



Inform Systems. Transform Lives.

CALIFORNIA SDM® AND SOP FAMILY TIME EVALUATION

COLLABORATIVELY EVALUATING SUPERVISED FAMILY TIME

This document provides a structure for clear communication between California Tribal or county child welfare agencies and the organizations or individuals responsible for supervising family visits. It can be used by any agency working with a family receiving services for a child currently placed in the California child welfare system.

The Structured Decision Making® (SDM) reunification assessment is used to support child welfare decision making related to a child's safe return home. Part B of the assessment focuses on the quality of family visits. This guide intends to support the effective and collaborative evaluation of the quality of family time.

Family visits can provide an opportunity to coach and support caregivers who are learning new skills and behaviors to keep their child safe. While older frameworks for supervised visitation focused on monitoring caregivers' actions, the limited research available indicates supportive or coached visitation models may help caregivers in practicing new skills and protective capacities.

Individuals responsible for supervising or monitoring visits are encouraged to use this evaluation framework as an opportunity to support open and collaborative dialogue with caregivers about the behaviors described in their case plan and overcoming barriers observed during visits. See also Northern Academy's [family time coaching resources](#).

INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce this evaluation at the initiation of scheduled family time. Have a transparent discussion about the criteria and what behaviors would be helpful based on the ages of children participating in family time. Subsequently, review it regularly, discussing with caregivers their progress, barriers, and needed support to overcome those barriers. It is recommended to complete this evaluation at intervals that provide enough time to address identified barriers before the next formal reunification assessment.

This form can be adapted or combined with local templates for family time. For consistency with the reunification assessment, do not alter the SDM® criteria.

AGENCY INFORMATION

Child Welfare Agency: _____

Caseworker Name: _____

Contact Info: _____

Current Service Period: _____

Next Court Date: _____

Program or Agency Supervising Visit: _____

Individual Supervising Visit: _____

Contact Info: _____

Program Type

- ☐ Tribal agency
- ☐ Community-based organization
- ☐ County child welfare services agency
- ☐ Other: _____

REFERRAL INFORMATION

Family Name: _____

Child Name(s): _____

Age(s): _____

HARM AND DANGER STATEMENTS

Write a short description.

SAFETY GOAL

Write a short description.

FAMILY TIME PLAN

Include specifics of court requirements for visits as well as any additional recommendations for supporting this caregiver in their work toward safety goals.

FAMILY TIME/VISIT COACHING

Visit Location

- ☐ Park or community location
- ☐ Family home
- ☐ Resource family home
- ☐ Agency office
- ☐ Other: _____

SDM CRITERIA FOR FAMILY TIME QUALITY

Visit quality is measured on the reunification assessment as strong or adequate when the caregiver demonstrates the following skills and behaviors.

On a scale of 1–5, where 5 is exceptional, how would you rate the caregiver’s demonstration of each of the following items?

CAREGIVER	SCALING (1–5)
Consistently demonstrates acts of protection and supportive behaviors toward the child that are consistent with case plan objectives.	
Often reinforces appropriate roles and boundaries for child (e.g., caregiver preserves parent–child relationship or takes on adult roles and responsibilities).	
Demonstrates an ability to recognize child’s behaviors and cues; generally responds appropriately to behaviors and cues.	
Identifies the child’s physical and emotional needs; responds adequately to these needs.	
Demonstrates effective limit-setting and discipline strategies.	
Demonstrates a focus on the child during visits; shows empathy to child.	
Demonstrates interest in school, other child activities, medical appointments, etc.	
Demonstrates behaviors that prioritize the child’s needs over their own.	

Which behavior or skills from the table, if any, might contribute to the caregiver’s progress toward the safety goal? What specifically might that look like for this caregiver? That is: What would an observer see?

How will the caregiver be supported in demonstrating these behaviors?

QUALITY OF FAMILY TIME

Refer to the reunification assessment definitions in the SDM policy and procedures manual.

- ☐ Strong (acceptable)
- ☐ Adequate (acceptable)
- ☐ Limited
- ☐ Destructive

What next steps are needed?

FAMILY FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION OF FAMILY TIME

Caregiver Name: _____ Date of Visit: _____

Visit Monitor Name: _____

Overall, at what level did **you** feel supported during this visit with your child?

- ☐ Strong/supportive
- ☐ Adequate
- ☐ Limited/inadequate

Describe:

What do you hope is different for future visits?

For children in out-of-home care, child welfare workers use the SDM reunification assessment, which looks for the following skills demonstrated during visits to assess readiness for children to return home.

Strong/ Adequate	Caregiver - Consistently demonstrates acts of protection and supportive behaviors toward the child that are consistent with case plan objectives. - Often reinforces appropriate roles and boundaries for the child (e.g., caregiver preserves parent-child relationship or takes on adult roles and responsibilities). - Demonstrates an ability to recognize a child's behaviors and cues; generally responds appropriately to behaviors and cues. - Identifies the child's physical and emotional needs; responds adequately to these needs. - Demonstrates effective limit-setting and discipline strategies. - Demonstrates a focus on the child during visits; shows empathy to the child. - Demonstrates interest in school, other child activities, medical appointments, etc. - Demonstrates behaviors that prioritize the child's needs over their own.
Limited/ Destructive	Caregiver - May not demonstrate acts of protection and supportive behaviors toward the child that are consistent with case plan objectives. - May struggle or have severely limited ability to reinforce appropriate roles and boundaries for child (e.g., preserve parent-child relationship, take on adult roles and responsibilities), and requires prompting to do so.

	• Demonstrates an ability to recognize child's cues and behaviors, but needs guidance in establishing an appropriate response to these cues and behaviors or is unable to respond appropriately. • May demonstrate an ability to identify child's physical and/or emotional needs, but may need assistance in consistently responding to the child in an appropriate manner. • Recognizes a need to set limits with child, but enforces limits or behavior management in an inconsistent or detrimental manner, OR may not recognize a need to set limits. • May have ignored redirection by supervising worker. • May not be focused on child during parenting time and/or conducts self inappropriately during visit (e.g., arriving for parenting time while substance-impaired, reinforcing "parentification" of child, knowingly making false promises to child, cursing at/violently arguing with worker in presence of child). • Has not been successful in progressing visitation toward unsupervised and/or extended visits, or has had significant visitation setbacks that have required increasing supervision due to safety concerns for the child. • Does not demonstrate behaviors that prioritize the child's needs over their own.
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From the areas in the list, which would you like more information on or support for?

Did the person supervising this visit discuss or offer coaching in any of these areas?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Next steps: Are there any current barriers to visits to address? Examples might include quality of visit, location, transportation, or time.

RESOURCES

Northern Academy Archive. (2018, January 23). *Legacy resource - Family Time coaching resources*. OER Commons. <https://oercommons.org/authoring/26768-legacy-resource-family-time-coaching-resources/view>

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. (2026). *Visitation programs*. <https://www.cebc4cw.org/topic-area/supervised-visitation/>