

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P. O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

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What's Inside:

Assuring safety through worker visits with children, parents and placement providers

MEMORANDUM

TO: REGIONAL EXECUTIVE STAFF, CIRCUIT MANAGERS, AND CHILDREN'S DIVISION STAFF

FROM: PAULA NEESE, INTERIM DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: CHILDREN'S SERVICES WORKER VISITS WITH CHILDREN, PARENTS AND PLACEMENT PROVIDERS

REFERENCE: CHILDREN'S DIVISION

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to introduce policy and practice changes for Children's Service Worker visits with children, parents and placement providers. In May of 2005, the Children's Division (CD) formed a visitation workgroup to review its policies and practices that impact visitation throughout its continuum of care. The visitation workgroup, represented by individuals of various levels from throughout the state, developed recommendations for policy enhancements and practice changes to be implemented to improve safety, well-being, and achieve permanency for children and families served by the Children's Division. **This memorandum is the third in a series to address visitation and its impact on reunification and preserving and maintaining family ties and follows memorandums CD06-47 and CD06-50.**

Visits with Children

Children's Division staff regularly visit with children, whether they are in the custody of the Division, under the supervision of the Division, or in intact families. One of the most important aspects of this contact is to assure the safety of the child in their current placement (in-home and out-of-home). To assure the safety of a child, the Children's Service Worker (CSW) must see the child where the child is living. It is essential that staff have regular contact with children in the placement home or facility.

Prior to memorandum CD06-47, out-of-home care policy located in the Child Welfare Manual, Section 4, Chapter 7.1.5, stated the CSW is to have "face-to-face contact with the child the next day after placement and, after that, once every two weeks and this contact should occur in a neutral setting or in the out of home care placement." Changes made in policy that was released with memorandum CD06-47 were to clarify Division policy. These changes were:

- The next day contact was clarified to state that the CSW assigned to the family **should** visit with the child, at the placement setting; the next business day after a child has been placed.
- The “every two weeks” language was changed to reflect that staff **must** see children twice each month, no less than **seven (7) calendar days apart**, and at least one of these visits must occur in the placement setting.

Children placed in a foster, relative or kinship home in a county other than the case manager county **should** be seen by the service worker the next business day after confirmation of child's placement in the home by the case manager county. This confirmation may be given by phone, email or IOC and **should** be sent within two (2) business days of the child's placement. For children placed in residential facilities, the child **should** be contacted by the Case Manager or service worker the next business day. This contact may be by phone but the child **must** be seen in person at the facility within 14 calendar days of the date of placement.

A worker/child visit checklist has been developed to help assure that staff are addressing case goals, the child's adjustment to the placement, loss and grief issues, desires for future placement, treatment participation, visits with family members, and their feelings of safety in the placement home. This checklist is form CD-82 Checklist for Worker/Child Visits. The Checklist is available as a Word document and is attached to this memo. The completed form should be retained in the file and kept in the Child's Section.

The Checklist for Worker/Child Visits (CD-82) is primarily intended to be utilized with children in out of home care but may also be utilized with children in Family Centered Services (FCS) cases. Current Intake policy has minimum contact guidelines for contact with families in FCS cases. These guidelines can be found in Section 2, Chapter 9, of the Child Welfare Manual and require one (1) to three (3) face-to-face contacts per month depending upon the family's risk assessment (CD-14E). Face-to-face contact for Division staff is defined as in-home contact. It is essential that staff observe the family in their home environment in order to adequately assess the family's functioning. More information regarding minimum contact standards can be found in memorandum CD05-72, Revision Of *Child Welfare Manual* Policy Related To Investigation/Family Assessment; Family-Centered Services; And Family-Centered Out-Of-Home Care.

Consultation between worker and supervisor on FCS cases should include a discussion of any child(ren) not present during the home visits and should include the family's explanation of why the child(ren) was not present during the visit. Extra contacts may be necessary to assure the safety of the child(ren). These contacts may include additional home visits, announced and unannounced, and/or collateral contacts, such as the child's school or child care provider.

It is also important that any changes to household composition (i.e. birth of a child, divorce, marriage, or the addition of a parent's paramour) be updated on the FCS Case Form (SS-63). All children should be listed on the family centered services case regardless of whether they live in the household or not. It is important for the family's worker to regularly review and verify the living arrangements for the children listed on the FCS case.

The Division also has the authority and responsibility to provide services to a child and parent when the child is not in custody but is under court ordered supervision by the Division, legal status three (LS3). This includes visiting with the child. Face-to-face in-home visits **should** be done no less than once a month or more as needed to assure the safety of the child and to achieve the case goal.

Visits with Parents/Guardians

Contact with parents and guardians is essential to achieving permanency for children in both FCS and Family Centered Out-of-Home Care (FCOOHC) cases. The worker **should** assure that the home is appropriate for the child to remain in the home or to return from alternative care. Both announced and unannounced visits should be conducted with parents and guardians in order to assure the safety and appropriateness of the home.

A checklist for home visits with parents and guardians has been developed. This form is the CD-83 Parental Home Visit Checklist and it addresses safety issues and topics to be discussed with the family during the home visit. This checklist may be utilized with FCS cases but **should** be used for FCOOHC cases. Workers have minimum contact guidelines for FCS cases as discussed in the previous section. The Parental Home Checklist (CD-83) is available as a Word document and is attached to this memo. The completed form should be retained in the file and kept in the **assessment and treatment services section**.

Workers in FCOOHC cases have different contact standards depending upon the timeframe since removal or case status.

- The initial home visit between the CSW and the parents or guardians **should** occur prior to the 72 hour Family Support Team (FST) meeting. This initial visit should be utilized to introduce the worker to the family and to begin the family assessment (CD-14). At the initial visit, the Parental Home Visit Checklist (CD-83) should be utilized to assess the appropriateness of the home for parent/child visitation. Visits between parents and children will ideally occur in the home. However, the location of the visit will be determined by the FST through the visitation plan. Please refer to memorandum CD06-50 for more information on parent and child visitation.
- **It is recommended that the Children's Service Worker should meet in the parents' home one time per week during the first 30 days, but a minimum of one time per month.** The Parental Home Visit Checklist (CD-83) should be utilized to document any safety concerns with the household as well as the topics discussed with the parents but it is not required that staff complete the form each week with the family. The Parental Home Visit Checklist (CD-83) should be used in conjunction with the FCS Family Assessment (CD-14) and Family Functioning Assessment/Reassessment (CD-14a). The Parental Home Visit Checklist (CD-83) may be utilized to document individual visits with the family while the FCS Family Assessment (CD-14) and Family Functioning Assessment/Reassessment (CD-14a) is an overall assessment for a specified time period.
- Ongoing case management **after the initial 30 days** requires a minimum of one home visit per month between the worker and the parents. This visit should not be included with any supervised visitation between parents and children that occur in

the home. This visit may occur on the same date but should be separate from the supervised visitation. Staff are encouraged to conduct these visits on a separate date if at all possible and to have both announced and unannounced visits in the parental home. At least one home visit per month with the parent(s) **should** occur during the duration of the child's placement in out of home care or until termination of parental rights is completed. These visits are in addition to the required visits with the child in out of home placement.

When the Family Support Team begins considering reunification and as unsupervised visitation between parents and children increase, the number of home visits by workers with the parents must increase. Workers **should** make every effort to conduct home visits during a child's overnight or extended visits with their parent or guardian to assess the quality of the visits as well as to provide recommendations on increased visitation or reunification. **It is recommended that the CSW have weekly contact with the child(ren) and family during extended visits. The household is to be visited weekly for the first 30 days of a trial home visit either by the CSW or external agency worker providing services to the family. When visits are conducted by an external agency worker, the CSW must document the visit date, how the safety of the child(ren) was assured, and other information provided by the agency worker. If weekly visits are conducted by an external agency staff member, the CSW should encourage them to utilize the CD-82 and CD-83 when meeting with the family. This provides for consistency across the state in the information collected and documentation.**

The worker **should** update the FCS Family Assessment (CD-14) and Family Functioning Assessment/Reassessment (CD-14a) during this 30-day trial home visit and complete the Risk Re-Assessment (CS-16E). The amount of contact between the worker, child(ren), and family between the end of the trial home placement and termination of jurisdiction **should** follow the minimum contact standards based upon the level of risk outlined in Intake policy, Section 2 Chapter 9 of the manual, and on the Family Functioning Assessment/Reassessment (CD-14a) form. After the trial home placement has ended but before the case is closed with the Division, staff should be working with the family to develop the Termination of Services/Aftercare Plan (CD-14D). Procedures for closing a reunification case are outlined in Out-of-Home Care policy in the Child Welfare Manual Section 4 Chapter 10.11.12.

Visits with Placement Providers

The CSW for a child **should** meet with the placement provider the next business day after a child is placed and thereafter a minimum of two times per month no less than **seven (7) calendar days apart**. These standards are the same as for visits between the worker and child. These visits can be held at the same time, however, the Children's Service Worker must see the child and placement providers separately as well as observe the interaction between them. Just as with parents and guardians, it is important that staff make both announced and unannounced visits to the home.

The new Placement Provider Checklist (CD-84) should be utilized to assess the ongoing safety of the placement. The Placement Provider Checklist (CD-84) also provides guidance to staff on treatment issues to be addressed with placement providers. If the placement provider and child are seen at the same visit, both the Checklist for Worker/Child Visits (CD-82) and Placement Provider Checklist (CD-84) must be completed. The Placement Provider Checklist (CD-84) is available as a Word document

and is attached to this memo. The completed Placement Provider Checklist form should be retained in the FCOOHC case file and kept in the **assessment and treatment services** section.

The current functioning of the foster, relative, or kinship family is an important factor in the safety of the children in the home. It is important that staff observe the family and take into consideration circumstances that may be impacting the stress level of the family. For example, one parent may have significant medical issues which result in the other parent assuming greater child care and household responsibility or the parents may be having **domestic issues**. These and other issues arise in many households, including those of the Division's placement providers. It is important that staff discuss these issues with providers and report any concerns with the ability of the foster, relative, or kinship care provider to continue to care for the child(ren). The CSW **must** report these concerns to their immediate supervisor as well as to the CSW responsible for licensing.

The CSW should note any changes in the household and report these changes in addition to any concerns regarding the placement provider and/or placement household to their supervisor and the CSW responsible for licensing. The licensing file must then be updated with these changes by the CSW responsible for licensing the household within two weeks of notification (see memorandum CD06-49.) Any time staff believe that a foster, relative, or kinship care provider has abused or neglected a child, the suspected abuse or neglect must be reported to the CA/N hotline as CD staff are mandated reporters.

Due to licensing regulations the completion of the Placement Provider Home Visit Checklist (CD-84) is not required for children placed in residential facilities. However, staff should be visiting with facility staff that has child care responsibility for the child and anyone else having significant contact with the child (i.e. a house parent, counselor, etc.). The visit guidelines are the same as for children placed in foster, relative or kinship care.

The policy and practice changes introduced in this memo are designed to help enhance the worker's ability to adequately assess and monitor children's safety and family progress toward permanency. Worker visits with children, parents and placement providers are an essential component of assuring the safety of and achieving permanence for children. These visits help family members maintain focus on the case goal and the steps needed to achieve it. The worker is able to assess the safety of the child, the appropriateness of the child's current living situation, child and parent progress in the treatment plan, changes in the family and/or living situations, and progress toward the case goal. Due to the amount of information included in these policy changes a Visitation Form Matrix has been developed to assist staff in knowing when each of the forms must be utilized. There is also a Worker Visit Guidelines form to assist staff with when and how many visits they must conduct each month with children, parents and placement providers. These grids are attached to this memo.

NECESSARY ACTION:

1. Review this memorandum with all Children's Division staff.
2. Review revised Child Welfare Manual chapters as indicated below.
3. All questions should be cleared through normal supervisory channels and directed to:

service delivery and goal attainment.

WB1.19.2 Increase policy compliance for frequency of worker visits for intact and out-of-home care cases.

WB1.20.1 Strengthen worker relationships with biological or adoptive parents.

SACWIS REQUIREMENTS:

N/A

PN/SW:js