



Best Practices for Family Time in Colorado:

Recommendations for Family Time Implementation

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

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

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.

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. 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.

Guidelines for Frequency and Duration of Family Time, by Age

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



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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