

# GIFT: Fact Sheet

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GIFT (Guided Interaction for Family Time), is the use of visitation for families involved in child welfare to engage the entire family unit in building on their natural strengths and identifying their areas of growth in order to repair and/or support attachment for children and their primary caregivers. This program is designed to equip the guide to prepare the parents with a tool box of skills and resources to engage them in active hands-on parenting with in the moment interventions and strategies to create behavior modifications for children affected by Fetal Alcohol.

This service typically takes place in a safe family friendly environment away from the local DHS office. The visitation time requires a minimum of two visits per week at 2 ½ hours each. It is facilitated by a trained coach who works consistently with the same family for approximately 2-3 months.

Visit Coaching is fundamentally different from supervised visits because of the focus on the strengths of the family and the needs of the children. Visit Coaching supports families to make each visit fun for their children and to meet the unique needs of each child. It includes:

- Helping parents articulate their child's needs to be met in visits (particularly connected to the risks that brought them into care)
- Preparing parents for their children's reactions and allowing them to model potential responses in advance
- Using teachable moments during the visit to remind the parents of the goals they set before each visit
- Helping parents plan to give their child their full attention at each visit
- Appreciating the parents' strengths in caring meeting each child's needs
- Helping parents cope with their feelings so that they can visit consistently and keep their anger and sadness out of the visit.
- If more than one parent participates it provides the opportunity to teach co-parenting skills in order to further support the family unit

## The Coach

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The coach is key... It is important to create a pool of available coaches to work with families. Whenever possible the coach's personality should be matched up with a compatible family. Coaches can be recruited from a number of sources. Ideally the preferred option would be connecting with the local university and their graduate programs in the school of Social Work, Education, and Psychiatry. A relationship can be established between the local Child Welfare agency and the university in order to create internships overseen by Field Trainers from DCFS (usually unit supervisors), who in turn assign the graduate students to the Safe Babies Court Team Project to meet the requirement of parent/child contact. This relationship does take time to develop.

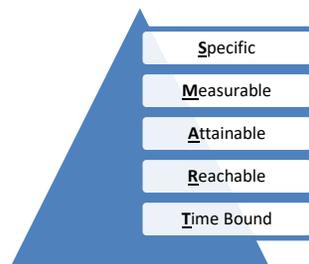
### **Recruited Coaches require:**

- The proper background checks need to be completed:
  - The State Police Criminal Record Check
  - The Child maltreatment Central Registry Check
- The coach assigned to the family must remain with the family through the entire Visit Coaching experience. The time commitment is roughly 5 hours a week (2/12 hour sessions twice a week), for a total of 2-3 months.

- Coaches are mandated reporters

**There are guiding concepts that each coach must know and apply when working with families:**

- **Everyone desires respect.** A true partnership with the parents is impossible without mutual respect.
- **Everyone has strengths.** All people have abilities, talents and dreams for their families that can help to provide solutions to support the growth of their family unit.
- **Everyone needs to be heard.** When one feels heard and understood, defensiveness and resistance are unnecessary and solutions can be sought.
- **Judgments can wait.** Delay judgment and stay open to new information. The time spent talking with families before and after visits is specifically to listen and plan. This is not an opportunity to neither judge nor take notes. There is a dialogue that only opens up when the pen is down.
- **Partnership is a process.** All goals set for visits and even the interaction throughout the visit is designed within the intimate relationship formed by the coach and the parent. This takes time to develop and in most cases the parent tends to be closer to the coach than anyone else involved in their case.
- **When setting goals with the family always remember to make them SMART.**



**Expectations and Responsibilities for the Coach:**

*Upon completion of the training to become a coach and after a family has been assigned, the following steps will need to be followed:*

- ✓ The Coach will contact the Family Service Worker assigned to the case and make arrangements to observe the family (preferably beyond an observation window), during their normal visit at the DHS office.
  - Complete the Strengths and Needs observation page located in the manual.
- ✓ Notify the ZTT Coordinator(s) that the observation is complete and schedule a follow up meeting to create a plan for the first Family Interaction Coaching session with the family based on the observations.
- ✓ Prior to the first session with the assigned family, the coach will need to participate in a meeting with the Family Service Worker assigned to the case in order to gain an understanding of the goals set for the family in their case plan as well as receive background on the assigned family.
- ✓ On a weekly basis the coach will meet with the ZTT Coordinator(s) to debrief and troubleshoot areas that have been identified for growth with the family.

*There are three key expectations that must be met by all Coaches:*

1. The Coach is expected to attend all staffings whenever possible. The observations are essential in this process. This is a prime opportunity to see the growth in a family and where the principles and practices of guided parenting and CPP are manifested.
  2. As the Visit Coach all observations **MUST** be turned in to the Family Service Worker on a weekly basis. These observations can serve as testimony and are admissible in court. If the coach is unable to attend court, this will allow the Family Service Worker to speak to the progress in the visitation process. *\* The observation logs are not designed to create any measure of judgment on the parent or overall outcomes in terms of reunification. The observations merely report what goals were set within the visit and what the parent did or did not do in their efforts to reach those goals.*
  3. The coach typically earns a position of trust with the family that very few in this process will be afforded. With that in mind, it is critical that the coach honors their commitment to work with the specific family assigned for the entire duration of the visit coaching process (approximately 2-3 months).
- *There is a document in the back of each Coaching manual that outlines the points made above and must be signed prior to accepting this role.*

### **Expectations and Responsibilities for the Parents:**

*Participation in Visit Coaching is a privilege that is afforded to families within the Safe Babies Court Team Project. Failure to comply with the requirements for this service will result in an automatic return of all visits to the DCFS office under the supervision of the Family Service Worker.*

- ✓ Parent(s) must arrive to the visit 15 minutes prior to the scheduled visit time in order to meet with their Coach and make preparations for the visit.
  - ✓ Parent(s) must remain after each visit for a minimum of 15 minutes to discuss the events and outcomes of the visit with their Coach.
  - ✓ Parent(s) must complete their journal after each visit (assistance can be provided by the coach).
  - ✓ These sessions are for the parent(s) and children ONLY. No outside friends or relatives may attend unless it is a pre-planned birthday party for the child. There is typically one additional visit conducted by DCFS where additional family may attend.
  - ✓ No cell phones during Family Interaction Coaching. If there is an emergency, the phone may remain on vibrate and out of sight.
  - ✓ Parents(s) must acknowledge that outcomes from the journal and observations by the Coach will be shared with their caseworker, individual counselor and CPP provider (if applicable).
  - ✓ Parent(s) must acknowledge that the Coach's observations can be used in court in the place of their testimony.
- *There is a document in the Visitation section of each Parent Book that outlines the points made above and must be signed prior to participating in this service.*