

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services
(CCDCFS)
Policy Statement**

Policy Chapter: **Substitute Care**
Policy Number: **6.05.01**
Policy Name: **Family Visits**

Original Effective Date: 03/29/2004
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Current Revision Date: 06/01/2016
Approved By: Thomas D. Pristow

PURPOSE: To ensure children in custody maintain and strengthen relationships with their parent(s), guardian(s), or custodian(s), sibling(s) or any other person that may impact a child’s adjustment to placement, reunification, permanency and well-being by providing frequent visits and interactions

SCOPE: This policy applies to all Division of Children and Family Services staff who work with children in custody and their families.

POLICY

- I. Every child in the custody of the agency has a Visitation Plan included with the Case Plan filed with Juvenile Court. Development of the Visitation Plan is a collaborative process with all involved parties. Visitation Plans are developed with consideration to safety, permanency and well-being. Visitation Plans are adjusted as indicated by the Worker of Record’s (WOR) ongoing assessment of safety and risk and as needed to be reflective of the child’s permanency plan.
- II. The Visitation Plan includes specific times, dates and locations for frequent visits and interactions with children in custody and their parent(s), guardian(s) or custodian(s), sibling(s) or any other person that may impact the child’s adjustment.
- III. Every child in the custody of the agency visits with their family as soon as possible following initial removal and in the least restrictive setting necessary to ensure safety. Visits for families referred to Supported Visits are held within the first two (2) days of removal. Families not engaged with the program have their first visit as soon as possible, but no later than seven (7) days after the initial removal. Other forms of contact are also encouraged when in the child’s best interests.
- IV. Visits provide an opportunity for parents and children to bond and for parents to demonstrate behavior change as an indication of Case Plan progress. All involved parties support these opportunities and the WOR continually assesses progress.

PROCEDURES

- I. **Supported Visits:** All families are referred to the Supported Visits Program using the Universal Referral Form (unless the child(ren) are placed in a residential setting). The Supportive Services Department will review the referral and determine eligibility.
- II. **First Visit:** Visits for families referred to Support Visits are held within the first two (2) days of removal. Families not engaged with the program have their first visit as soon as possible, but no later than seven (7) days after the initial removal and in the least restrictive setting necessary to ensure safety.
- III. **Visitation Plans:** Most often, Visitation Plans are developed in a Family Team Meeting (see Policy 5.01.04 Family Team Meetings). Visitation Plans are developed with input from those who will be visiting and those who serve in a supportive role to the child. This includes parents, guardians or custodians, child(ren) when age appropriate, supported visits coaches, network case managers, foster home resource managers and *guardian ad litem*s (GALs). Visitation Plans are developed based on the best interest of the child(ren). In cases of domestic violence, parents may need to visit separately to ensure safety and compliance with court orders.
 - A. Visits are coordinated based on the scheduling needs of the children and parents causing the least amount of disruption to school and work, while also being mindful of the schedules of those serving in a supportive role to the child.
 - B. Visits are scheduled to occur at minimum on a weekly basis. If weekly visits cannot occur, the reason must be documented on the Family Team Meeting Report, Visitation Plan and Case Activity Logs.
 - C. Length of visits should be based on safety concerns, available resources and best interest of the child and adjusted as appropriate to coordinate with child's permanency plan. At minimum, visits are at least two hours in duration and increase as progress is made towards permanency.
 - D. From the onset, visits are held at the least restrictive location. Visits are only held in agency settings when strict supervision is required due to a safety threat.

(Note: Families referred to Supported Visits generally have their first visit at a CCDCFS building. However, at this initial visit the least restrictive location for future visits is identified.)
 - E. The level of supervision required for visits is determined based on whether or not there is a safety threat to the child during the visit. The least amount of supervision necessary should be selected. Supervision levels should constantly be assessed and as progress is made towards permanency and supervision levels are then decreased.
 - F. In circumstances where it is not in the child's best interest to have face to face visit with their parent(s), visits are coordinated via video conferencing, if appropriate and in the child's best interests.
 - G. The WOR observes, at a minimum, every 4th visit to observe interaction between child(ren) and caregiver.

- IV. **Transportation:** Transportation for visits is a shared responsibility. The least restrictive transportation arrangements are used. In circumstances when the transportation department is unable to provide services for a visit, the WOR, substitute caregiver and the foster home resource manager equally share responsibility for transportation.
- A. Children placed with relatives or in an agency foster home may be transported by the Transportation Unit.
 - B. Children may be transported by a relatives/kin, parent, DCFS staff, substitute caregiver, residential, group home or placement provider.
- V. **Cancelations:** Agency staff do not cancel visits unless absolutely unavoidable. In the event a visit may be canceled by either the WOR, parent, caregiver or transporter, the WOR:
- A. Seeks additional supports and supervisory guidance prior to canceling a family visit;
 - B. Ensures timely communication with all involved parties; and,
 - C. Reschedules as soon as possible or plans to have the next scheduled visit extended.
- Note: Visits and other contacts (e.g. phone) are never cancelled as a form of discipline to a child or to control or punish a parent for not making progress on a Case Plan.
- VI. **Modifying the Visitation Plan:** All modifications to Visitation Plans are documented in a Case Plan Amendment filed with Juvenile Court. (see Policy 5.01.02 Case Plan / Family Service Plan)
- VII. **Other types of Communication:** Every child in the custody of the agency has the opportunity for other forms of communication with their parent(s), guardian(s), or custodians(s) on a regular basis.
- A. Other forms of communication include, but are not limited to: e-mail, telephone calls, texts, letters and other appropriate types of social media, such as, video-conferencing.
 - B. Parent(s), guardian(s) or custodian(s) of youth in custody are invited to attend and participate in the activities and appointments in which their child(ren) participates. This includes, but is not limited to, educational and medical appointments and/or social and recreational activities.

SEE ALSO:

Ohio Administrative Code (OAC)

- Section: 5101:2-38-05 PCSA case plan for children in custody or under protective supervision
- Section: 5101:2-42-92 Visitation for children in temporary custody
- Section: 5101:2-42-93 Change of placement or visitation plan prior to journalization of case plan

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedures Manual

Policy 2.03.07 – Cases Involving Domestic Violence

Policy 5.01.02 – Case Plan / Family Service Plan

Policy 5.01.04 – Family Team Meetings

Policy 6.01.04 – Sibling Policy

Policy 7.06.03 – Family Rights

Universal Referral Form (Use for Supported Visits)