

Familyconnect Pilot Project

A research initiative by
Family Alternatives



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FAMILY ALTERNATIVES

is a private, non-profit foster care
and adoption agency that
supports children in care and
their connections to families and
communities.

*Embracing possibilities... honoring children and
families*

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Familyconnect Research/Pilot Project

August 2006-2008

How do we improve family visits
and connections for children
living in foster care?



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Video Clip... 

Segment #1 – *The importance of attachment and family connections....*

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72 Qualitative Interviews - with Foster Parents, children, social workers and birth parents regarding their experience with family visiting...

- Purpose
- Key Elements
- Training
- Challenges
- Stories

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What we heard...

- Inconsistencies around the purpose of visiting
- Unclear expectations, roles, rules, responsibilities, boundaries
- Lack of training and understanding around attachment and the importance of family connections
- Need for strategies to deal effectively with children's emotions and transitions related to visits
- Desire for better working relationships between birth families and foster families

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Preparation is key...

"Halfway through the visits my girl would get her coat on, her hat on, her mittens on and stand by the door and cry for me to take her home. "Mommy take me home now, I'm ready to go home, let's go mommy..." it was heart breaking and I had no idea what to say."

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Video Clip



Segment #2 – A Family visit Scenario...

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HOW do we make visitation practice and policy consistent with what we know when there isn't enough:

◦ TIME

◦ MONEY

◦ RESOURCES



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The "Family Visit" Guides

Children's workbooks:

Visit calendars, transition plans, journals, quizzes and funny stories.....interactive!



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Foster Parent Guide

- ✓ Interactive
- ✓ Focus on attachment & trauma
- ✓ Practical strategies for communicating about/with birth families



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Birth Parent Guide

- Interactive
- Affirming
- Parenting and relationship building strategies



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FIVE pieces of Family Visits

-  EMOTION
-  COMMUNICATION
-  PREPARATION
-  CONNECTION
-  TRANSITION

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Demonstration Project

- Piloted the guides with 23 families January-June 2008 and conducted pre/post interviews with each participant over a 2 month period
- Overall response was extremely positive – *full evaluation report accessible on the DHS website*

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Video Clip...



Segment #3 –
The Familyconnect Project Overview

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How can the guides help support family visits?

Tools for Preparation...

- Normalize** experiences so everyone feels less alone and more empowered
- Clarify** expectations, roles and responsibilities, boundaries
- Inform** everyone about the value of family visits and children's attachments
- Plan** for supportive transitions
- Build** stronger connections between foster families and birth families (when appropriate)

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TIPS for Utilizing Guides



- Initial out of home placement meetings-*time & energy spent on preparation generally translates into less time dealing with conflict/crisis/behavioral concerns*
- Monthly visits between social workers and children
- Supportive conversations between children and foster parents **before and after** visits.
- Conversations between children and birth parents **during** visits - *Children's guides are designed to be used interactively with adult assistance.*

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"But I don't have time...."

"Spending one on one time with children does not have to take "extra time"... It takes the same amount of time and attention to meet children's emotional needs as it does to deal with behaviors caused by their unmet emotional needs..."

Excerpt from "Connecting Parenting" by P.Leo

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Paradigm Shift....

"Because children in foster care often come from families where the parent-child attachment is unhealthy, visitation should be viewed as a planned, therapeutic intervention and the best possible opportunity to begin to heal what may be a damaged or troubled relationship..."

-*Smariga, M.* "Visitation with Infants and Toddlers in foster care; what Judges and attorneys Need to Know". July 2007

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National Support...

➤ *Gerald Mallon, DSW* – National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP)

➤ *Peg Hess* – Co-Author of "Family Visiting in Out of Home Care- A Guide to Practice" - published by the Child Welfare League of America

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National Support cont.

➤ *Marty Beyer, Ph.D.* - National visit expert and developer of "Visit Coaching"...

"All four Family Connect Guides are terrific! They make it clear that family time for children in foster care and their parents is very important. Helping children, teenagers, parents and foster parents think ahead about visits, prepare for their feelings and communicate better are all emphasized by these carefully-written books...I hope the foster parent guide will become part of foster parent training everywhere: it recognizes how challenging children's behavior can be after visits and offers great ideas for foster parents and children..."

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**For more information on the
Familyconnect Guides or to order....**

> www.familyalternatives.org
click on link to "familyconnect guides"

> Or by contacting Wendy Negaard at 612.746.8175 or email
wnegaard@familyalternatives.org

> The familyconnect research findings were presented at a public
forum held on October 22, 2008 at the University of Minnesota in
collaboration with the Center for Advanced Studies in Child
Welfare and are accessible on their website:
http://cehd.umn.edu/SSW/cascw/events/past_events/default.asp

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Familyconnect Guides: Order Form

Qty.	\$	Guide Sets	PRICE
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$30.00/ea.	Set I - Foster Parent Guide/video; Birth/Legal Parent Guide; Child's Guide (9-14yr/o)	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$30.00/ea.	Set II - Foster Parent Guide/video; Birth/Legal Parent Guide; Child's Guide (4-8 yr/o)	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$40.00/ea.	Set III - Foster Parent Guide/video, Birth/Legal Parent Guide, both Children's Guides	TOTAL: \$_____
Individual Guides			
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10.00/ea.	Child's Guide 4-8 Yr/o (full color)	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10.00/ea.	Child's Guide 9-14 Yr/o	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$15.00/ea.	Foster Parent Guide (includes DVD)	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$5.00/ea.	Birth/Legal Parent Guide	TOTAL: \$_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$10.00/ea.	Familyconnect DVD Companion	TOTAL: \$_____

Add totals from each line + \$5.00 for shipping/handling: \$_____

Payment Options: Check/Cash only. Make checks out to Family Alternatives. Feel free to call Wendy Negaard at 612.746.8165 or email at wnegaard@familyalternatives.org with any questions! *Because we believe strongly that everyone; kids, birth/legal parents and foster parents need to be prepared in order for successful visits to happen, we will not sell the guides or video separately unless at least one set is purchased. The foster parent guide will not be sold separately from the DVD because it is necessary to explain the basis of the project and the importance of birth families and foster families working together.* **(OVER)** →

Order/Billing Information

Agency: _____
Contact Person: _____
Phone: _____

Billing Address: _____

Send Payments to: **Family Alternatives**
1089 SE 10th Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55414

Payment is required at the time of order. All orders will be processed and mailed within 2 weeks. A \$5.00 shipping and handling fee will be added to all orders. No refunds or exchanges are available once materials are shipped.