

## **Psychoeducational programme to improve the quality of visits during family foster care: a birth and foster care family approach**

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### **Abstract**

Scientific literature recognise the benefits of visits between foster children and their families for, among other things, maintaining emotional bonds, as well as promoting the construction of their identity and personal and family history. Likewise, international and national legislation recognise the right of fostered children to maintain contact with their birth families. The research carried out by the Foster Care and Adoption Research Group of the University of Malaga on visits during family foster care had highlighted the need to improve the quality of such contacts and to support all those involved (children, birth families, foster families and professionals). To this end, the research group has developed and implemented in pilot phase the first Spanish psychoeducational programme *Visits: a context for family development* (Bernedo et al., 2020), targeted to birth and foster families.

The programme has two training modules, one for each family, in which parental, educational and emotional competencies related to contact are worked on. Each module comprise seven sessions, the first six are individual and the last one in group format, to consolidate what has been learned and provide an opportunity to share feedback. Specifically, birth families received coaching regarding the types of gifts, snacks and age-appropriate topics of conversation during visits and were trained to transmit appropriate messages to children. For their part, foster families were trained to identify and respond more accurately to the child's emotional state before and after the visits. In addition, both families were trained in conflict resolution skills and work was carried out on building a collaborative relationship between the families. The last session were used to consolidate what has been learned and provide an opportunity to share families experience and feedback.

The implementation of the programme includes the educational tool *My Visits Book*. It was designed to be used by children in foster care in collaboration with both families. The Book offers children an opportunity to share with their foster family, memories and experiences from their life before being taken into care. Likewise, to share with their birth family information about their day-to-day life with the foster family during visits. The information can be in photographs, drawings or letters format.

The programme is a resource for child welfare professionals to improve the quality of visits during family foster care and to promote positive parenting in both families (birth and foster care).