

Caseworker Tip Sheet

Successful Parent Child Visits

Visitation is the right of the family. The agency shall encourage the maximum parent child and sibling contact possible, when in the best interests of the child. RCW 13.136



Visits are vital in maintaining family connections and can improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in out-of-home care. Visits should be consistent and frequent with the proper level of supervision to ensure child safety.

The visitation plan should be developed timely and include visits in the least restrictive setting based on risk factors, present danger, safety threats and protective factors.

Children who were visited frequently by their parent(s) were more likely to have higher well-being ratings, and adjusted better to placement, were more likely to be discharged from placement, and experienced shorter placements. (Hess, 2003)

When should the first visit occur?

By policy the first visit should happen within 72 hours of initial out of home placement and no later than 5 days after placement or at signing of a Voluntary Placement Agreement. Schedule visits as soon as possible to reassure both children and parents that their relationship is important and respected.

How is the level of supervision and frequency determined?

The level of supervision should be based on any present danger concerns, safety threats and risks that currently exist, if or how they can be managed during the visit and protective factors. Additional considerations include the child's age, development, and the case plan. Visit plans can be updated at any time when circumstances change and with court approval.

Young children

Children in this age group benefit from frequent physical contact with their parents. Parents need to be given an opportunity to engage in daily care activities during visits. Infants and toddlers need to know they are loved and cared for in order to have a secure attachment and foundation for future success.

School age children

Developmentally, children at this age tend to blame themselves when bad things happen to their families. It is important for children to be reassured that things are not their fault and to develop language with parents to help explain what is happening. Parent's may help the child with homework or participate in a school activity to help maintain or develop attachment and trust.

Adolescents/Youth

Involve the youth in the development of the visitation plan and schedule. They may need a separate visit time with the parents depending on developmental and other wellbeing needs, if feasible. Adolescents need regular visitation and contact with parents, siblings and other family members.

What about Incarcerated parents?

When working with a parent who is incarcerated it is important to remember that improving relationships with their child and feeling more competent in the parenting role can support a parent's desire to create a safe and stable home and thus work on problems that necessitated the incarceration.

The child's fantasy of the parent's experience in prison may be much more frightening than the reality, and visits can reassure the child that the parent is alive and safe. Visits with an incarcerated parent support attachment and provide the opportunity for improving relationships.

When planning visits between children and incarcerated parents, contact the facility where the parent is incarcerated and secure permission for the child to visit. Questions to ask include: who can accompany the child to visits, how often, and how long the child can visit. <http://www.doc.wa.gov> is the link to information about family visits.

Face-to-face visits are especially important for children under the age of eight due to their developmental level; however, the parameters of the facility, the age of the child and the distance to the facility will need to be considered in determining the visit plan and the best interests of the child.

When in-person visits are not feasible, an option is Video Conferencing, available in most correctional facilities. Inmates use video kiosks to see and communicate with their child who participates via a computer equipped with a webcam. Video visits are subject to the same application processes as in person prison visits.

Who is responsible for the visit plan?

Caseworkers carry the primary responsibility for assuring that the visit plan is developed, implemented, and revised as needed.

- Develop a written visit plan during the initial FTDM scheduled within 72-hours of the child's out of home placement. The plan should be developed with parents, relatives, caregiver, child's tribe, if the child is an Indian child, and provided to all parties.
- Explore whether there are relatives or family friends, willing and able to be approved through background and FamLink checks, to supervise or transport.

- Prepare parents by letting them know their role and responsibilities during visits. Discuss the importance of being on time and visiting consistently.
- Be aware of the complex emotions experienced by children and parents prior to, during, and after parent-child visitation and suggest ways a parent may respond to their child's questions and emotions.
- Explain to foster parents/caregivers the importance of visitation in maintaining the child's bond with their family and how the foster parent/caregiver's mentoring and support of visitation can be helpful in achieving permanency.
- Review the visit plan monthly with your supervisor as well as at all shared planning meetings. Assess safety to determine the potential to progress to unsupervised visits.
- Observe a visit at least quarterly.

Supervised Visits

- There is present danger or a safety threat that is active and present during visits that can be controlled only with a visit supervisor
- There is reason for concern that parents may abduct the child
- There is an active law enforcement investigation of the abuse or neglect
- Supervisor is with the child at all times
- Supervisor is able to see and hear all that occurs between the parent and the child
- Supervisor is expected to intervene if needed to protect the child

Monitored Visits

- There continues to be safety concerns but not present danger
- The parents have some control over their behavior
- Safety threats can be controlled by the environment and the visit monitor
- Location of the visit is set
- Visit monitor checks in periodically (as determined by the CA caseworker) to ensure the visit is going well
- Visit monitor is expected to intervene if there are safety concerns

Unsupervised Visits

- There is no present danger, safety threats do not exist or have been mitigated
- There is progress toward reunification
- Overnight visits occur after parents have made significant progress and reunification is expected soon
- Visit plans include a safety plan in the event of an emergency or if parents begin to feel out of control