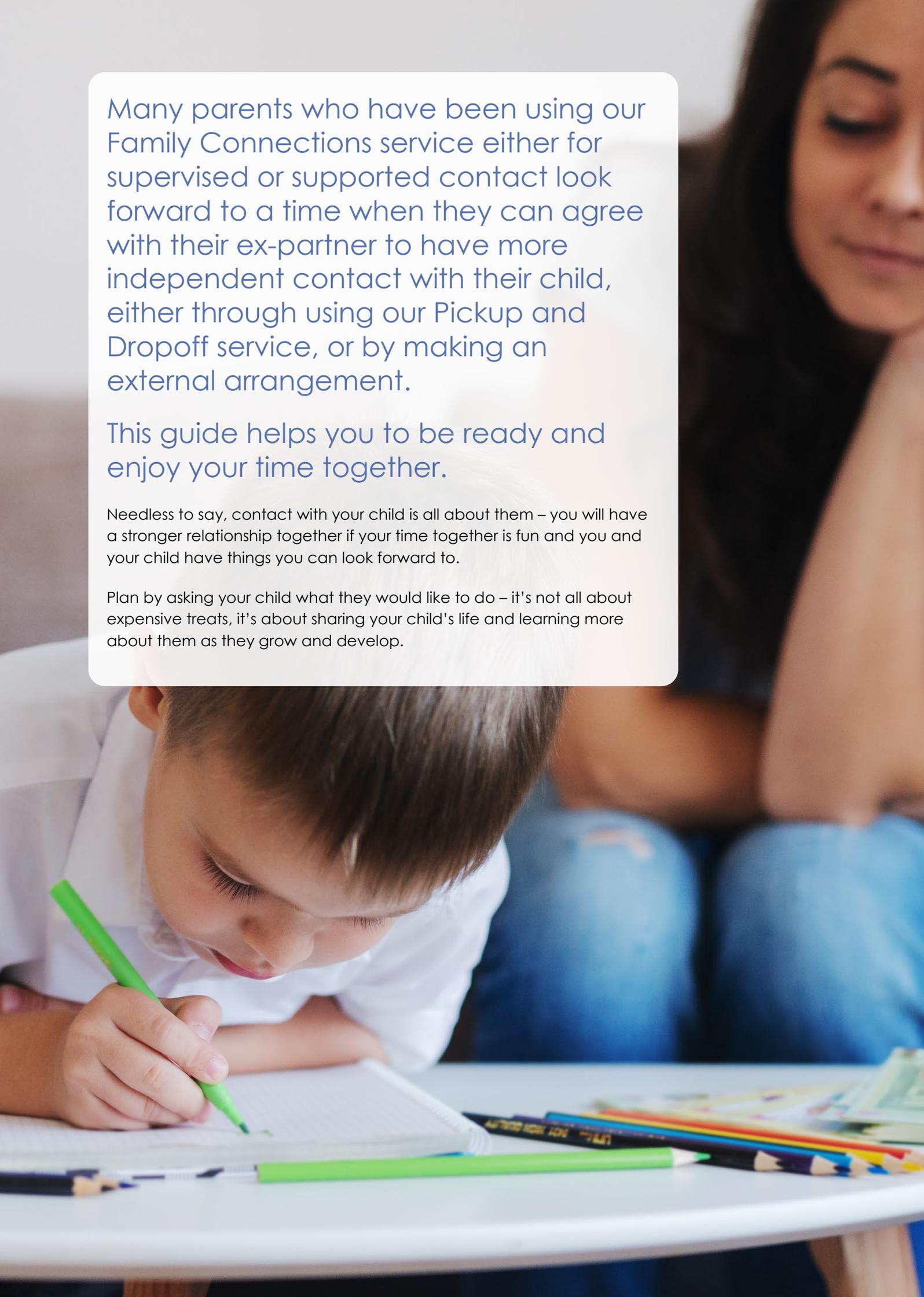


Progressing to more independent contact with your child



Many parents who have been using our Family Connections service either for supervised or supported contact look forward to a time when they can agree with their ex-partner to have more independent contact with their child, either through using our Pickup and Dropoff service, or by making an external arrangement.

This guide helps you to be ready and enjoy your time together.

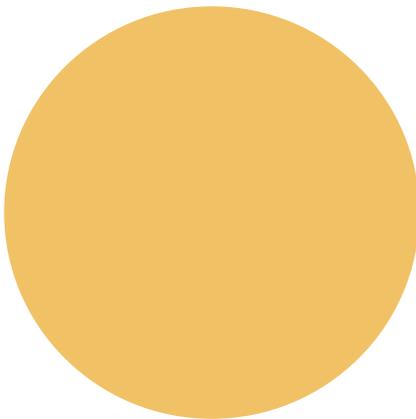
Needless to say, contact with your child is all about them – you will have a stronger relationship together if your time together is fun and you and your child have things you can look forward to.

Plan by asking your child what they would like to do – it's not all about expensive treats, it's about sharing your child's life and learning more about them as they grow and develop.

Planning together

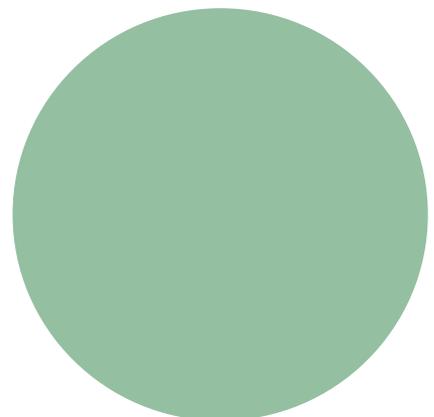
Ways to plan together

- Keep an ideas box with things you both like to do, leaflets and information from parks or other free attractions. You can “roll the dice” and pick something out of the box at the end of each visit to see what you’ll be doing next week - some children like to think ahead.
- If your child struggles to choose from too many options, cut it down to two or three.
- Be flexible! Children change their minds and weather, and other circumstances change.



Doing your bit

- Make sure other people in your life know your time with your child is too important to allow distractions – that you’ll be giving your child all your attention during your visit.
- Let your boss know you can't change your plans with your child at short notice – family friendly working applies to all parents.



Ready for anything

It's a parent's job to think ahead and to solve all the problems that come up when you are with your child to keep them safe, warm, happy, fed and watered. Things you might want to think about:

Small children are “high maintenance” - during a short period of time, they might need:



- A pushchair or carrier with wind/water cover
- Spare clothes for accidents – nappies or a potty
- Sunscreen
- Food and a bottle, bib and cloths/wipes
- Their favourite comfort toy
- Something to sleep in

Older children are high-energy / low-boredom people - they might need:

- few different activities within a short session to keep them on the go and occupied
- A first aid kit for accidents
- Waterproofs/wellies/coveralls to keep their day-to-day clothes clean and to keep them warm/dry/cool
- Sunscreen
- Snacks and healthy stuff to nibble



Teens need you to balance being the adult in charge and being a pal - they are learning their problem-solving skills from you!

Children of all ages will need to be safely secured in cars until they are adult sized.

Great places to be

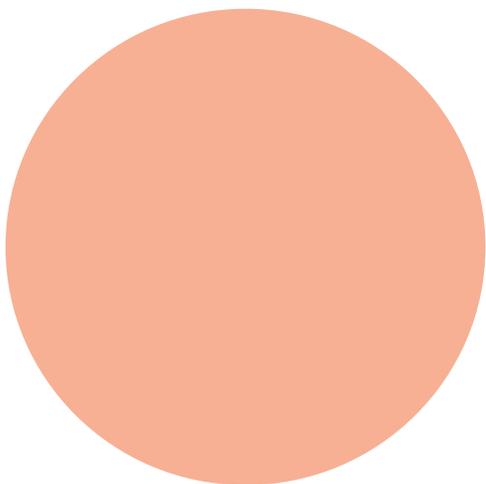
If your time with your child cannot be spent in your home, then you're going to need a range of ideas that suit all weathers and all moods.

Even if you can take your child home, try not to let all the time they spend with you be on a screen.

Don't make it all about expensive treats – reading stories together, relaxing together and doing "normal" stuff like shopping for school uniforms together, is all part of the parent-child relationship.

Parents and children who play together grow together and have strong relationships. Create memories together.

Think ahead and ask yourself: is this place child friendly? Does it have loos close by, is it safe to run around?



Things to do together

Be mindful and respectful of your child's life, loves, hobbies and interests.

Showing you are interested and willing to share these is an important part of your relationship.

Think about:

- Supporting your child to attend their clubs and classes if they are held the same time as your contact
- Sharing your hobbies with your child - if they are age appropriate. Teaching your child to fish / play golf / swim / ride a bike might be fun for you both, as long as you remember it is their time - if they get bored, change tack!

As children get older, it might be okay to help them with their homework or studies if they want this. If you are able to, take them to your home, and let them help you cook and learn other skills.

Many things' parents and children enjoy together can be done without expensive toys and equipment:

- Build dens and dams in the great outdoors
- Enjoy nature – collect things, have treasure hunts

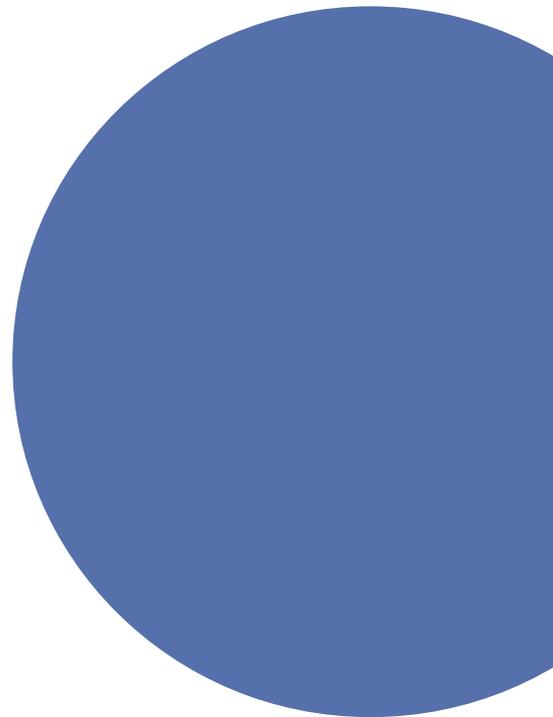
Your child and your networks

You might be keen to share some of your own new life with your child - your wider family or friends.

Always make sure your ex-partner is aware of this before it happens.

Always remember that on any occasion when other adults are around, your child comes first, as this is their time with you. They might not want to share you.

It is your responsibility to ensure other adults are behaving and talking appropriately in front of your child.



It is especially important that your ex-partner is aware if you have a new partner - and that you agree together the best way to tell your child about this.

It is just as important to know that your contact time is about you and the child. Your child may not want to spend time with your partner too, and you should reassure them that's okay.

Give them time and understanding, and over time it will be less stressful for them.

Never ask your child to keep secrets about what they do or who they meet when they are with you.

Sharing meals and snacks

Meals can be a tricky time. Your time with your child should be stress-free, but at the same time, it isn't fair to be the parent who always gives in to treats and unhealthy foods. Try not to use treats as a bribe for getting your child to do things.

Agree the boundaries with your ex-partner and try to stick to them: when to eat, what to eat, how much to eat.

Carry spares for younger children - healthy snacks or cartons of juice.

If your child has allergies, it's your responsibility when you are with your child to read the labels, inspect the ingredients, and to protect them from allergens.

Special days

Think ahead and agree with your ex-partner what will happen on the times when your contact with your child falls on a special day - a birthday, or Christmas, for example.

If this kind of thing is a touchpoint in your relationship, consider asking for help through mediation with Family Journeys, so you can agree in advance how to manage special days.



Poorly days

All children are ill sometimes.

This is another issue to agree in advance - what you'll do if your child is feeling unwell and doesn't want to go out to play with you or to meet you.

It's reassuring to the child to know that, even if they miss a meeting with you, they will still see you another time.

Also, be considerate. Don't pass on infections to your child and look after yourself before seeing your child to avoid picking up any viruses you could end up passing on.

Problem solving and good communication between parents

Regular contact with your child is great for you both.

It helps all children to have strong reliable and happy relationships with both parents. Let's hope it lasts throughout your child's life.

But sometimes things might crop up that you and your ex need to discuss. If it's hard, remember you can ask Family Journeys for help with mediation or parent coaching, at any time.

Sometimes, the problem solving might be with your child, not your ex. We can help with this too.



Keeping promises

Keep to the agreed days and times.

Children benefit from being around adults that keep their promises, which includes sticking to agreements with your ex, and the agreements you have made with your child.

At the same time, don't make promises that will put your ex-partner into a difficult position.

Get in touch

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Reception lines are open;

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