



Top Tips

Making the Most of Family Time

The HENRY *Healthy Families: Right from the Start* programme has two elements: Parent/Carer Time and Family Time. Both elements need to be completed.

- In face-to-face programmes, Family Time can take place for 30 mins each week (it usually works better at the end of the Parent/Carer Time, as if it's beforehand, it can be more difficult to leave the children in the crèche)
- Facilitators may choose to do two longer sessions (both 1½ - 2 hrs long), either at the start, mid-way or at the end of the 8 weeks.
- In online programmes, Family Time videos are shared with parents and carers each week; however, another option is to deliver online parent sessions, but have two longer face-to-face Family Time sessions as above.

Facilitators and parents and carers tell us they see so many benefits! These include:

- Relationship-building, enjoying each other's company and experiencing shared mealtimes
- Improved communication and bonding
- Modelling the three S's – eating "sitting, slowly, sociably"
- Both children and parents and carers trying out new foods in a relaxed setting
- Both children and parents and carers trying out new activities they can use at home
- Practising guided choices, rewards and descriptive guidance and praise

When arranging a programme, talk to Facilitators, children's centre staff, crèche staff etc. about the need to include Family Time and its benefits. It is important that they understand it is a core part of the programme and see the value of offering it to families. It can be a good topic for your Practice Development Sessions.

Consider timing in consultation with venue staff. Offering Family Time after Parent Time works well in the mornings – parents and carers are often keen to relax and eat together with their children then.

If Family Time is before Parent Time, consider making more of it as a space for a shared meal – some Facilitators have successfully offered toast/pancakes with fruit etc. as a shared breakfast before a morning session, or sandwiches/soup as a shared lunch before an afternoon session. Encourage parents and carers to bring in their children's food if it's a mealtime for them.

When Family Time is delivered as two longer sessions (1½ - 2 hrs long), consider offering a dual-purpose Taster Session/Family Time, having a half-term session with all the family or an end of a programme celebration. Offer a shared picnic/lunch with a choice of healthy foods suiting different ages and a variety of games/action songs and activities. Parachute games and storytime are very popular.

It works well to offer Family Time in the crèche room - explaining that crèche staff are welcome, but do not need to be present, as crèches often cannot exceed two hours. If Family Time runs before Parent/Carer Time, using the crèche room helps children settle in and parents and carers feel confident to leave them – and usually there are small tables/chairs to use, as well as fun activities set out.

Start in Week One and discuss the Family Time benefits during the Parent/Carer Time. Many worry about healthy snacks or how to keep their children active and are keen for their children to try new foods and activities.

Offer a range of simple inexpensive healthy snacks. Cut-up fruit and vegetables are great, and you could also try cubes of cheese, breadsticks with dips, oatcakes with cream cheese, fruit bread etc. Show labels

on packets and explain where you can buy foods you have brought in. For more snack ideas see “Top Tips for Family Time Snacks”.

In Week One, start with something familiar and popular – for example chopped banana and breadsticks. In subsequent weeks, offer less familiar foods. As parents and carers become more confident, ask for their suggestions/contributions. If parents and carers mention favourite recipes in Week Two or at other times – perhaps recipes from their own culture – ask if they would like to bring some in to share!

Use parents and carers’ own ideas for games and activities and those at the back of the Healthy Families book, as well as those in the Manual. Reading HENRY stories in the weeks these resources are given out also works well.

Model quiet enjoyment and gentle encouragement of both snacks and activities!