities.

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

**Standard:** When applicable, the family time plan should identify the specific ways sibling contact will be fostered, both when parents are present and sibling-to-sibling direct. Sibling contact methods should reflect age-appropriate methods (e.g., texting, social media, in-person) and usual relationships (e.g., playing online video games, WhatsApp, watching the sibling play sports).



Children/youth may also have other vital kin relationships in their life, such as an aunt or grandma. These key relationships should also be integrated in the family time plan.

**Description:** Families are made up of not only parents, but also other children/youth and broader kin networks. This means family time should be all encompassing of key relationships. Maintaining key relationships can buffer the trauma that comes with family separation while promoting child/youth emotional and physical well-being. Unless a safety concern presents, sibling-to-sibling contact and contact with other vital relationships should be left unsupervised. In-person time together should be discussed as an option, as well as other methods like social media, depending on age and access.

**Rationale:** National evidence indicates that in-person sibling contact should occur a minimum of once per week to promote healthy development. Most Colorado counties reported meeting this national standard. However, achievement varied greatly by child/youth age, with 38% of counties reporting in-person sibling time twice per month or less for youth over age 12. Transportation for siblings to see one another was cited as a major barrier in Colorado, especially for older youth.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Placing children/youth together whenever possible can most effectively preserve bonds and reduce the need for dedicated sibling-to-sibling family time, which in turn saves resources while improving outcomes. 2) Transportation for children/youth to see parents is typically a covered expense in Colorado, but not always allowable for sibling-to-sibling connection. Extending transportation coverage for all key relationships in family time will improve feasibility. 3) Sibling-to-sibling contact should never be cancelled or withheld as punishment for child/youth behavior or parent behavior. 4) Child welfare and other professional supervisors should engage professional development opportunities to better understand age-appropriate tools and how siblings can interact across age gaps.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C7](#) for guidance on child/youth placement assignments.

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

**Standard:** The family time plan should prioritize parent and child/youth goals, family cultural values, and preferences around frequency, location, method, supervisor type, and activities. The role of the caseworker and other professional staff is to help right-size expressed hopes to what is feasible given safety concerns, available choices for supervision, and other circumstances of the case. When there are conflicting viewpoints between family members, each voice should be heard and the most balanced solution identified.

**Description:** Parents and children/youth are experts on their own lives. [Colorado rule](#) states that “whenever possible, the family time plan shall be developed in collaboration with the family.” This leaves room for a caseworker-led, family consulted model, rather than the ideal model of family-led, caseworker-consulted. Research evidence indicates this collaboration should be the norm, where family voice leads plan development and professionals work with the family to determine what is practical and allowable. When a parent or child/youth preference is not possible, professionals should be transparent about why and alternatives explored. While it is not expected that all family members will share preferences, input from children, youth, and parents should be equally considered in plan development and balanced solutions identified.

*“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

An example of a parent preference that a caseworker can help make feasible is hours of family time. A parent may request that family time occurs for their 8-year-old from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. every day because this is an available time between their Circle of Parents meetings (at 1 p.m.) and their therapy session (at 3 p.m.). However, the child is typically in school during this time and should not be removed for family time. The caseworker collaborates with the treatment provider to move the therapy session to 2 p.m. and free up the 3 p.m. slot for family time after school.

**Rationale:** Research evidence indicates family engagement is correlated with success of a child welfare case, including reunification and reducing trauma. Study findings indicated that “cookie cutter” family time plans are common in Colorado, and because they do not consider family needs and context, are more likely to fail. For example, a major challenge in Colorado is missed family time, where parents are forced to cancel or arrive late, youth refuse in-person time, or professionals struggle to meet all needs on the case. By incorporating family and youth voice from the start, a more feasible and desirable plan can be developed. Interview narratives also made clear that having parents help set up and navigate the family time plan can strengthen their skills and better reflect their real lives, which is key to reunification success.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Consensus in aligning child, youth, parent, and professional preferences is not the goal. The goal is to find a balanced solution that reflects all family voices and is feasible based on case factors. 2) Feedback loops should be used to regularly elicit parent and child/youth voice. This helps identify what is going well and what needs to be adjusted. Other trusted supports (e.g., parent and family advocates) to help elicit this information may be used. 3) Professionals should make clear what is—and is not—possible up front so that parents and children/youth can ask for realistic options. 4) It is important to understand what support kin, the foster family, and other professionals are willing to provide, so that available options are known.

## 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.

**Standard:** Child/youth refusal is not an inherent reason to forever restrict or suspend family time. In cases of child/youth refusal, therapeutic and other supports should be activated to identify the underlying reasons for the refusal and come up with a plan for helping the child/youth and parent repair their relationship. While working through underlying issues, other forms of contact can still be engaged, such as texting with the parent.

**Description:** Children/youth may not want to engage with in-person family time. This may take the form of reluctance or resistance or expressed as outright refusal or rejection. Children/youth cannot be forced to engage in family time. However, refusal of in-person family time should not be confused with refusal of all forms of engagement. Children/youth may still want to talk to their parents on the phone, have a bedtime story read, or have their parent attend their concert. Refusal may be temporary and commonly reflects a root cause (or underlying reason), such as a broken relationship or embarrassment. As such, other options for the child/youth to connect with the parent should be offered (e.g., texting). Using trusted supports can help uncover the true reasons and move the family towards relationship repair.

An example of a root cause is a child’s behavior after family time. A 4-year-old who cries and refuses to eat dinner after family time is interpreted as distressed by the foster family, caused by contact with the parent. When a child therapist is consulted, the root cause is found to be distress at being separated (again) from their parent. Providing the child with therapeutic supports for self-regulation can maintain emotional well-being during family time and no restriction is necessary.

**Rationale:** Most counties (81%) indicated that youth refusal is a small to moderate barrier to implementing family time. Interview narratives revealed caseworkers and family time providers are ill-equipped to address this challenge, beyond acknowledging they cannot force a child/youth to participate. Refusal is experienced as a tension for all involved because the parent is legally entitled to family time. Solutions require a case-by-case approach that prioritizes addressing the underlying issue or cause of refusal, versus letting the refusal limit family time for the entirety of the case.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Refusal or reluctance of in-person family time does not mean all forms of

*“I hear from youth a lot. Sometimes they refuse family time as an act of resistance. They love their mom, but they are angry at them for failing. And now all these people are in their private life. They try to regain control by refusing family time. Even though they really, really want to hug their parent.”*

- Legal advocate

family time should be limited. 2) Refusal or reluctance should be revisited and allowed to change over the course of the case. 3) Refusal or reluctance should be considered in the context of the child/youth's development, with experts engaged to understand development needs and behaviors. 4) Some counties, especially rural ones, may not have the mental health and other resources locally available to discover and treat root causes. To improve access, other options, such as telehealth and hybrid models for family therapy should be explored..

### **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.**

**Standard:** Missed family time by parents is often a result of untenable expectations in the family time plan. Missed family time can be minimized by setting feasible expectations and providing matched supports. If missed family time is chronic, the underlying reasons should be explored so that the right solution can be identified. Chronic missed family time alone should not be a reason to further restrict or suspend family time in the absence of other harms or safety concerns.

**Description:** For family time to be quality, it must be frequent and consistent. Child welfare places high demands on families (e.g., heavy treatment plan, court dates), in addition to their usual life obligations (e.g., work, school). When family time plans fail to consider real life, the result is missed family time. To remedy this, family time plans should be developed with feasibility in mind, including realistic scheduling, reasonable locations, and structural supports, such as gas vouchers and reminders to all parties involved that family time is coming up.

**Rationale:** Counties identified missed family time as a major challenge, with a perceived 25% to 30% cancellation rate. Missed family time hurts the family and introduces system efficiencies when professionals have to hold slots that end up not occurring. Missed family time also hurts professional staff directly, with one-third of counties rarely or never paying providers for missed family time. Narrative findings showed that missed family time is especially hard on children/youth, who may not understand why their parent was unable to attend. Time with their children is commonly cited as a key motivational factor for parents and this loss is acutely felt.

**Key Considerations:** 1) The underlying reason for the missed family time could be structural (e.g., transportation barriers) or motivational (e.g., feeling lost and "not worthy"). Supports should be provided that match with the underlying reason (e.g., bus or gas vouchers, peer specialist to support engagement). 2) Chronic missed family time is not a sufficient reason to further restrict or suspend family time in the absence of other harms. 3) Families should not be asked to arrive early as a stipulation of the family time, as this nearly always increases burden and can cause more missed family time. Setting expectations is appropriate, but "attendance contracts" that require early arrival or automatically restrict after a certain number of missed family time are not appropriate. 4) Other parent obligations should be considered when determining family time options and opportunities for alignment identified (e.g., family time near the parent's work at a park). 5) This recommendation is consistent with trauma-informed practice principles.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C4](#) for guidance on transportation support for parents.

Consult [Recommendation C5](#) for guidance on realistic scheduling standards for parents.

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

**Standard:** The family time plan should be routinely revisited to identify what is going well, where there are barriers, what is no longer relevant, and what needs to be added. Family Engagement Meetings should be used to provide this periodic refresh and include multiple viewpoints.

**Description:** Routinely revisiting the family time plan will ensure it reflects the progress that parents are making on the case, any new safety concerns, and opportunities to improve family time. Family Engagement Meetings (FEMs) are a prime opportunity in most counties to engage multiple voices in the discussion. The FEM schedule will vary by county and case. “Routinely” is thus not a set number (e.g., once a week) and should be tied to the cadence of the FEMs and other key opportunities in the case to discuss the family time plan. The family time plan may need to be revisited more or less often depending on family goals and available resources.

**Rationale:** Seventy-five percent of counties reported family time plans are reviewed in FEMs. However, individuals with lived expertise did not share that perception, reporting that they commonly only heard recommendations for their family time at the court hearing and were not consulted in advance. This indicates an opportunity for alignment across families and professionals.

*“Family Engagement Meetings are where we check in on the family time plan. What’s working? Are the parents progressing? If yes, let’s look about changing frequency and duration to get them more time together.”*

- Human services staff

**Key Considerations:** 1) Revisiting the family time plan is an opportunity to hear from all voices involved in the case, including parents, children/youth, caseworkers, kin, foster families and other professionals (e.g., parent defenders and Guardians ad Litem). 2) Documenting changes to the plan is critical to ensuring transparency and consistency in the plan. This means updating records in Trails, providing families a copy of their updated plan, and updating in court reports. 3) Judges and legal advocates can promote accountability by consistently reviewing and asking about changes to the family time plan at hearings and in documentation. 4) When revisiting, challenges, successes, and opportunities to strengthen the family time plan should be identified.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation B7](#) for guidance on using information for learning vs. punishment.

## B. Recommendations on Family Time Implementation

The second set of recommendations provides guidance for family time implementation practices related to frequency, setting, activities, and supervision.

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

**Standard:** Contact between parents and children/youth is required within 72 business hours, with rare exception. Whenever possible, in-person contact should be prioritized. Not yet completing the kin search or finding a third-party provider is not a reason to delay in-person family time. Other staff (e.g., caseworker) can facilitate the in-person initial contact while other supervision supports are located and the full family time plan is developed.

*“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

**Description:** [HB21-1101](#), Preserving Family Relationships In Child Placement, set the requirement that contact between parents and children/youth must occur within 72 business hours, unless parties consent otherwise or other rare exception. Ideally, this requirement is met through in-person contact. Prioritizing in-person contact (versus a virtual format) means a supervisor must be available. It may take time to build up a network of supervisors, especially around kin. While options are explored, other types of supervisors can be temporarily used.

**An example prioritizing in-person contact in the first 72 hours. A caseworker decides a third-party provider is the most appropriate supervisor type, but none have availability in the first 72 hours. Rather than moving to a video call format to meet initial contact requirements, the caseworker provides supervision for an in-person family time interaction on a temporary basis.**

**Rationale:** Thirty-eight percent of counties reported not meeting the expectation of family time contact within 72 hours for children birth to 12 months, and 62% of counties reported not meeting the 72-hour expectation for youth over the age of 12. Narrative findings showed the lack of clear expectations across different parties (e.g., third-party providers, caseworkers, judicial) is a barrier to meeting this immediacy requirement. Another commonly cited barrier was not having the “right” or “long-term” supervisors in place within 72 hours, which then results in no contact or virtual contact, versus finding a temporary supervisor for in-person initial contact.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Coordination of activities across involved parties (e.g., finding a third-party supervisor, kin search, timing of the shelter hearing) is a significant challenge. Counties should identify the core people that are most common to coordinate with in the first 72 hours

and set a workplan that can be replicated across cases. 2) Flexibility in supervisor type and location is needed in the first 72 hours; this may be different from the long-term plan. 3) When geographic spread is a barrier, transportation support should be prioritized. 4) At the hearing, explicitly identify who is responsible for ensuring initial contact and how it will be approached.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C1](#) for guidance on shared messaging to improve coordination.

Consult [Recommendation C4](#) for guidance on transportation supports.

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

**Standard:** In-person family time frequency and duration guidelines should be used to support the developmental needs of children/youth, by age (Table 4). These guidelines show minimums that should be adjusted based on family goals and unique situation. A parent should not be punished if they are unable to make minimums or if they ask for a different cadence to meet their goals. Ensuring weekend and evening availability is an important component of frequency and duration.

**Table 4. 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 contact” and not to a total duration for the week.

**Description:** Across all age groups, in-person family time should occur as frequently and for as long as possible. When feasible, this can be as often as daily, especially for younger children and infants. Duration must be favorable to developmentally appropriate activities, the family’s goals, and their unique situation. Table 4 establishes guidelines for duration and frequency, by age, based on the best available research evidence. These are minimum targets to promote frequent in-person family time; minimums may not be feasible in all situations. Ensuring weekend and evening availability is also an important component of this recommendation.

**An example of aligning duration and frequency to family goals. A family has a two-year-old and an eight-year-old. They express a value of church on**



**Sundays and their usual activity is lengthy board games. At least one family time interaction during the week is three hours and in the evening, so they can play their favorite game. A second family time interaction is on Sundays to dovetail with church. Two additional family time interactions of one hour also occur, for four total planned interactions per week of varying duration. Asking kin to supervise is the most favorable approach to this schedule.**

**Rationale:** National evidence shows that more frequent family time leads to less time in out-of-home care and higher quality family relationships. Spending significant time together as a family is critical to reunification success. While 56% of Colorado counties reported an ideal of family time four to five times per week for children under 2 years old, only 18% of counties actually achieved this ideal. Similar trends persisted for older children/youth. Sustained time together is also important to ensure usual family activities and cultural values are honored. About 50% of Colorado counties reported the typical family time session lasts 1 to 2 hours. Multi-day and overnight family time was rare. Over 35% of counties reported that weekend family time was rarely or never available, especially for younger children. Narrative findings revealed this is in part because of “cookie cutter” plans and is largely driven by availability of family time supervisors.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Child/youth age anchors this recommendation and reflects the best available evidence for matching family time to development stage. For example, infants require more frequent contact with parents, but duration may be less (e.g., priority activity is lactation and physical touch). In contrast, older youth may want a camping trip or family hike, which requires greater length, but in-person contact may be less frequent because they can supplement with other methods (e.g., Zoom, texting). 2) Less restriction improves feasibility of frequent family time of robust duration. For example, having weekend family time at the human services department is hard because the building is typically closed and staff are off work. In contrast, going to the splash park on a Saturday with an aunt acting as the supervisor is both more feasible and better reflects typical family activities and networks. 3) Transportation can be a major barrier, especially when geographic spread is vast. In these cases, consider the right balance of frequency with duration. A child placed far away from the parent may require less frequency, but longer durations each time.

#### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendations B3](#) and [B4](#) for guidance on community settings and use of kin.

Consult the [funding structures](#) section for opportunities to move resources toward this ideal.

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

**Standard:** Family time should occur in the community, outside of institutional or department facilities whenever possible. Families should be free to choose activities that reflect their real



lives. Family cultural values should be reflected in activities and settings chosen. Activities and other choices should not be judged by professionals (e.g., third-party provider and caseworker) or non-professionals (e.g., kin) that are supervising.

**Description:** Activities and setting for family time are closely tied. Community settings are more favorable to ensuring time together is meaningful and reflects the family’s unique way of being. Community settings include homes (of parent, of kin) and public spaces such as parks, toddler gyms, and restaurants. Families should be free to choose activities that reflect their real lives, from eating Sunday breakfast together at a café, to playing in the park, to going to the mall and catching up on a youth’s day. Location and activity should also reflect family goals. For example, if a parent is working with a coach to learn to manage their child’s behavior, the family time should happen in a setting where the parent can practice that skill (e.g., library).

*“Before [child welfare involvement], I tried to take my son for a little ice cream after school once a week. This is our ‘family time,’ not sitting in a white wall room at the DHS office. That’s not connecting. That’s being watched and judged.”*

- Lived experience expert

Critically important to the goals of reunification and honoring cultural values is the need for families to connect free of bias. Individuals supervising family time should not judge the “quality” of the activities the family chooses. As long as child/youth safety is not compromised, the activity chosen for the family time is neutral.

A commonly reported example of judgement is snacks. Caseworkers, for instance should not judge the snacks (e.g., Cheetos versus celery sticks) provided by a parent as “less than” or “unacceptable” unless a demonstrable safety concern is there (e.g., cow’s milk for a 2-month-old).

Another common example of unwarranted judgement is screentime. For instance, a third-party provider should not judge the quality of parenting as “low” because a parent and child/youth choose to watch an age-appropriate video together or share in funny memes on social media.

**Rationale:** Fifty-eight percent of Colorado counties reported that family time most often occurred at the Department of Human Services (DHS). In contrast, narrative findings revealed nearly all parties agree that family time should not be artificial; it is an opportunity to preserve family strengths and bonds. National evidence shows that community-based settings and usual activities can help parents develop the skills they need to be successful long-term once reunified, reducing future risk of harm and re-involvement in child welfare.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Parents and children/youth should be consulted on what feels supportive and comfortable (e.g., a public space may cause undue stress for the youth). 2) Transportation and other practical supports (e.g., zoo passes) are critical to making this recommendation

feasible. 3) Activities and setting should vary based on child/youth age, parent goal, and cultural values. 4) Activities and setting should be diverse to reflect the usual ways families move through their lives and reduce burden. 5) Sometimes child/youth and parent preferences will not align; consider alternating ideas and identifying mutual options. 6) Reducing judgement and bias will require ongoing training and accountability among child welfare and other professionals.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendations C4](#) and [C5](#) for guidance on aligning structural supports.

Consult the [funding structures](#) section for opportunities to move resources toward this ideal.

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

**Standard:** Kin play an important role in achieving least restriction during family time. Preference for this option should be explored with parents, children/youth, and available kin. Challenging family dynamics and other logistics may prevent kin from being supervisors. Beyond supervision, kin should also be considered for other roles in family time, such as providing transportation.

**Description:** It is vital that the parent, child/youth, and kin are consulted before deciding to use kin to supervise. Some family dynamics may lend themselves more or less to kin serving as supervisors, based on the family’s history, the reasons for child welfare involvement, and where the child/youth is placed. Ensuring all are consulted on the supervisory arrangement will make family time best practices more feasible and sustainable. Kin can also be leveraged for other important roles, including transportation, providing a host home for family time, and debriefing with youth.

*“My grandchild is so attached to her mom, as most kids are, and then if I have to correct her mom when supervising, they [grandchild] get mad. So, it is just this big tension. And I am also caring for them [as a placement home], so it is extra hard. I still think this is the best way, but I don’t want to be the only relative doing it [supervision].”*

- Lived experience expert

**Rationale:** One of the biggest challenges identified in implementing HB23-1027 was the lack of kin to supervise, with 94% of counties reporting this as a barrier in some form. National literature supports use of kin for supervision as a driver of reunification success, and narrative findings show most parties agree this is an ideal, though it must be carefully navigated. For example, a commonly reported tension is that of caring for a relative’s child and then supervising that relative, which can fuel conflict and bias. Another challenge commonly experienced by kin is that

of being the placement home, the transporter, *and* the supervisor—all of which take time and money. This demonstrates the importance of building a “bench” of available kin supports.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Kin should not be forced to supervise. 2) Supervision of family time by kin should be explicitly presented as a choice without penalty when declined. It should be made clear that there are no consequences if they do not wish to supervise (e.g., aunt worried that if she says no, her niece will not remain placed with her). Similarly, parents should not be penalized for declining certain kin to supervise, but trade-offs (e.g., fewer options for weekend visits) should be made transparent. 3) Who meets the [definition](#) of “kin” will vary depending on person. For example, a parent’s new partner may be kin to the parent, but the child/youth may still view them as a stranger. 4) Feasibility of kin providing supervision increases when a “bench” of available kin supports is cultivated. The Colorado Family Involvement Continuum ([Colorado Kinnected Kinship Navigator program](#)) can be used to identify the wealth of roles kin may play.

An example of building a “bench” of kin to support family time: Grandma Betty is serving as the child’s placement. Grandpa Jo helps with transportation for family time. Uncle Jimmy helps supervise. Aunt Linda is a back-up supervisor when Uncle Jimmy has a work conflict. Neighbor Jillian also serves as a supervisor or helps with transportation, as needed.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C3](#) for guidance on compensating and supporting kin.

Consult [Recommendation C6](#) for guidance on building capacity through a bench of supervisors.

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

**Standard:** Group supervision and group monitoring can reduce staffing demands while ensuring parents have the support they need during family time. This can be best accomplished in spaces naturally conducive to multiple families and different types of activities, such as Family Resource Centers and local recreation centers. In implementing a group model, it is critical to consider family confidentiality and ensure families are able to opt-in.

**Description:** A one-on-one supervision or monitoring model increases the demand for available supervisors. This demand becomes even more burdensome when it is determined professional supervision (versus kin, for instance) is necessary. To reduce burden and better achieve best practices in frequency, duration, setting, and activities, group supervision in a community setting is a promising innovation. In addition to reducing staffing burden, this model is naturally conducive to real life and building parent skills (e.g., managing child behavior appropriately in

public settings). Group supervision can also widen parent support networks and serves as an opportunity to learn from peers, improving family functioning long-term. An opt-in (versus opt-out default) approach would need to be used to ensure parents and children/youth understand both the benefits and that some confidentiality would be lost, as all families involved would know that they are together because of their involvement with child welfare.

**Rationale:** Thirty-eight percent of counties reported workforce is not a strength for them in achieving family time quality and frequency; narrative findings strongly echoed this. Study findings indicated group supervision can improve staffing ratios and reduce resource needs. Many evidence-based family strengthening models (e.g., Circle of Parents) rely on group or peer components exactly because they build protective factors; such benefits can be extended through a group supervision model in family time.

**Key Considerations:** 1) The benefits of group supervision should be documented and highlighted to county leadership when exploring this model, including building family protective factors and cost efficiencies. 2) Consider family goals when deciding what families will most benefit from this model. For example, group supervision may be most appropriate when limited intervention by the supervisor is expected, or when parents are working on managing child behavior in a public environment. 3) Professional supervisors of group family time will need to be more experienced to maintain safety and effectively support families. 4) Group supervision should occur in settings that are naturally conducive to multiple families and group activities, such as parks, community centers, or designated family time centers. 5) Family Treatment Courts are set up so that a cohort of families will interact; this is a prime opportunity to build out a group supervision model. 6) If children/youth or parents choose not to opt-in, there should be no penalty.

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

**Standard:** Family time can be strengthened—and outcomes accelerated—when multiple types of family strengthening support are offered in a complementary way. The specific needs of parents (e.g., skill development), of children/youth (e.g., play therapy), and of the family network (e.g., economic supports) should be identified and supports offered to supplement family time.

**Description:** Family strengthening is key to success, both during the child welfare case and after child welfare involvement has ended. Family strengthening cannot occur solely within the family time plan. The family time plan is one of many plans a family may have during child welfare involvement. Other plans (e.g., full family services plan) likely identify family strengthening supports, such as home visiting programs to develop parenting skills (SafeCare), community groups to increase parent social connections (Circle of Parents), substance use disorder and mental health treatment, and concrete supports (e.g., Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children). Identifying opportunities to complement family time with family strengthening supports can help accelerate outcomes. Aligning content and logistics of family strengthening programs and family time is key. For example, if a parent is in a home

visiting program focused on parent-child relationships, family time activities and settings should be chosen to allow practice of newly developed skills. If a child has soccer near where a parent has therapy, explore opportunities to dovetail family time while family is in close proximity. A family applying for a community grant to help with car repairs may need support with the application; reliable transportation can promote more frequent and quality family time.

**Rationale:** There is a [robust body of literature](#) that shows the benefits of family strengthening for permanency, safety, child well-being, and adult well-being. Narrative findings from professionals, kin, and families alike called out family strengthening supports as essential to meeting goals of the child welfare case and moving families toward reunification. Not aligning the family time approach with the focus of other family strengthening supports was noted as a “missed opportunity.” Vice versa, narrative findings revealed that family time can surface the right supports families need, whether fixing a broken car or improving self-confidence in parenting..

**Key Considerations:** 1) The family time plan should be developed and revisited in tandem with other plans, such as the treatment plan. 2) Providers involved in family time should articulate family support needs to others on the case (e.g., third-party professional supervisor flagging a need for the caseworker) and should ask about other complementary supports for family time. 3) Family strengthening supports may be more financially intensive in the short-term, but they can help prevent child welfare system re-entry and create longer-term cost-offsets. 4) Providing services in a mutually reinforcing way requires coordination and communication.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C1](#) for guidance on shared messaging to improve coordination.

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

**Standard:** Family time generates information that can inform the child welfare case and the approach to family time. Information has the potential to be taken out of context and used to punish families. Information generated from family time should be interpreted by skilled individuals, in consultation with parents and children/youth. The expectation is to use information for learning and to communicate successes, including to the courts.

**Description:** Typical information generated during family time includes how a child/youth reacts, how a parent demonstrates certain skills, and barriers to attendance. This information requires context to interpret correctly. As such, it is important for individuals supervising family time to focus on

*“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

facts, rather than opinions, when communicating information to others on the case. It is also important that information be brought to multiple people who can help review and interpret, including professionals (e.g., child therapist to explain child regulatory behavior), parents (e.g., to explain that a phrase used is part of their culture), and youth (e.g., to explain they were agitated because they had a break up). A holistic understanding of the information is especially important when used to inform next steps, such as restricting family time or as a reason for termination of parental rights. A learning lens should be used by default, where information is communicated not just about deficits, but also strengths and growth areas.

**For example, a foster family reports that the 5-year-old placed with them cries and vomits after family time and argues that restrictions should be put in place because “seeing the parent is stressful.” Although stated as fact, this is the foster family’s interpretation. A professional is asked to interpret, and they find that it is not seeing the parent, but being separated from the parent, that is stressful. Also, transportation pushes back meal time, and the child is hungry and overtired after family time. These root causes show that restricting family time is not in the best interest of the child or the parent.**

**Rationale:** Parents and youth with lived experience shared many experiences of judgement for how they approach or interacted during family time. They reported fear in how their behavior would be “used against them” by the caseworker or judge. As documented in both interview narratives and national literature, this causes increased stress on parents and youth and can result in both parties shutting down for “fear of being watched” and “misunderstood.” Such stress and silencing defeats the purpose and benefits of family time.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Insights generated during family time should be shared with the family so they know where to grow and can be celebrated in their progress made. Sharing should be proactive, timely, and reflect their way of learning (e.g., need time to process vs. rapid feedback). 2) All information should be put into context and judgement on childrearing practices removed. Part of context is remembering family time is a snapshot and this is one piece of information. 3) Using a standard template to debrief and share information can create a learning mindset and reduce trauma by prompting first successes (e.g., three strengths) and then improvements (e.g., one growth point), while keeping information digestible. This has the added benefit of creating a clear record for court reporting. 4) Some counties may need to revisit their policies/procedures for sharing information to make this best practice feasible. This includes communication between parties outside of the courtroom. 5) Using a learning mindset does not mean safety concerns should be ignored; address safety concerns while still providing feedback for growth.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation B3](#) for guidance on removing judgement in activities and settings.

Consult [Recommendation B8](#) for guidance on the importance of coaching around family time.



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

**Standard:** Supportive coaching to parents before, during, and after family time should be available. Parents deserve time to debrief after family time, including receiving feedback on what went well and where they can improve. Feedback should be communicated proactively and directly with parents. Children/youth should also be offered processing supports, such as therapy or time to reflect on how family time is going.

**Description:** Supportive coaching can help the family work towards identified goals (e.g., managing strong emotions and child behavior) before, during, and after family time. Before family time, expectations can be set and the parent's goals for the day identified. During family time, coaching might look like offering alternatives to the parent's responses (e.g., "Instead of 'don't run,' try saying 'please walk.'"). After family time, coaching can focus on strengths and growth points. A similar approach can be taken for children/youth, depending on age. By reviewing information together, a positive feedback loop is created. This approach can also help reduce trauma by ensuring a "no surprises" motto. Information about family time included in other places (e.g., court reports, Family Engagement Meetings) should not be a surprise to parents; they should be previously consulted and engaged.

*"Family time is absolutely a key component to reunification! Everyone engaging in family time should be trained in some level of coaching and motivational interviewing."*

- Human services staff

**Rationale:** Study findings showed near consensus across all partners that the goals of family time are to work toward reunification, support positive parent-child interactions, improve parenting skills, promote life skills, and minimize or repair trauma. Coaching is an evidenced practice that can help achieve these goals. While coaching was used more often with parents alone, only 31% of counties reported using coaching around family time with *both* parents and children.

**Key Considerations:** 1) The supervisor does not have to be the one providing coaching. Coaching can be provided by a dedicated professional or another person prepared to help the family process and grow during family time. 2) When serving the role of coach, feedback should be focused on family time specifics, rather than other aspects of the case. For example, during the debrief after family time, the coach should communicate and discuss what they observed during the session, rather than discussing the parent's recent missed UA.

## C. Recommendations on Family Time Infrastructure

The third set of recommendations provides guidance on the infrastructural supports that must be built to ensure implementation of quality family time is feasible and sustainable.

### **Building a System-Wide Infrastructure for Family Time**

Because family time exists as part of the larger child welfare system, recommendations in this section focus on system-wide infrastructure components critical to achieving best practice recommendations for family time outlined in the first two sections.

The assumption is that infrastructure will be built over time and will not be an immediate reality. Further, it will require resourcing to make possible. As such, the third set of recommendations acts as a roadmap for intentional investment and capacity-building.

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

**Standard:** For cohesive implementation, standard communication and support materials should be developed for all parties who interact with family time. Professionally, this includes human services, judicial, legal, and third-party providers. Communication and support materials should be adapted for use with parents, children/youth, foster families, and kin. Consistent messaging across all materials and audiences is essential.

**Description:** Shared messaging and support materials are necessary to achieve a common mental model and ensure everyone is rowing in the same direction. Content should convey fundamental expectations of family time to all individuals involved in the development, implementation, or accountability of family time plans. For professionals, this will commonly take the form of training and reference materials (e.g., county procedures). It is important that non-professionals, such as kin providing supervision and foster families, also have support. However, they should not be held to the same rigor as professionals (e.g., intensive required training). Children, youth, and respondent parents also need materials that communicate their options and rights around family time. All materials should be tailored to the audience and their role in family time. While tailored, consistent messaging on the “what,” “why,” and “how” of family time is vital.

**Rationale:** Shared messaging can help bridge the gap from current to ideal practice. Most Colorado counties (77%) reported that they begin from the assumption that parents will require supervision in family time. Some implementation practices by counties also run counter to best practice ideals. For example, 58% of counties indicated that they consider a parent’s period of sobriety when deciding when to reduce supervision. Narrative findings revealed implementation gaps are in part due to a lack of shared understanding around family time expectations. This is



especially true when third-party providers are involved, with only 23% of counties reporting they most often pay for training for outside professional supervisors.

**Key Considerations:** 1) For professionals, training on family time should be incorporated into existing professional development opportunities when possible (e.g., Child Welfare Training System). 2) Implementation supports for non-professional supervisors (e.g., kin) should be low-burden and not required. A variety of options should be made available to them, at the beginning and throughout the case. 3) Consistent and accurate messaging, aligned with best practice standards, is an important ingredient for success.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C2](#) for guidance on defining roles and responsibilities.

Consult [Recommendation C3](#) for guidance on the unique support needs of kin who supervise.

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

**Standard:** There are different responsibilities in family time and these look different on each case. All parties involved in family time (e.g., parents, caseworker, professional and non-professional supervisors, foster families, and legal/judicial professionals) must understand their role and the role of others in fulfilling family time best practices. Roles should be revisited regularly to remain responsive to evolving needs.

**Description:** Responsibilities span from plan development, to making sure the plan happens, to gathering information, to reporting information. There are both general responsibilities (e.g., ensuring the family time plan is filed with the courts within 30 days) and case-specific responsibilities (e.g., transporting the child to family time). Counties should develop a list of typical responsibilities and roles (e.g., caseworker, judicial, kin, respondent parent) that can fulfill these. Specifics on roles and responsibilities can then be determined during development of the family time plan and revisited as the case evolves. A shared understanding of expectations for all individuals involved in family time should be established to promote transparency and accountability to best practice recommendations.

**Rationale:** Study findings revealed a clear lack of alignment across the many parties involved in family time, which results in confusion over roles and hinders implementation. For example, counties reported that a major barrier to initial contact within 72 hours of removal is the lack of prompt responses by others (e.g., families, judicial system, third-party providers) to get an option in place. Narrative findings illustrated that different parties on the case lacked clarity on their role and as a result, would often not be able to differentiate between “what is urgent and waiting on a response from me” versus “what is a heads up to me, but no action is needed.”

**Key Considerations:** 1) Colorado has already developed several resources related to roles and responsibilities in family time, such as letters to kin and expectation documents for respondent parents. These should be leveraged to identify where clarity in roles and responsibilities is missing. 2) Expectations around roles should be clearly communicated to everyone in a given case. For example, a caseworker should know expectations for kin, the kin should know expectations of judicial staff, and parents should know expectations of the caseworker. 3) As with other aspects of family time, revisiting roles and responsibilities is important. Family Engagement Meetings can be a prime opportunity to do this. 4) Roles and responsibilities should be determined based on the specifics of each case, as part of plan development.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation A9](#) on the importance of regularly revisiting the family time plan.

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

**Standard:** Kin are not child welfare professionals, and they should not be expected to take on caseworker responsibilities. They do have unique responsibilities in supervising and facilitating family time. Fulfilling their role requires tailored support. When there are challenging family dynamics, therapeutic supports should be offered to unpack underlying causes that may prevent kin from supervising, and to otherwise strengthen the parent’s family support network long-term.

**Description:** There are several administrative- and compliance-oriented pieces to set up family time. Common ones include scheduling the family time, arranging transportation, and ensuring the location is appropriate. Such responsibilities are not the responsibility of kin supervising family time, though kin may choose to support these identified needs. To help them best fulfill their unique role as supervisors, kin require initial and ongoing support.

This includes making clear expectations and having a professional to reach out to for in-the-moment support or debriefing after family time. Effectively supporting kin in supervising family time will expand opportunities to achieve the ideal of a community-based model of family time.

*“I was just kind of winging it [supervising family time as a kin relative]. I wanted more support, but DHS told me they don’t offer that kind of thing to us [grandparents].”*

- Lived experience expert

**Rationale:** Finding kin to supervise was a reported barrier to implementing family time for 94% of Colorado counties. Supervising family time can be a significant undertaking, yet half of Colorado counties indicated that paying for kin to supervise was “never” allowed. Only 38% of counties said they can often pay for training for kin. Narrative findings revealed that human services staff have concerns over requiring training or asking too much of kin when orienting them to

supervision. Yet, kin themselves commonly report wanting more support and training so they “don’t miss anything” and can “best help the family” while “reducing [their own] anxiety.”

**Key Considerations:** 1) Priority topics for kin providing supervision include setting boundaries, identifying when to intervene during family time, expectations for activities during family time, and what professional(s) are available to support them in this role. 2) Kin are being asked to take on supervision responsibilities previously held by paid professionals. This takes time and resources from their own lives. Whenever possible, compensation for the time they take learning their role and then supervising family time should be provided. 3) Kin acting as supervisors can reduce burden on professionals, freeing them up to do other activities specific to their caseload. 4) When kin express need to temporarily or permanently pause supervisory responsibilities, it is important that this is communicated to the family in a way that does not blame kin and hurt relationships further. 5) It should be made clear to kin that pausing supervision responsibilities does not jeopardize their other relationships with the case (e.g., as the placement home).

### Related Recommendations

Consult the [funding structures](#) section to better understand opportunities to pay kin.

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

**Standard:** Assisting parents with transportation can minimize missed family time, promote greater frequency of family time, and build parental skills. Assisting with transportation goes beyond direct dollars to also account for creative support mechanisms (e.g., skill building around public transportation) that can help families build lasting foundations.

**Description:** What is done in family time has a significant impact on reunification and the family’s long-term success. Transportation is a key example of this. Transportation not only helps make family time feasible, but it can build their capacity to manage transportation needs in the longer term, when the case has closed.

Transportation support may include helping the parent secure reliable transportation (e.g., connecting the family with a community resource for affordable car repairs), gas vouchers (especially when vast geographic separation results in extra burden), city bus passes and skill-building on how to use, and asking neighbors or other supports to provide a reliable ride for the parent. Providing transportation to parents is a key lever to reducing missed family time and achieving best practice standards around frequency.

*“Transportation is always a barrier. We do a pretty good job at transporting kiddos, but not parents. Why don’t they deserve our support too?”*

- Human services staff

**Rationale:** Eighty-seven percent of Colorado counties indicated that parent transportation is a barrier to family time, yet less than half of counties (42%) indicated that parent transportation is

“always” an allowable cost under current funding. Narrative findings echoed this, with transportation repeatedly cited across all parties as a prime barrier to improving the frequency of family time and making sure usual parent and child/youth activities can occur.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Rather than trying to get one or more children/youth to the parent’s location, or children/youth and parents alike to a different location, prioritize concrete support for parents getting to their children. 2) Parents should also be supported with transportation after family time to ensure other obligations are not unduly impacted. 3) Explore options for parent transportation as early as possible and develop a reliable plan. Some counties have moved to a model of dedicated staff to ensure reliable transportation, such as a transportation specialist. Other counties have leaned into technical solutions to improve reliability, such as rideshare apps, CarePortal, and HopSkipDrive app for youth. 4) Kin should not be overly burdened with transportation asks, especially if also serving as a family time supervisor or placement. Cultivating multiple options for parent transportation promotes feasibility.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation A8](#) for guidance on reducing barriers to missed family time.

Consult the [funding structures](#) section to explore opportunities to pay for transportation.

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

**Standard:** Family time should be scheduled with consideration for the very high demands placed on parents involved in a dependency and neglect case, in addition to usual life obligations. Family time should not overlap with other essential obligations and when possible, should be done adjacent to other activities that may be concentrated in a shared location. Child/youth activities should also be considered when scheduling family time. Family time should not conflict with school hours. Extracurricular activities are a prime opportunity for additional family time.

**Description:** Family time is just as essential to the child welfare case as other elements of the treatment plan, and scheduling approaches should treat it accordingly. This means setting realistic schedules for family time that consider other obligations of parents and children/youth. Without realistic scheduling, missed family time is more likely, and best practice standards for frequency cannot be achieved. In addition to maintaining usual life obligations (e.g., work), parents have heavy additional demands placed on their time due to child welfare involvement. Often times, the treatment plan alone can result in dozens of appointments each week. Personal care needs of children/youth (e.g., eating a timely dinner), obligations (e.g., school hours), and desires (e.g., staying involved in volleyball) should be considered as well when scheduling.

**Rationale:** Most Colorado counties are respecting child/youth obligations. Sixty percent of counties rarely or never took school-aged children out of school for family time. Ninety percent of counties provided attendance at children’s school events as a family time opportunity at least sometimes. Narrative findings, however, revealed that youth felt pressured to choose between family time or another activity, such as sports or youth group, commonly due to transportation barriers. Parental schedules can be more complex and options for supervised family time outside of traditional workdays are limited, often due to a reliance on professional (versus kin) supervisors. Thirty-five percent of counties indicated that weekend family time was rarely or never available, and only 29% of counties are most often able to use kin for supervision.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Using kin to supervise family time can remove many barriers to realistic scheduling simply by expanding the available hours and days family time can occur. 2) Using more community-based settings can also improve realistic scheduling because facilities (e.g., DHS office) have more limited hours of availability (than a park, for example). 3) Families are best equipped to understand their own schedules, and planning around the family rather than centering provider availability will mean there are fewer logistical barriers to frequent and consistent family time. 4) Travel time between parent and child/youth activities must be considered when scheduling family time. This is especially true when parents and children/youth are living far apart. Providing transportation supports to expedite travel time (e.g., direct ride versus multiple buses) can help. 5) Holding family time in a community-based setting close to other obligations can improve feasibility. 6) Realistic scheduling does not mean perfect scheduling. This is about best options within limitations and being creative with solutions.

*“I tried to tell my caseworker ‘Hey, that time is really hard for me. I have treatment around then and the bus is almost always late.’ I told her, but she didn’t listen. Then I was late to family time, and they used that against me.”*

- Lived experience expert

**An example of realistic scheduling:** There is a one-hour opportunity for family time every Tuesday and Thursday from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m., which works for the youth and the parent. However, the parent does not end therapy until 3:50 p.m., so they need a close location. There is a park nearby that the family loves, and the youth is able to get a ride from her aunt after school ends at 3:30 p.m. to get to the park by 4 p.m. This is a win-win for all and maximizes the available shared hour while respecting other obligations.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendations A1, B3,](#) and [B4](#) for guidance on restriction, supervisor, and settings.

Consult [Recommendation C4](#) for guidance on transportation supports.

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

**Standard:** A family time plan need not have a singular supervisor. Family time plans should identify multiple supervisors available to support the family, depending on activity, location, and time. Using a “bench of supervisors” reduces burden on any one supervisor and increases capacity for more frequent family time that reflects usual family activities and cultural values.

**Description:** Both professionals and non-professionals have different availability and constraints in supervising family time. While county human services staff are not typically available for evening or weekend supervision, a grandparent may be. If going to a faith-based event is a named priority, a member of the church may be the most culturally appropriate supervisor. By proactively identifying multiple options for supervisors, capacity is built to increase the frequency of family time, expand outside of traditional working hours, and improve opportunity for the family to connect around activities and events of importance.

**Rationale:** Overnight and multi-day family time is rare in Colorado – over half of Colorado’s counties provided this in less than 10% of cases. Weekend family time is also limited, especially for younger children, and 35% of counties reported this rarely or never occurs. Narrative findings indicated that without weekend, evening, and multi-day availability, preservation of family values and activities is directly hurt and options for strengthening relationships become limited.

**Key Considerations:** 1) To create a relevant bench of supervisors, start with what is most important to the family in values, activities, and key events. This will help inform who might be appropriate and available to supervise. 2) Stack the bench with supervisors at varying levels of restrictiveness, to account for family progress during a case. Even if a family is at a higher level of restriction to start and requires county staff to supervise, do not assume they will always be required. Cultivate kin and other less restrictive options early so that when a family progresses, those options are ready to be tagged in. 3) Do not automatically count out “one-time” or “rare” supervisors. If a family has an upcoming faith-based event that only occurs once a year, this may require a unique supervisor that is culturally matched and provides supervision just for this event.

### **Related Recommendations**

Consult Recommendations [B4 and C3](#) for guidance on using kin in the bench of supervisors.

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

**Standard:** When there is more than one child/youth removed from the home, placement together should be prioritized. Placing siblings together can facilitate sibling-to-sibling bonding

and improve feasibility of frequent family time with parents. Placing children/youth in the same geographic areas as their parents will also help improve frequent family time and better maintain the family's long-term ties with their community.

**Description:** Sibling co-placement creates natural opportunities for siblings to maintain their relationships and, as a result, reduces this need within the family time plan. If siblings cannot be directly placed together, placing them in geographic proximity to one another can help improve frequent connection as it reduces transportation barriers. Placing siblings near parents is similarly important to improve frequent family time by reducing transportation barriers and other practical challenges, including travel time and distance. Keeping families in their community of choice helps them integrate their real life with their progress on the child welfare case, strengthening their supports long-term. When placement options are limited and children/youth are placed at great distance from their parents, a plan for using virtual options to maintain regularity in family time becomes critical.

**Rationale:** Study findings showed travel distance is a leading barrier to frequent family time in the least restrictive setting. This was especially pronounced for rural counties. Travel needs, logistical concerns, and the ability to engage usual family activities are heightened when siblings are in multiple placements. A 2020 Children's Bureau study noted that a major practice concern is that minimal or no family time occurs between siblings when they are placed separately.<sup>20</sup>

**Key Considerations:** 1) In some cases, sibling co-placement is not possible (e.g., different biological fathers and thus different paternal relatives caring for the children). In this scenario, the family time plan should prioritize supports to reduce travel and the extra logistical burdens. 2) When children cannot be physically placed near parents, it is important that parents are still able to receive services in their community so they can continue using those long-term. For example, having a parent use a therapist three hours away from their home just to facilitate an extra family time session may not be the best long-term trade-off. 3) When proximate placements of siblings and parents is not feasible (e.g., lack of available caregivers and rural area spread), virtual options to supplement in-person family time become even more important. Covering virtual costs for the placement home is important for feasibility and sustainability.

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

**Standard:** In Trails, wording and documentation should be aligned to the language and requirements of current family time statute, rule, and best practice recommendations. Trails should be modified to consistently capture key elements of family time so implementation trends can be monitored over time and evidence on effectiveness built.

**Description:** Trails is Colorado's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System. It is an administrative system used firstly for case management and documentation. Data from Trails can also be used for evidence building and quality improvement. As such, it is vital that information



about family time is consistently and accurately entered across all counties. With passage of [HB23-1027](#), [CRS 7.304.64](#) requires the family time plan be entered into Trails with specified components. Updating language (e.g., “visitation” to “family time”) as well as ensuring proper functionality (e.g., identifying kin versus professional supervisors) is important to ensure the data system is aligned with best practices and changes in law.

**Rationale:** Forty percent of Colorado counties identified using data to improve family time as “not a strength.” Counties that systematically reviewed their data related to family time primarily used it to look at trends in scheduled time, missed family time, and staffing. Implementation of HB23-1027 was identified as a leading opportunity to improve data use to drive best practices in family time, with updates to Trails being identified as the major need to allow empirical inquiry. Counties reported they were “hungry” for the opportunity to more robustly examine their data for continuous quality improvement and understand how their practices compare to others statewide. However, they did not feel Trails was conducive to this and struggled to know where and how to enter family time information. Counties also recommended using Trails data to measure progress on whether best practices were being achieved, using a third-party evaluator.

**Key Considerations:** 1) Ensure a consistent place to document the family time plan in Trails and train counties. 2) To promote shared understanding and family engagement, identify opportunities for the family time plan to be pulled out of the system and given to families and others on the case. 3) Identify opportunities at county and state levels to use data on family time to promote continuous improvement and strategic learning. 4) The [technical report](#) includes recommendations for changes to Trails based on this study.

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

**Standard:** Incarceration poses unique challenges to implementing family time best practices, particularly for who can supervise, setting, and frequency. The de-centralized nature of human services and corrections in Colorado adds to this issue and leads to inconsistencies. A collaborative protocol between corrections and county human services departments should be developed that outlines standard topics to be agreed upon for that facility and the surrounding counties. By pre-determining the expected approach, less time will be wasted in re-negotiating terms each time the need arises.

**Description:** There are standard components of family time that will need to be addressed for every family that is incarcerated. This includes who can supervise (e.g., kin or professionals only) and where (e.g., monitored room or kid-friendly room) in the facility. Identifying options for virtual family time is also a standard component, given the frequency of in-person family time is expected to be less with the additional logistical burden that comes with secure facilities. Having a collaborative protocol that addresses standard pieces can help improve consistency of family



time while reducing inefficiencies. As a collaborative protocol, it is a non-legally-binding contract that should be updated based on what is working well and what is not.

**Rationale:** [Senate Bill \(SB\) 23-039](#), Reduce Child and Incarcerated Parent Separation, went into effect on January 1, 2024. This act requires that rules are promulgated to facilitate communication and family time between children and their parents that are incarcerated. It also requires the court and the prison or jail to facilitate the parent’s attendance and participation in proceedings for the dependency and neglect case, including family time. Study findings indicate that this law has furthered the alignment and coordination efforts already underway between county human services and jails and prisons in their area. Concurrent to progress made by SB23-039 are this study’s findings that family time with incarcerated parents is a major challenge and sometimes nearly impossible to make happen. Barriers reported include: a) the rigidity of schedules within jails/prisons, which may be at odds with child/youth schedules; b) lack of clear communication from and with jails/prisons; c) lack of appropriate space in jails/prisons to conduct family time; d) unclear requirements about videoconferencing platforms; and e) ability to pay for incurred costs, both in who covers costs and acceptable forms of payment.

*“Each county jail has a different system. But we most often work with two or three. So, we try to set expectations around who can supervise, how do we get in, how can we do virtual calls. So, families, the jails, and us [caseworkers] know what to expect.”*

- Human services staff

**Key Considerations:** 1) Topics that should be included in the collaborative protocol are: a) allowable format(s) of visits, including any virtual platform used; b) high-level process for arranging family time; c) what individuals are allowed (or required) to be present for family time; d) how costs are covered; and e) who are the point persons (contacts) on each side (human services, corrections). 2) Leadership and staff from both human services and corrections must have a shared understanding of the “why” and “what” of family time best practices. County-level Sheriff’s Offices and the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC) are key leaders in making this recommendation a reality. 3) Counties that have made progress in implementing family time with incarcerated parents identified the importance of having a point person on each side of the agreement. 4) Inherently, incarceration places limits on parent schedules and ability to attend family time. These limitations should not reflect negatively on the parent when reporting on case progress or family time observations in court reports or other documentation.

### Related Recommendations

Consult [Recommendation C1](#) for guidance on shared communication and materials.

## Building Capacity for Sustained Implementation

Family time is an essential component of a child welfare case and a fundamental right of families. As such, it is imperative that adequate funding and other resources are available to support implementation. This study uncovered three categories of costs in family time, as well as potential funding sources and innovative ideas for resourcing. Together, this information provides a starting place for the state and counties to develop a funding structure to achieve best practice recommendations.

Developing a robust funding structure for family time is not just about adding new dollars. This is also about cost re-allocation, cost offset, and cost savings, including those achieved by reducing child welfare re-entry rates through quality family time. Ensuring adequate funding for family time is not only vital to achieving best practice recommendations, but it can help set families up for long-term success when reunification happens.

### Costs to Provide Quality Family Time

Three categories of costs—aligned with best practice standards—emerged from this study:

- **Personnel/Staffing Costs:** Funds needed to pay for individuals' time.
- **Direct Costs:** Costs incurred in preparation for, during, or after family time.
- **Implementation Costs:** Activities or resources needed to ensure consistency and quality in delivery of family time across Colorado.

Specific costs in these categories are described in Table 5, along with how often these expenses are typically allowed and used under existing practice; the target (or ideal) level of use; and other cost considerations (e.g., how costs relate to one another or recommendations above). Costs may be incurred by county departments of human services, state agencies, other systems (e.g., criminal justice), or non-governmental entities (e.g., Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children [CASA] and family resource center).

### Funding Streams or Sources

It is important to consider multiple funding sources to cover costs. The ability to braid and blend funds will better ensure adequate resourcing levels. Study findings make clear that current funding levels are a barrier to implementing quality family time; 67% of Colorado counties reported funding limitations. In addition to ensuring enough dollars, counties also identified the need for greater flexibility in how available funding can be allocated and used.

The two primary sources of funding currently used to fund family time activities are the Child Welfare Block Grant and Core Services. Additional potential funding streams were identified through the county survey and subject matter expert interviews. Table 6 synthesizes these expansive funding possibilities.

**Table 5. Costs to Provide Quality Family Time**

<b>Cost Considerations Across All Types of Professional Supervisors</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If providing group supervision, the cost per hour (i.e., wage) will be higher, but total cost may be decreased due to fewer individuals being paid.</li> <li>• Scheduling sibling time often falls on foster or kin placement, rather than with a professional; having a professional take on this role may increase cost, but would reduce burden on placements and could facilitate more frequent sibling time.</li> <li>• Weekend and evening availability is limited in part because it requires overtime from professional supervisors. This cost can be offset by using kin to supervise and expand availability of family time.</li> <li>• Professional supervisors also need ongoing training, professional development, and mental health support to address secondary trauma, burnout, and culturally responsive service delivery. These costs are included under infrastructure.</li> </ul>					

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<b>Personnel/Staffing Costs</b>					
<b>Third-party supervisors.</b>	Salary/reimbursement for hours spent supervising family time; hours and resources spent transporting child/youth, parents, and self; hours spent following up and debriefing with parents after family time; and hours spent	Often covered for family time that is held as planned; rarely covered for missed family time.	Sometimes to often.	Sometimes.	Missed family time is rarely covered in the salary/hourly rate costs paid to third-party providers. The time, however, is still carved out by the professional and, thus, should be covered. Costs for missed family time are directly tied to a cancellation/no-show rate, and these costs can be reduced by allocating more resources to family engagement and exploration of underlying causes behind missed family time.

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
	documenting family time (e.g., court reports, assessments, and family engagement meetings).				Counties engaging third-party supervisors should consider flat rate vs. fee-for-service contracts. Flat rate contracts give more flexibility for third-party providers to be responsive (e.g., wrapping in costs for canceled or missed family time, extending family time, and coaching).
<b>Human services department-based supervisors: caseworkers, case-aids, and social workers.</b>	Salary for hours spent supervising family time; hours and resources spent transporting child/youth, parents, and self; hours spent scheduling and coordinating; hours spent following up and debriefing with parents after family time; and hours spent documenting family time (e.g., court reports, assessments, and family engagement meetings).	Often.	Often.	Rarely.	<p>Caseworkers have a full plate and adding family time supervision can make the role too expansive, thus causing burnout. Reducing their role in supervising family time (and therefore associated costs) can reduce burnout while also freeing up dollars to fund other types of supervisors.</p> <p>The burden on department staff is most pronounced in rural areas and small counties, where caseworkers “do it all” when it comes to family time, including supervision, logistics, and transportation.</p>

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<b>Human services department-based supervisors: family time staff.</b>	Salary for hours spent supervising family time; hours and resources spent transporting child/youth and parents; hours spent scheduling and coordinating; hours spent following up and debriefing with parents after family time; and hours spent documenting family time (e.g., court reports, assessments, and family engagement meetings).	Often.	Rarely to sometimes.	Sometimes.	<p>Dedicated family time staff are used in some counties. Small and rural counties use them less often, as it may be challenging to justify a dedicated family time staff member with smaller caseloads. In these areas, proportionally more resources will be used for other supervisors (i.e., third-party or kin who supervise in less restrictive cases, or caseworkers in more restrictive cases).</p> <p>Even if direct supervision of family time by staff is reduced, other expenses are still incurred. This includes staffing specialized positions, such as a dedicated transportation specialist, or positioning a family time staff member at the courthouse to coordinate teams and parents real-time.</p> <p>Using dedicated family time staff may reduce the burden placed on caseworkers or replace costs spent on third-party supervisors.</p>

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<b>Kin acting as family time supervisors.</b>	Stipends for hours spent supervising family time; hours spent orienting and learning about family time; hours and resources spent transporting child/youth parents, and self; hours spent scheduling and coordinating; hours spent following up and debriefing with parents after family time; and hours spent documenting family time (e.g., court reports and family engagement meetings).	Rarely.	Sometimes.	Often.	<p>Compensation for kin may be most successful as a stipend to honor the increased effort, versus a direct hourly rate. This is because structuring payment as “employees” of the department creates new hurdles and administrative burdens. Instead, structuring payment may take the form of stipends and reimbursements, similar to how foster family expectations and payment occurs.</p> <p>Increased use of kin as supervisors would decrease the demand for department-based or third-party supervisors and, thus, these funds could be re-allocated to provide stipends to kin to supervise.</p> <p>Kin acting as supervisors is not a one-to-one exchange for professional supervision. To be successful, kin will need increased support, including consultation and coaching on effective techniques, how to set boundaries, and similar topics. This will incur some professional staff time costs, but increasing kin for supervision is likely to reduce overall costs while improving family time.</p>

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
					For kin who choose to serve as the placement and the family time supervisor, funding for family time activities could be considered as part of kinship navigation programs (e.g., Colorado Kinconnected) or by leveraging increased funding from legislation such as <a href="#">SB24-008</a> , Kinship Foster Care Homes.
<b>Therapeutic supervisors.</b>	Salary/reimbursement for hours spent supervising family time; hours spent scheduling and coordinating; hours spent following up and debriefing with parents after family time; and hours spent documenting family time (e.g., court reports and family engagement meetings).	Not examined.	Often.	Sometimes.	<p>In practice, therapeutic supervision is commonly treated as the most restrictive type and is often used by counties in Colorado. In moving toward best practice standards, this role is likely to be reduced and replaced by other supervisor types, as well as supportive family and individual therapy options.</p> <p>Exact costs associated with therapeutic supervision depend on provider type (e.g., therapist versus psychiatrist) and where (e.g., DHS office versus clinic).</p>



Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<p><b>Safety and security personnel: probation officer, guard, and other law enforcement.</b></p>	<p>Salary/reimbursement for hours spent providing safety and security, in order for family time to occur (e.g., providing DHS building security after hours; presence during family time at jail/prison; and time spent arranging family time and schedule to be present).</p>	<p>Sometimes.</p>	<p>Sometimes.</p>	<p>Rarely.</p>	<p>Safety and security personnel are not typically supervisors, but may be required for family time to safely occur.</p> <p>Some costs will be shared with the criminal justice system (e.g., prison guard). When security is needed, consider establishing a contract with local law enforcement (e.g., Sheriff’s Office).</p> <p>Monitored facilities are the most restrictive setting and should be rarely used. Reducing costs associated with monitored facilities (e.g., eliminating need for an after-hours security guard) will allow resources to be put toward less restrictive supervision options (e.g., dollars saved are re-allocated toward kin stipends).</p> <p>When a monitored space is required, salaries for any law enforcement or other security present are likely to be higher on weekends and evenings.</p>

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<b>Parent coaching and parenting skill development.</b>	<p>Salary/reimbursement for hours spent on parent coaching and skill development before, during, and after family time.</p> <p>Connecting parents to existing evidence-based programs in their community.</p>	Often.	Often.	Often.	<p>Parent coaching and other methods of supporting skill development are critical to developing parental knowledge of caregiving and child development, both of which contribute to longer-term family strengthening. Ensuring parent coaching and skill development is integrated into family time can help decrease system costs over time by reducing re-entry.</p> <p>Parent coaching and skill development can be done by many roles. Taking time to connect parents to existing evidence-based programs, including home visiting (e.g., Healthy Families America), can also help share the burden and create long-term support networks.</p>
<b>Direct Costs</b>					
<b>Access to community-based activities and locations.</b>	Family resource centers; community rec center pass; zoo admission; and tickets to community events.	Sometimes to often.	Sometimes to often.	Often.	Free options for community-based activities exist, but it may be challenging to spend the full duration of family time in these locations (e.g., libraries) or because they are inaccessible in some months (e.g., parks in winter). Further, not all locations match the activities that parents and children/youth desire to strengthen ties (e.g., family sports time and movie time). Ensuring dollars are available to cover the cost of activities is key

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
					to ensuring family time reflects normal family activities and cultural values. Direct costs can be reduced by arranging organizational discounts through local human services departments or other community-based entities (e.g., Family Resource Centers).
<b>Dedicated family time space at human services departments.</b>	Kitchen or playroom reserved for family time.	Often.	Sometimes to often.	Rarely to sometimes.	Human services departments are among the most restrictive settings for family time. While in some cases these will still be the best option for families in the short term, operating under a least restrictive ideal will reduce the use of department facilities. These funds can be shifted to address other costs that will increase, such as paying for community-based spaces and activities.
<b>Monitored facility space for family time.</b>	Jail or prison visiting space and treatment facility.	Often.	Rarely to sometimes.	Rarely to sometimes.	<p>Some monitored spaces are managed and paid for by other organizations (e.g., a prison or a hospital). The cost is typically absorbed by the entity itself.</p> <p>Monitored facilities are the most restrictive setting for family time. While in some cases these will still be the best or only option for families in the short term (e.g., while a parent is seeking in-patient treatment), operating under a least restrictive ideal will reduce the</p>

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
					use of monitored facilities and, thus, costs incurred.
<b>Food and personal care during family time.</b>	Snacks, meals, and diapers.	Sometimes.	Sometimes.	Often.	Currently, this cost is variably incurred by the child welfare system and/or by the parent. Ensuring dollars are available to pay for necessary supplies will facilitate higher quality family time and allow parents to better focus on the purpose of family time—connecting with their child/youth.
<b>Transportation support for parents.</b>	Gas card, bus pass, rideshare, CarePortal, help with car repairs or connecting families to resources/grants that can help with repairs, and contracted transportation specialists.	Sometimes.	Sometimes.	Often.	<p>Transportation is consistently identified as a major barrier to achieving regular family time. Transportation costs incurred by parents are commonly not covered. Ensuring reliable transportation can help remove access barriers and reduce late arrivals while also reducing costs spent on missed family time.</p> <p>It is important that transportation methods chosen are feasible for the parent and do not pose an undue burden, even if the cost is higher. Covering transportation to and from family time is the expectation.</p>
<b>Transportation support for child/youth.</b>	Gas cards, bus vouchers, HopSkipDrive, CarePortal, and	Often.	Often.	Often.	Compared to parents, transportation costs for children and youth are more likely to be covered. While funding should be sustained,

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
	contracted transportation specialists.				<p>methods to pay for child/youth transportation should be expanded. For example, if kinship foster homes provide transportation, consider leveraging funds from kinship navigation programs (e.g., Colorado Kinconnected) or legislation such as <a href="#">SB24-008</a>, Kinship Foster Care Homes.</p> <p>If the location can be collaboratively determined by the parent, supervisor, and individual transporting the child/youth, rather than at a set location like a county office, the location is more likely to be feasible and efficient for parents and children/youth.</p>
<b>Offsetting lost wages incurred by parents.</b>	Lost wages due to family time scheduled during work hours.	Rarely.	Rarely.	Rarely.	<p>This cost is not typically covered for families for whom the only supervised family time options are during regular working hours. Moving towards a community-based model for family time should decrease this need. Regardless of supervisor or level of restriction, family time should not be scheduled during a parent’s working hours whenever possible.</p>
<b>Video services for family time with incarcerated parents.</b>	Prison video call platforms (e.g., Securis).	Sometimes to often.	Rarely to sometimes.	Sometimes to often.	<p>This cost is limited to respondent parents incarcerated during a child welfare case and the family time practice. Procedures for family time with incarcerated parents are relatively new for most counties or non-existent. At this</p>



Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
					<p>point, most only offer virtual family time; the costs associated with these video platforms are fairly new to the system. As family time becomes more widely available to incarcerated parents, video service costs may increase due to expanded reach.</p> <p>Vouchers for video services may need to be provided to individuals supervising rather than holding a single county-level video platform payment account; multiple accounts may have additional implementation expenses relative to a single account.</p> <p>Counties may have more straightforward ways to fund video calls for different types of supervisors. For example, this cost is sometimes covered for foster families and caseworkers, but not for kin. Ensuring consistent coverage across supervisor types is critical to success.</p>
<b>Implementation Costs</b>					
<b>Development and provision of communication materials and</b>	Develop online and in-person training; develop communication resources; develop orientation guides and	Often for employed staff; sometimes for kin; and	Sometimes.	Often.	While training costs are regularly covered for department-based staff, increased funding is needed to support all parties who are responsible for ensuring quality family time. This includes, but is not limited to,

Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
<p><b>implementation supports on best practices for all involved in family time.</b></p>	<p>other implementation materials; provide training and keep resources up-to-date; and provide ongoing professional development, coaching, and consultation.</p>	<p>rarely for third-party providers.</p>			<p>department staff, kin, third-party providers, foster parents, respondent parents and children/youth, legal and judicial professionals, CASA, and Family Engagement Meeting facilitators.</p> <p>Costs associated with shared messaging and implementation supports should look different depending on audience and their role. For example, training on family time for human services staff is required and extensive; costs are thus higher. Providing support to kin should be low-burden and responsive to individual needs; costs may thus be lower.</p> <p>This category includes both up-front (development of materials and training) and ongoing (provision of implementation supports, updating materials) costs. Investment in this category will create savings in personnel time otherwise lost due to lack of clarity and misalignment across roles. Adequate resourcing to orient and support all involved in family time is critical to achieve the ideal of a community-based model for family time.</p>





Cost	Examples	Current Level of Coverage	Current Use of Resource	Target Use of Resource	Cost Considerations
					<p>This category also includes ongoing professional development opportunities, as well as ongoing coaching and consultation. Specific resources for secondary trauma, burnout, and culturally responsive service delivery should be covered.</p>
<p><b>Family search and engagement specific to family time.</b></p>	<p>Time spent identifying kin for placement, supervision, and other forms of support (e.g., host, transportation) for quality and regular family time.</p>	<p>Often.</p>	<p>Sometimes.</p>	<p>Often.</p>	<p>Family search and engagement is done in a child welfare case firstly to identify possible kin placement(s). Training staff on how to use the family search and engagement process not only to identify placement options, but other roles in family time, can help expand the bench of available kin supports.</p> <p>Increased resources dedicated to identifying family members who are willing to host, supervise, transport, or otherwise facilitate family time will enable more kin supervision options. This will reduce the resources needed for professional supervision and offset costs.</p> <p>By identifying a bench of kin supports, immediacy of family time after removal and availability of kin over time may improve. This would contribute to more regular family time as well as opportunities for overnight and weekend interactions.</p>

**Table 6. Potential Funding Sources and Recommended Uses for Family Time**

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
<b>Frequently Used</b>			
<b>Core Services funds.</b>	90% (n = 43)	Core Services Program was established in 1994 to provide strength-based resources and support to families when children and youth are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement, in need of services to return home or to maintain a placement in the least restrictive setting possible. There are ten designated types of family preservation services that can be covered by Core Services funds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department staff supervision.</li> <li>• Third-party supervision.</li> <li>• Kin stipends and reimbursement.</li> <li>• Therapeutic supervision.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> <li>• Implementation materials.</li> <li>• Supplies (e.g., food) and activity costs (e.g., zoo) during family time.</li> <li>• Transportation to/from family time.</li> </ul>
<b>Child Welfare Block Grant funds.</b>	88% (n = 42)	<p>The largest allocation of funds used for child welfare, consisting of 20% local funds and 80% General Fund/federal funds split.</p> <p>Can be used for administration, out-of-home placements, and other child welfare-related services and activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department staff supervision.</li> <li>• Third-party supervisors.</li> <li>• Kin stipends and reimbursement.</li> <li>• Therapeutic supervisors.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> </ul>

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
<b>Rarely Used</b>			
<b>Title IV-E Foster Care Payments.</b>	29% (n = 14)	Federal source that reimburses states for a portion of costs associated with services for eligible children, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative costs, such as case planning and review; activities on behalf of children in foster care; and</li> <li>• Expenses related to training staff and foster parents.</li> </ul> Characteristics of eligible children: in out-of-home placements; home from which they were removed meets financial benchmark; entered care through judicial determination or voluntary placement; and in a licensed or approved foster care placement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation materials.</li> <li>• Transportation to/from family time.</li> <li>• Supplies (e.g., food) and activity costs (e.g., zoo) during family time.</li> <li>• Time spent coordinating partners and scheduling.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborative Management Program (CMP) funds.</b>	25% (n = 12)	State-level program that funds local collaborative management structures and processes that bring together agencies and services for at-risk, high systems-use children, youth, and families. In State Fiscal Year 2024, 50 of Colorado’s 64 counties participated in CMP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation materials.</li> <li>• Transportation to/from family time.</li> <li>• Kin stipends and reimbursements.</li> <li>• Time spent coordinating partners and scheduling.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> </ul>

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
		CMP funds can be used to promote cross-service alignment and to achieve positive outcomes for children and families, particularly those in the child welfare system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supplies (e.g., food) and activity costs (e.g., zoo) during family time.</li> </ul>
<b>Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).</b>	19% (n = 9)	CASA programs and volunteers advocate for children/youth in a child welfare case.  While some counties indicate they use CASA funds to directly pay for family time, CASA may also provide in-kind resources that support family time, such as transportation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing training for CASA volunteers.</li> <li>Transportation to/from family time (child/youth focused).</li> </ul>
<b>Title IV-E Adoption Assistance.</b>	13% (n = 6)	Federal source that reimburses state for a portion of costs associated with adoption assistance, including expenses related to training staff and foster parents.  Children/youth are eligible if they have “special needs”(i.e. have characteristics that make it more difficult to find an adoptive home for a child/youth).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation materials for foster families and staff.</li> </ul>
<b>Title IV-A Temporary Assistance for</b>	13% (n = 6)	Federal block grant; in addition to providing cash assistance to families with low incomes, may be used to fund foster care for children ineligible for Title IV-E. Uses include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kin stipends and reimbursements, especially if also placement.</li> <li>Professional supervision.</li> </ul>

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
<b>Needy Families (TANF).</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relative foster care payments.</li> <li>• Family preservation services.</li> <li>• Services provided to children/youth and families involved in the child welfare system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation to/from family time.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> <li>• Time spent coordinating partners and scheduling.</li> <li>• Supplies (e.g., food) and activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Title XIX Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, or Social Security Administration.</b>	13% (n = 6)	<p>Children/youth eligible for Title IV-E Foster Care, Adoption, or Guardianship programs are automatically eligible for Medicaid; children/youth may also be eligible due to family income.</p> <p>May be used for services for children in treatment or therapeutic foster home settings (out-of-home placements for children with high needs), targeted case management, and rehabilitative services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic supervision.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> <li>• Implementation materials.</li> <li>• Time spent coordinating partners and scheduling.</li> </ul>
<b>State and federal grants.</b>	8% (n = 4)	<p>Within child welfare, the <b>Social Services Block Grant</b> can be used for social services directed towards preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, or the exploitation of children/youth.</p> <p>Funds from <b>Title IV-B</b> of the Social Security Act can be used for child welfare services including</p>	<p>Depending on specific source, they may be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation supports.</li> <li>• Parent coaching, family strengthening, evidence-based programs.</li> </ul>

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
		<p>preventing maltreatment, family preservation, family reunification, services for foster and adopted children, and training for child welfare professionals.</p> <p>Other funding sources include the <b>Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act; Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention grants; Children’s Justice Act; Adoption Opportunities; Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Awards;</b> and <b>Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting</b> programs. (See further descriptions of these funding sources as summarized by <a href="#">Child Trends</a>.)</p> <p><b>County Level Child Welfare Staffing</b>, or “242 Funding” is a state block grant with a 10% local match. Provides dedicated funding for hiring child welfare staff at the county level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiring additional child welfare staff (e.g., family time staff).</li> <li>• Supplies (e.g., food) and activity.</li> <li>• Stipends and reimbursement for kin who supervise.</li> <li>• Transportation to/from family time.</li> </ul>
<b>Title IV-D Child Support Funds.</b>	6% (n = 3)	Federal source that reimburses the state for a portion of eligible program costs for providing child support services. Title IV-D funds can be provided to out-of-home placements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited use case, but funds may be able to supplement child/youth basic needs during family time, such as meals and diapers.</li> </ul>

Funding Stream/Source	Percentage of counties ever using this source (n = 48)	Description	Recommended Uses
<b>Family First Prevention Services Act (Title IV-E funding).</b>	Not examined.	The Family First Prevention Services Act can be used to reimburse states up to 50% for eligible evidence-based programs for children/youth at risk for out-of-home involvement and toward reunification. There are 10 currently approved evidence-based programs in Colorado’s Plan that are of direct relevance to providing parents family strengthening supports, skill development, and coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence-based programs, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In-home parent skill-based.</li> <li>○ Mental health of children/youth and parents.</li> <li>○ Kinship navigation.</li> <li>○ Substance use.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Philanthropic funding.</b>	4% (n = 2)	Although this source was used extremely infrequently, private philanthropy remains an untapped source of potential to build out a robust infrastructure for a community-based model of family time. This source is most appropriate for larger scale capacity building activities (e.g., establishing a statewide fund for stipends to kin), as well as one-time or periodic costs (e.g., material development and gas vouchers). Depending on the source and purpose, the funds may be more flexible than other state and federal funding sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct costs.</li> <li>• Implementation costs.</li> <li>• Stipends and reimbursement for kin to provide supervision.</li> </ul> <p>*Note: philanthropy can be a flexible source, but not always a sustainable source. Philanthropic funding is most appropriate for one-time use or where a sustainability plan is in place.</p>



## Innovative Ideas for Resourcing Family Time

Several innovative strategies were identified from study findings. These innovations can reduce barriers to using identified funds, decrease the strain on program resources, and strengthen family networks in the longer term.

- **Use community intermediaries to help distribute funding:** Counties commonly have challenges in distributing dollars for direct costs (e.g., gas cards). Contracting with a community-based organization as a fiscal intermediary, such as an existing third-party family time provider or a local Family Resource Center, can help eliminate administrative challenges and improve responsiveness of these funds. Especially helpful for direct costs.
- **Establish partnerships with local organizations:** While family time does not require paid activities, financial support can help a family participate in usual and culturally relevant activities in their community. Counties and the state should foster partnerships with community organizations for family time activities (e.g., a zoo) and logistics (e.g., CASA for transportation). Discounted bulk or governmental rates may be available. Relatedly, resources (e.g., Foster Friendly) that are currently available to foster families may also be available to parents and kin for family time. If parents and kin are not named, counties can explore partnerships to access similar discounts or resources for family time.
- **Explore group supervision and monitoring models:** As noted in [Recommendation B5](#), group supervision is a promising practice for providing peer connection and learning opportunities for parents, while still meeting supervision needs. It also has a fiscal benefit of reducing the ratio of supervisors to families and thus creates cost efficiencies.
- **Partner with existing community entities with space conducive to family time:** Many community places have space that is supportive to family interactions, such as Family Resource Centers. Proactively building partnerships with these spaces can help both professional and non-professional supervisors more easily access these. Such spaces can better foster usual family activities in naturally occurring environments. Using these spaces has the added benefit of introducing parents to more resources in the community that they can take advantage of over time, following reunification.
- **Support adequate cross-system budgeting:** Unique roles and activities were explicitly called out as positive enablers of family time; most notably, parent advocates and social workers with the Office of Respondent Parents' Counsel (ORPC), as well as staff from the Child Protection Ombudsman of Colorado (CPO) and the Colorado Office of the Child's Representative's (OCR) Lived Experts Action Panel. Ensuring these cross-system partners have adequate resourcing for these roles and activities is a collective responsibility.
- **Consider mobile spaces:** Transportation for children/youth and parents is especially challenging in rural counties, vast geographic spread, and where public transportation infrastructure lacks. Purchasing a fleet of cars that can be appropriately used by transportation specialists, department staff, and other supervisors may be less costly (immediately and long-term) than investing in buildings or using less reliable one-off solutions. Mobile spaces have the most potential if invested in regionally for shared use.

## 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. The High Quality Parenting Time Task Force identified opportunities to share and activate these recommendations (Table 7). Moving forward, the Task Force will steward recommendations forward by identifying the right partners to lead, dovetailing with existing efforts, and convening communities of practice and action workgroups.

**Table 7. Activation Opportunities**

State and County Human Services	Other State Agencies and County Partners	Judicial, Legal, and Court Partners	Community Organizations, and Families and Kin	Other Players
Child Welfare Sub Policy Advisory Committee.	Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing.	Legal representation for parents (ORPC) and children/youth (OCR).	Colorado Association of Family & Children's Agencies.	Schools of Social Work.
Child Welfare Prevention Task Group.	Colorado Behavioral Health Administration.	Child Protection Ombudsman of Colorado.	Together Colorado.	Strengthening Families Conference.
Colorado Department of Human Services townhall.	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.	Specialty and Problem Solving Courts.	Raise the Future.	Kempe Center.
Office of Children, Youth and Families newsletter.	Colorado Department of Early Childhood.	The Colorado Bar Association.	Family Resource Center Association.	General Assembly and Joint Budget Committee

State and County Human Services	Other State Agencies and County Partners	Judicial, Legal, and Court Partners	Community Organizations, and Families and Kin	Other Players
Colorado Human Services Director Association.	Colorado Department of Public Safety.	National Association of Counsel for Children.	Fostering Great Ideas; Fostering Colorado.	Illuminate Colorado.
Colorado Child Welfare Training System.	Colorado Department of Local Affairs.	Court Appointed Special Advocates	Family and youth advisory boards.	Convening on Children, Youth, and Families.
Contracted third-party family time providers and child placement agencies.	Colorado Department of Corrections	Court Improvement Program.	Grand Families.	Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families.
Collaborative Management Program and Core Services.	Colorado Department of Transportation	American Bar Association, Judicial Education, and County Attorney Listservs.	Kinship Alliance; Kinship Navigator Program.	Community Partnerships for Child Development

## Building Evidence and Data-Informed Learning

Findings from this study lay the foundation for evidence building on implementation of the new family time law and the accompanying best practice standards. Movement towards the ideal of a community-based model of family time (as represented in best practice recommendations) will require intentionality and time. Culture change and structural shifts are hard work. Benchmarks can be established for each standard and trends can be monitored over time using Trails administrative data and [linked data](#) from other systems (e.g., judicial). This approach will enable ongoing continuous quality improvement and identify other statutory, rule, or practice changes necessary to drive outcomes—in *shared commitment to Colorado’s children, youth, and families*.

## Endnotes

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