



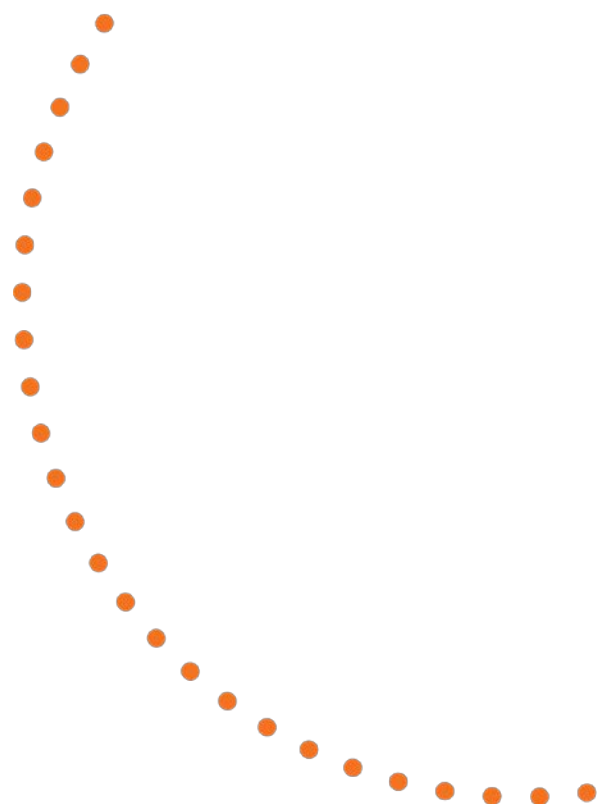
# Carer Coaching Practices

For case workers working with carers who are raising children in permanent care.

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## What is the focus of this practice guide?

This practice resource has been designed for case workers working with carers to:

- guide their conversations with carers about Family Time and
- to encourage carers to reflect on their role to support birth family connections with children
- work with carers to share positive feedback with birth relatives.

The practice guidance is based on evidence-informed elements of effective coaching and strengthening collaborative relationships.

## What is coaching?

Coaching involves several features including:

- joint goal setting and action planning
- building on family's strengths
- effective teaching of new skills
- supporting the implementation of new knowledge and skills into the everyday life of families and
- building parent/carer confidence and problem-solving skills.

This practice resource only refers to some elements of coaching, such as building on carer/parent strengths; linking conversations with carers and parents back to their goals/plans and providing positive feedback for effort and change<sup>1</sup>.

## Evidence on the effectiveness of coaching?

The effectiveness of a coaching approach to supporting and upskilling those doing the important job of raising children<sup>2</sup> has been researched for many years through the early childhood development and intervention literature by authors such as Carl Dunst and Carol Trivette (and colleagues).

Recently in the out of home care literature, researchers are studying the effectiveness of interventions that include features of coaching to support birth families with supervised contact with their children<sup>3</sup>. While more research specific to carer coaching is needed, the evidence suggests that it's a helpful and useful approach for caseworks to use when carers are faced with problems that could be solved by building the carers knowledge and skills<sup>4</sup>.

The aspects of carer coaching described in this guide are outlined in two parts.

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<sup>1</sup> The Parenting Research Centre are currently developing a Practice Framework for the Permanency Support Program (funded by DCJ) which will describe in detail the key elements of coaching.

<sup>2</sup> People undertaking the job of parenting includes birth parents, foster carers, adoptive parents, kin carers, extended family.

<sup>3</sup> Bullen, T., Taplin, S., McArthur, M., Humphreys, C., & Kertesz, M. (2017). Interventions to improve supervised contact visits between children in out of home care and their parents: a systematic review. *Child & Family Social Work*, 22(2), 822-833

<sup>4</sup> See Evidence Review of Permanency Practices completed by Research Centre for Children and Families for more details. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/content/dam/corporate/documents/faculty-of-arts-and-social-sciences/research/research-centres-institutes-groups/open-adoption-studies/ioas-evidence-review-permanency-aug2019.pdf>

## PART 1: Practice tips for case workers when having conversations with carers about Family Time

Area of exploration	Rationale	Example
<p>Seek to understand how the carer is progressing in forming a relationship with the birth family.</p>	<p>This encourages the carer to think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their strengths in building a relationship with the birth family</li> <li>• strengths in supporting the connection of children with their birth family</li> <li>• any next steps they can take to strengthen their relationship with the child's birth family</li> <li>• a goal focused on birth family connections that they can work towards</li> </ul>	<p>“Something that you have been working on is sharing one positive you noticed about Kimberly’s efforts in the Family Time session – even if things didn’t go to plan. How are you going with that? What positive did you notice and share with Kimberly?”</p> <p>Other questions include:</p> <p>What’s going well?</p> <p>What’s getting the way of doing this?</p> <p>How might you overcome those barriers?</p> <p>What might help?</p> <p>How have you addressed a problem like this before?</p> <p>What’s your next step in building your relationship with their birth family?</p> <p>How can I help?</p>
<p>Ask carers about progress towards any Family Time related goals/plans the carer and birth relative<sup>5</sup> are working on together</p>	<p>Asking about the goals/plans for Family Time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brings a focus to the conversation</li> <li>• reinforces to the carers that goals and plans are important</li> <li>• provides an opportunity for the carer to identify strengths/progress the carer is making</li> <li>• brings the focus back to the relationship between birth families and child connection</li> </ul>	<p>“The plan you and Kimberly developed for Family Time was for you to support Kimberly to sensitively set play limits with Sasha and for her to have strategy of what to do when if Sasha hits her. How did that go?”</p> <p>“What is your next step in supporting Kimberley to feel confident to set safe limits with Sasha?”</p>

<sup>5</sup> Birth relative is the inclusive term used for any birth family member - parents, siblings, grandparents, aunties, uncles, cousins etc

<p>Learn about the child's experience, in particular their connection with their birth relative.</p>	<p>This brings children's best interests to the forefront of the carer's mind. Even if the parent/birth relative is doing something the carer may disagree with, it encourages them to think about what impact it has on the connection between the birth relative and children.</p>	<p>"What moments of connection did you notice between Kimberly and Sasha?"</p> <p>"When were they enjoying themselves?"</p> <p>"Even though you would have preferred the Kimberly spoke to you about this gift, what impact do you think it had on Sasha? What did she think of the gift?"</p>
<p>Ask the carer to reflect on strengths or progress the birth relative made during the recent Family Time session.</p> <p>If the carer only talks about what went wrong in the session, ask them to specifically think about any positive efforts or actions from the birth relative.</p> <p>If the carer cannot think of any positive or strengths, encourage them to be on the lookout for positives at the next Family Time session.</p>	<p>As a result of you encouraging carers to recognise and reflect on birth relative strengths and progress, they will start noticing positives without you asking.</p> <p>By carers noticing and providing this feedback to birth relatives, the family is likely to keep doing those positive actions.</p>	<p>"What strengths did you see in Kimberly at this session?"</p> <p>"What did Kimberley do well to prepare for Family Time?"</p> <p>"It sounds like there were a few things that didn't go well with Family Time, Kimberly was late, she forgot to bring something eat like she agreed, and Sasha seemed too tired to play with Kimberly. Even amongst all of that, was there anything positive about Family Time? Was there anything that Kimberly did that made a positive impact on Sasha?"</p> <p>"It sounds like even though Kimberly was running late again for Family Time, she texted you ahead this time to say that her train was late, so she'd be late. Was Kimberley doing this 2 months ago? That's a good step forward isn't it? What strength does this demonstrate from Kimberley?"</p>
<p>Encourage the carer to think about the reason behind a birth relative's behaviour.</p>	<p>Asking the carer to think about reasons for a birth relative's responses, can help to build carer's empathy for a parent's experience.</p> <p>Strong emotions, fear of judgement and feeling uncertain about the <i>'right way to act'</i> can get in the way of birth families being their best selves in Family Time. They may say or do things in an effort to preserve their relationship with children, to alleviate uncomfortable feelings. For example, a parent might let the kids misuse toys during Family Time, because they don't want to risk the kids getting upset with them. Or a parent might</p>	<p>"Even though you might have handled things differently, Kimberly might have had a good reason for doing what she did. What reasons can you think of?"</p> <p>"You are concerned that Kimberly gives Sasha lollies, chocolate and gifts each Family Time. I'm wondering why Kimberley might be giving these to Sasha. What do you think?"</p> <p>"I wonder if it's her way of telling Sasha that she cares about her?"</p>

	<p>sit and watch the kids play, rather than joining in because they are uncertain about how to play a game and the don't want to look silly in front of carers and the kids.</p>	
<p>Ask the carer about their experience of Family Time – what do they think and feel about Family Time.</p>	<p>Information gathered here, can provide useful insights into carer strengths, resilience, resourcefulness, as well as any problems they are experiencing. This creates an opportunity for you and the carer to explore any problems, develop a goal and design a plan to address them.</p>	<p>“Sasha and Kimberly had Family Time this week, how did you think it went?”</p> <p>“What was the experience like for you?”</p> <p>“When Kimberley says that she loves Sasha, what’s that like for you?”</p> <p>“How are you feeling about the next family contact?”</p> <p>“What would help you to feel more prepared/calm?”</p>

### Reflection questions for case workers:

1. What aspects of this guide are you already doing well? Give two specific examples
2. What aspects of this guide have you tried before and would like to try again?
3. What aspects of this guide are new for you and you would like to try soon with a carer?
4. What would help you to implement this? For example, practising with a co-worker or supervisor?

## PART 2: Tips for carers when providing feedback to birth relatives about Family Time

Practice tip	Rationale	Example
<p>Be on the lookout for positive intentions, efforts and actions of birth relatives.</p>	<p>Making a conscious effort to be on the look for positives, skills, strengths and resources of birth family members, makes it more likely that you will notice them.</p> <p>Focusing on the positives of birth families helps to build and strengthen your relationship with them, and it will also make it more likely you will share positive stories about the family to the child.</p>	<p>Efforts of the birth relative to attend Family Time or make connections with the child – e.g., travelling, changing their commitments.</p> <p>Efforts of the birth relative to create a positive experience for the child – e.g., bringing something for the child, using a warm tone of voice, following their lead in play, showing an interest in what they child is interested in.</p> <p>Level of engagement with you, for e.g., responding to your text messages; adapting to your family’s scheduling for Family Time; working with you to develop a plan to create a positive experience for the child during family time.</p>
<p>Share the positives that you observe. Be specific as this helps the person know exactly what they did that was positive and has a positive impact on the child.</p>	<p>Birth families, especially parents, connected to the child protection system usually have few people share something positive about how they play, interact or care for their child. Sharing something positive to a birth relative has a number of benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It sends a message to children that you and their birth families get along and this helps children feel safe and secure</li> <li>• It helps you to build a positive relationship with the parent/birth relative</li> <li>• It highlights to the parent/birth relative the importance they have in the child’s life and the unique experiences they bring to their child’s life</li> <li>• It sends a message to birth families that you acknowledge and see their strengths, efforts and positive intentions.</li> </ul>	<p>“Sasha had such a great time pulling funny faces with you – she was bursting with laughter. She was feeling sad about her brother not being here today, but you made this such a fun time for her”</p> <p>“You brought Sasha’s favorite food and game today, just look how happy she is”</p> <p>“I saw a bunch of things that went really well today, how do you think it went?”</p> <p>“Thanks so much for getting in touch and letting me know early that you can’t make Family Time this afternoon because of changes at work. Would it be OK if we scheduled a face time tonight instead? I know Sasha would love to see you”</p>

	Birth relatives are more likely to keep engaging in positive actions and efforts when they get recognized by others.	
Build on strengths for future contacts/Family Time sessions	The most effective way to create positive experiences for children during Family Time and other contact experiences is to build on the birth family's strengths.	"Sasha really loved seeing photos of her aunts and uncles on your phone, and the videos of her cousins at the beach. I'm wondering how you'd feel about sending some of the photos/videos through for her to look at? We could set up a face time so you could chat to her about the videos, what do you think?"
Once you have built a positive relationship with the birth relative, your relationship may be strong enough for you to sensitively offer constructive feedback.  When offering feedback, say it in a way that allows the birth relative to give their perspective.  Be prepared to change your mind based on the rationale that the birth relative shares with you.	There will be times when it's important that you raise an issue with the birth relative, for example, to improve the experience for the child.  In the early stages of your relationship with the birth relative, it's recommended to focus on strengthening the birth family's strengths, before discussing areas for change.	"I noticed that Sasha hit you on the leg when you said that you would need to change the date of our next family time session. Did you notice that? What's your thinking on why Sasha might have hit you?"
Once you have explored your observation, ask the birth relative for their input or ideas to resolve the issue.  If appropriate, offer your support to work with the birth family on the concern.  Be prepared to leave the issue if the birth relative responds defensively. Give the birth relative some space to reflect on what you have said and raise it again at a time when you can both discuss the issue in a calm way.	Inviting the relative to join you in problem solving is helpful because it lets them know that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You see them as important and that they have good ideas to share</li> <li>• You would like to work together to solve any problems and create a positive experience for the child</li> <li>• You are not blaming them for the issue and that working together might help solve the issue</li> </ul>	"I know Sasha really looks forward to seeing you, so I wonder if we could come up with a plan for when Family Time needs rescheduling, so Sasha knows when she'll see you next. Rather than it being a surprise for her, how does that sound?"  "If we had to change Family Time again, how could we let Sasha know that it was changing?"



<p>After some time and reflection, the birth relative may bring this issue up with you and seek your support to resolve it.</p>		
<p>After the Family Time session, contact the birth family to reflect on the session. Start off with what went well and then move on to 1 thing (if any and depending on the strength of your relationship) that could be different next time.</p> <p>Work with the birth relative to come up with a plan for any ideas for the next session.</p>	<p>Contacting the birth family soon after the Family Time session allows you both the opportunity to reflect on the session and work out a plan for next time. Overtime this reflection, in addition to good Family Time planning will create a positive experience for children.</p>	<p>“Sasha is still talking about the funny videos you showed her. How do you think the Family Time session went?”</p> <p>“What was good for you?” “What did you enjoy?”</p> <p>“What do you think was good for Sasha?”</p> <p>“Was there anything that didn’t go to plan?”</p> <p>“What could we both do for next time that will create a good experience for Sasha?”</p> <p>“Is there anything you’d like me to do that might help?”</p> <p>“Was there anything that you weren’t happy with or were worried about?”</p> <p>“I’m wondering if we could work together to stop Sasha from hitting you during Family Time. Would you be interested in that?”</p> <p>“OK great, let’s brainstorm and just write down any ideas we have and then we can decide the best option to try at the next family time. How does that sound?”</p>