



If you have not seen your child for a period of time the first meeting may be very tough for you. Here are a few pointers that will help you.

- Make sure your children know exactly what will be happening at the contact centre; be warm and friendly when you first see them. Follow their lead, e.g. if they are shy then pretend to be shy yourself.
- Small presents are acceptable; however, you cannot buy affection.
- **Do avoid criticising the other parent or step-parent, this will only confuse them.**
- Do talk to them about their interests and chat about what you have been doing. They will want to hear that you are coping well with your current life. Even though you want them to be part of it, feeling sorry for you isn't helpful for them.
- Do avoid asking too many questions if their answers have been very short - this indicates they are reluctant to speak about that subject.
- Do avoid talking about them when you know they are listening. They are very likely to misunderstand what you have said. Children are the same as adults in that they are trying to make sense of their world.
- However tempted, do not persist with cuddling them if they show resistance. It doesn't mean they don't love you but they may be feeling disloyal. **Children need permission to love both parents.**
- If you make a promise to them it has to be a possibility otherwise they may begin to distrust you.
- You may like to repeat an activity enjoyed on a previous occasion. If they appear restless change the activity. Give them a choice of two activities rather than lots of choices; it is easier for them to choose between two options. Join in whenever possible.
- **Every effort should be made to make contact fun. Laugh at every opportunity; laughter is a great way to ease tension.**