

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE: December 2, 2008

POLICY # SSA 09-9

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Foster Care Supervisors, Local Departments of Social Services,

FROM: Cathy F. Mols
Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Caseworker Visitation with Child

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Out-of-Home Placement Services/Foster Care/Kinship
Care/Adoption

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Children and Family Services

BACKGROUND: Supersedes SSA Circular Letter 06-10

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implement policy and procedures regarding Visitation with Child

ACTION DUE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: Deborah Ramelmeier, Director
Office of Child Welfare Practice and Policy
Social Services Administration
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Purpose

The purpose of this circular letter is to delineate the requirements for local department caseworker visitation with a child in Out-of-Home Placement. This includes foster care and kinship care services. Visits are face-to-face contacts with a child, which involve directed and purposeful communication and interaction. This policy should supplement any court orders, any L.J. Consent Decree requirements, or circumstances, which may require a caseworker to have more frequent visits with a child. The standards established by this circular letter are minimum standards and should be increased according to the child's needs, circumstances, and best interest. The directives for both the frequency of visits and the contents are included.

Background

The local department is required to have a number of contacts with a foster or kinship care child on a regular basis. Contacts can be in the form of phone call, emails, letters, or visits. A visit is a face-to-face contact that includes dialogue (or communication as appropriate to the age and ability of the child) and exchange of information pertinent to the child and family. This distinguishes a visit from a simple contact. Visitation or face-to-face contacts are extremely important to the provision of appropriate child welfare services, meeting the needs and best interest of the child, and achieving permanency. The information gathered by regular, purposeful visitation with the child is one of the greatest assessment tools available to the child welfare professional.

This circular letter establishes policy for visitation frequency and visitation content.

- *Visitation Frequency*
Visitation frequency is the number of visits that must occur during a specified period. Caseworker child visits can be combined with other visits, such as when the caseworker is in the home for an aftercare visit, in placement for visit with foster parent, or during a visitation between siblings where the parent provides the location or transportation. While visits should be scheduled, it may be beneficial to case assessment to allow for an occasional impromptu visit. All scheduled visits should be made by the 25th of the month to allow for rescheduling due to unforeseen emergencies.
- *Visitation Content*
Visitation content is the directed or focused activities to be completed by a caseworker during a visit. The main content requirements are communication, observation, and assessment. Content standards set forth areas of information to be derived from these activities during a visit.
- *Purpose and outcome*
All visitations must be done with a specific purpose and outcomes that include but are not limited to:
 1. Setting the stage for the communication and interaction during the visit,
 2. Providing essential information for case management,
 3. Allowing for active participation of the child in permanency planning

4. Providing information for ongoing assessment of the child and their relationships with their family and supportive (significant) others.
5. Ensuring that the child's needs for safety, permanence and well-being are met.
6. Providing individual life skills guidance and assessment when exiting care to promote a successful transition for productive self-sufficiency (when appropriate).

National minimum standards for visitation require that children should be visited by the caseworkers at least monthly and that the content of the visit should be directed so as to provide information to aid in the assessment of the child's needs and well-being and to promote accomplishment of the permanency goal.

Minimum Visitation Frequency

Monthly Visitation:

The local department caseworker must visit with the child in out-of-home placement at least monthly (e.g. once per month). This applies to every child in the care and custody of a local department, regardless of placement type or location. Children placed out of state should be visited monthly when geographically and fiscally feasible. Otherwise, quarterly visits to the placement location must occur. The location of the visit can be varied as appropriate for the child. Visits can occur during transportation and waiting periods for medical visits, in the placement, at school, at a community or social area such as a fast-food restaurant.

Placement/Placement Change Visitation:

The local department caseworker must conduct a face-to-face visitation with the child within 2 working days of placement or re-placement. This visit must occur in the child's actual placement.

In-Placement Visitation:

The local department caseworker must visit with the out-of-home placement child in the placement 9 out of 12 monthly visits. This visit must occur in the child's current placement. This visit also applies for fulfillment of monthly visitation for that particular month.

College Visitation

Children enrolled in college must also be visited monthly, when geographically and fiscally feasible. Visits must be made to the "home placement" (i.e. where the child stays when not at school) during school breaks. The caseworker should maintain regular contact (at least monthly) via email, letters and telephone calls when the child is at college location.

Approved Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC Placement):

The receiving state must see the child monthly and send quarterly reports to the ICPC office.

Trial Home Visit

Intense visitation is crucial to a successful aftercare placement. During the aftercare period, the caseworker must visit the child in the home at least once every 2 weeks. These visits must take place in the home with the child and at least 1 caregiver present. These visits are used to determine if the family can adequately provide care for the child without supportive help from the department or with less intensive in-home family services, and to also determine what community services the family needs to be linked to beyond local department involvement. These youth must be visited monthly.

Exceeding the Minimum Visitation Frequency

While the caseworker must meet the minimum requirements for visits with the child, the visits may occur more frequently. The frequency of the visits should be more often when the situation warrants. Beyond the minimum visitation requirements, the frequency of caseworker child visits will be based on:

- The caseworker's documented clinical assessment of the child's needs,
- Changes in placement or living circumstances,
- The child permanency goal,
- Court orders, and
- The best interest of the child.

Caseworkers are encouraged to visit the child beyond the minimum whenever possible. Visitation frequency should be increased as necessary to help the child's adjustment to foster care and to the placement. Frequent and purposeful visitation may decrease the time in care and result in a faster achievement of permanency.

Less Frequent Visitation

A child in the custody of the local department may be visited less frequently than once a month if a child is out-of-state temporarily, more than thirty days but no more than sixty days, and the court, or the local Director has approved the child's stay out-of state, if the agency has guardianship.

Suggested Child Visit Content

All visits shall be of sufficient duration and privacy to allow the child the opportunity to express any concerns regarding the placement, services or needs. The suggested content for the face-to-face visit with a child include:

- Discussions of relevant issues related to why the child is in care,
- The service needs of the child,
- The service needs of the parent/family, and
- The necessary steps to achieving permanency for the child.
- Placement
- Education
- Health
- Social and interpersonal areas
- Life skills issues for self sufficiency

Child Visit Content Standard- Focus Areas

The documentation of each visit shall include at minimum a discussion of major focus areas related to the child. This narration is a result of interacting with the child during the visit. Of course, the discussion during the visits and the narrative are relative to the child's age and ability. While a great deal of the focus information can come out of talking with a child 4 years old or older, the younger child or special needs child may not be able to speak with the caseworker on the issues. The caseworker will have to use alternate ways of communication and observation to be able to gather information in the focus areas. The main focus areas of required content include: child safety, physical and mental health, progress of child and child's concerns, child's relationships, child's overall well-being (includes education).

Child safety: This includes not only the overall safety of the placement as related to the child's care needs, but also any illness, incidents or injuries that may have occurred since the last visit.

Physical and Mental Health of the Child: Discussion and observation of how well these needs are being met. This may include discussion and assessment on whether medical appointments and follow-up is being completed, how the child is feeling (any illness in the past month), whether needed mental health services have been arranged and how the child feels about the services.

Progress of the child and child's concerns: Discussion should focus on what the needs of the child are from the child's point of view, what concerns they have about their placement, school, family, and social interactions. This also provides an opportunity to aid the caseworker in the assessment of how the child is adjusting to the placement and to foster care.

Childs' relationships or visits with parents, siblings, and other relatives: Discuss how these meetings, visits, contacts, or interactions went. Should also discuss how they can be improved, and what the child's expectations are regarding these occasions and relationships.

Overall well-being of child: Discussion with the child on how things are moving, how they are feeling, and if their overall needs are being met. This includes whether educational needs are being met, how they are doing in school, how they feel about school, and if they are receiving the educational services they need.

In-Placement visits have an extra content standard: placement observation. During the in-placement visit, the caseworker needs to observe the placement, including the child's bedroom. The caseworker also needs to assess whether there have been any changes to the household, and if so, follow-up with the foster parent/caregiver regarding those changes. As discussed below, the caseworker should remember to allow the opportunity for some privacy during the in-placement visit, away from the foster parent/caregiver and other children in the home.

Communicating With Child During Visits

Visits with the child should be a focused conversation and interaction, not a question and answer session. The child age 3 and over should be given an opportunity during visits to meet privately with the caseworker, out of the presence of the foster parent or caretaker. This time is an essential part of allowing the child to openly share concerns regarding treatment and care.

Visits with special needs children or children under 3 who may not have communication skills requires other interaction and observations in order to comply with the content area requirements. The caseworker will need to determine how best to interact and observe the child in order to address each content area.

Documentation

All face-to-face contacts, as well as planned visit times and reasonable efforts, should be documented in the case record Contact Sheets in CHESSIE. Every visit with the child shall be documented in the case record as soon as possible, but no later than 10 days after the visit occurs. Documentation is crucial to visitation compliance. The contact sheets should include discussions of the major areas listed in the content standards. Documentation of the contact shall include enough information regarding communication and observation to constitute a visit. In addition, documentation is to include the following:

- Date and location of each monthly visit
- Name of person making the visit
- Name of agency that made the visit if other than local department

- Summary of the visit and any significant results of the contact
- Discussion of major content areas (as appropriate)

When multiple visits occur at the same time, the record must clearly reflect the caseworker actually visited and communicated with each person (child, parent, foster parent) to be considered as meeting each visitation requirement.

MD CHESSIE Documentation

Proper documentation of caseworker visits with children in out-of-home placement necessary to provide visitation statistical reports to state and federal stakeholders, MD CHESSIE must contain the official record of the caseworker visit. In order for a caseworker visit with a child in out-of-home care to count, the following must be recorded in the Contacts Details of the Service Case as follows:

- Type of contact Must be “Face-to- face”
- Location: If visit is at the child’s OOH residence, then use “Child’s Residence” (the requirement is 9 out of 12 monthly visits).
- Status: Must be “Completed”
- Reasons: Must include “Monthly Visit”

For children that are on runaway they will be coded under the Living Arrangement as “Runaway” and there will be no monthly documented visits.

Details | Comments

ID: Source: Name:

* Date: 00/00/0000 * Time: 00:00 AM Contact Initiated
 Contact Received

* Type of Contact: Face to Face * Location: Child's Residence

* Duration of Contact: [] hrs [] mts Travel Time: [] hrs [] mts * Status: Completed

Participants [Select](#) Collateral [Select](#)

* Reasons [Select](#) Non Client/Non-Collateral [Edit](#)

Monthly Visit

OK Save New Cancel Help

Monitoring

To ensure good casework practice as well as comply with the visitation requirements, the Social Services Administration (SSA) will utilize the information generated from CHESSIE to monitor monthly visitation compliance.