



# Best Practices for Family Time in Colorado:

## Recommendations for Iterative Plan Development

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

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

**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. Moving a family towards more or less restriction should be approached with all options on the continuum in mind.

### Understanding Restriction as a Continuum of Options

	←————— 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, 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 mandatory presence	Therapeutic supervision

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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) and usual relationships (e.g., playing online video games). 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.



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



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