

**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
Revision Date(s): 06/01/2016
Current Revision Date: 08/01/2022
Approved By: Jacqueline M. Fletcher, Interim Director

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, locations and levels of supervision and restriction 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 with families will be held 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 will be assessed for Supported Visitation within the first two-weeks of removal and those in need of this service will be referred no later than 30-days of removal. The referral is submitted 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:** Families not engaged with supportive visitation program, and are placed on a waiting list, will 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, *guardian ad litem*s (GALs) and *court appointed special advocates* (CASAs). 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: Visitations held in a County Building require Deputy Director approval and will be assessed every 4th visit.)
 - E. The level of supervision required for visits is determined based on whether 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. Any changes made to the visitation plan must be updated in the case plan and documented in SACWIS case activity log by WOR within (72) hours.

- 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 Network provider equally share responsibility for transportation. (Note: Agency Resource Managers are able to assist with facilitating 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), sibling(s), or custodians(s) on a regular basis. (Note: In accordance with OAC 5101:2-38-05, a sibling visitation plan must be documented in writing).
- 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.

- C. Siblings should maintain weekly contact; however, there are situations when this is not feasible. In these situations, the WOR, supervisor, and senior manager determine the visit frequency.

SEE ALSO:

Ohio Administrative Code (OAC)

- Section: 5101:2-38-05 PCSA case plan for children in custody or under protective supervision
- Section: 5101:2-39.01 Removal of a child from the child's own home
- 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 – Client Rights

Location: Traverse
Universal Referral Form (Use for Supported Visits)