

4254. Parent, Child, Sibling, and Relative Visits

Approval: Connie Lambert-Eckel, Assistant Secretary

Original Date: July 26, 2008

Revised Date: July 1, 2016

Sunset Review: June 30, 2020

<https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/4250-placement-out-home-and-conditions-return-home/4254-parent-child-sibling-and-relative-visits>

Purpose

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, existing danger, safety threats and protective factors.

Scope

This policy applies to Division of Children and Family Services caseworkers.

Laws

RCW 9.94A.030 Definitions

RCW 13.34.025 Child dependency cases, Coordination of services and Remedial services

RCW 13.38.040 Definitions

RCW 13.34.065 Shelter Care Hearing

RCW 13.34.130 Order of Disposition for a Dependent Child, Alternatives

RCW 13.34.136 Permanency Plan of Care

RCW 13.34.200 Order Terminating Parent and Child Relationship

Policy

1. Parent and Child Visits

- a. Visits between the parent and child must be face-to-face in-person including visits between incarcerated parents and their children. Extenuating circumstances include threats to child safety, inclement weather affecting safe travel, illness, distance.
- b. Other forms of approved visitation when extenuating circumstances exist or to supplement face-to-face visits include:
 - i. Telephone contact.
 - ii. Electronic contact through video chat (Skype), FaceTime, or email.
- c. Efforts must be made to hold an initial visit within 72 hours of the child's initial out-of-home placement and no later than five calendar days from initial out-of-home placement or signing of a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA), unless there are documented safety concerns prohibiting the visit.
- d. Visits between the parent and child are in the least restrictive setting and unsupervised unless the presence of threats and danger to the child requires the constant presence of an adult to ensure the safety of the child. Decisions about whether visits are unsupervised, monitored or supervised are based on:
 - i. Risk factors
 - ii. Present danger
 - iii. Safety threats
 - iv. Protective factors demonstrated by the parent
- e. Visits must be supervised when the following conditions exist and the physical, psychological or emotional safety of the child requires the constant presence of an adult who can safely supervise the visit:
 - i. The allegations of abuse or neglect of the child resulted in injuries requiring medical treatment, evaluation, or assessment. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.
 - ii. The abuse appears to be deliberate or premeditated.
 - iii. The allegations of abuse included multiple victims.
 - iv. The parent can provide no plausible explanation for the child's injury.
 - v. The child is allegedly sexually abused.
 - vi. The child expresses or demonstrates extreme fear of his or her parent.
 - vii. The parent's view of his or her child is bizarre or unusual to the degree that what he or she says, about or to the child, causes emotional or psychological harm. Examples include the parent's belief that the child is possessed or is a threat to the parent.
 - viii. There is an active law enforcement investigation of the abuse or neglect.
 - ix. The parent is unable to provide the basic care required for a child based on the child's development, special need or disability.
 - x. The parent may flee with the child.
- f. Visit Plans will be developed in consultation with the:
 - i. Parent
 - ii. Youth (if age 14 and older)
 - iii. Out-of-home caregiver
 - iv. Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)
 - v. The child's attorney (if appointed)
 - vi. Tribal worker (as applicable) and
 - vii. Any other supports identified by the parent.
- g. Visit Plans must be in writing and provided to the parent and dependency court. If the visit plan calls for supervised or monitored visits, clearly state the reason for the level of supervision necessary to keep the child safe.

- h. Develop an initial visit plan at the first Family Team Decision Making meeting (FTDM), when placement is being considered or a child is in a court-ordered placement (licensed or unlicensed). The visit plan is effective for up to 60 days from the child's initial placement.
- i. Review the initial visit plan at the shared planning meeting held after shelter care and no later than 30 days prior to the scheduled fact finding hearing per shared planning policy.
- j. Develop the visit plan at the time the VPA is signed and the child is placed pursuant to a VPA.
- k. Ongoing reassessment of risk and safety and review of visit plans will occur until the child returns home or permanency is achieved.
 - i. Visit plans will be reviewed at all shared planning meetings and monthly supervisory case reviews.
 - ii. If the court orders a psychosexual evaluation for a parent and the visit plan is reassessed because of the evaluation, the court must approve the visit plan as it relates to duration, level of supervision and location of visits.
 - iii. Concerted efforts must be made to consult with law enforcement before recommending changes to parent/child or sibling visits when a parent or sibling has been identified as a suspect in an active criminal investigation for a violent crime that may impact child safety in relation to visits.
 - iv. Consult with the assistant attorney general (AAG) before sharing any information received from law enforcement about the parent or sibling suspect or investigation.
 - v. The caseworker will observe at least one visit per quarter. The visit observation meets that month's health and safety visit with the child and parent if other requirements of a health and safety visit are met. Private conversations between the caseworker and child or caseworker and parent may occur before or after the visit.
 - vi. All participants in the visit must be notified when a visit must be rescheduled.
- l. Visits can only be limited or terminated to protect the child's safety, health or well-being. Visits cannot be:
 - i. Limited due to the parent's lack of compliance with dependency court orders or failure to participate in services.
 - ii. Denied based on the parent's incarceration.
- m. Visits will be discontinued if parental rights are terminated or relinquished.

2. Sibling visits

- a. Children placed apart from their siblings will have two or more monthly face-to-face visits or contacts, unless there is an approved exception.
- b. Additional approved forms of sibling contact are encouraged to support and maintain sibling relationships. Approved forms of contact include:
 - i. Telephone contact.
 - ii. Electronic contact through video chat (Skype), FaceTime, or email.
- c. Ongoing visitation is encouraged to promote and maintain the continuity of sibling relationships that existed prior to placement. This includes siblings who:
 - i. Remained in the home at the time of removal;
 - ii. Aged out of foster care;
 - iii. Returned home;
 - iv. Placed with a non-custodial parent; and
 - v. Lived part-time in the home at the time of the sibling's removal.
- d. Sibling contact during a parent and child visit meets the requirement for a sibling visit.
- e. Shared planning meetings or court events do not meet the requirement for a sibling visit.
- f. The first sibling visit must occur as soon as possible after placement.

- g. Sibling visits will continue after a parent's rights are terminated or relinquished unless an approved exception applies.
 - h. Sibling visits cannot be limited or used as a sanction for a child's behavior or as an incentive to change a child's behavior.
 - i. Visit plans will be developed within 14 calendar days and in consultation with the out-of-home caregiver and child (when developmentally appropriate), unless an approved exception applies.
3. Other Relative Visits
- a. Determine if any relative is awarded court-ordered visitation with a child in the care and custody of CA.
 - b. If a relative is awarded court-ordered visitation, the caseworker must:
 - i. Obtain a copy of the visitation orders by:
 - 1. Asking the parent for a copy; or
 - 2. Asking the relative for a copy; or
 - 3. Contacting the county where the court orders were established.
 - ii. Identify the court ordered visitation participants, frequency, duration, and location of visits.
 - iii. Consult with the assistant attorney general (AAG) regarding CA's responsibility to comply with the court order.
 - iv. Confirm that visitation participants meet the requirements of the CA background check policy. Consult with the AAG to determine options when the participant does not meet background check policy.
 - c. If a relative seeks court-ordered visitation after the child is placed in the care and custody of CA, the caseworker must:
 - i. Consult with the AAG to determine options when a relative petitions the court for visitation during out-of-home placement.
 - ii. Verify the relative meets BC requirements and consult with the AAG when a relative does not pass a BC check.

Procedures

1. To complete the parent and child visit plan the assigned caseworker must:
 - a. Determine whether visits will be unsupervised, monitored, or supervised. Types of visits include:
 - i. Unsupervised visits require the parent to be the primary caregiver and able to demonstrate the willingness and ability to safely care for the child for the duration of the visit and protect the child from any safety threats.
 - ii. Monitored visits require the parent to be the primary caregiver during the visit, while an approved adult is available to periodically observe and intervene if needed. The parent must demonstrate the willingness and ability to manage any safety threats and safely care for the child during the visit.
 - iii. Supervised visits require an approved adult to maintain line of sight and sound supervision and intervene if needed.
 - iv. For monitored or supervised visits, the parent's natural supports can act as monitors or supervisors before considering paid providers or caseworkers.
 - b. Develop a written visit plan that includes the level of supervision, location, frequency, duration, transportation, and any other necessary details. The location of visits must be:
 - i. In the least restrictive setting with consideration given to the family's culture.
 - ii. In the child's community whenever possible.
 - iii. In an age appropriate setting that supports safety of the child.
 - iv. At the CA office when needed to protect the child's safety or when support before or during visits is needed.
 - c. Determine who may participate or supervise visits by completing the following:
 - i. A background check request and FamLink check for any adult visit participants who will have unsupervised access to children, including family supports who are available to monitor, supervise or transport the child for visits, per the background check policy.
 - ii. CA supervisor must provide approval before allowing contact between the child and a parent who is a perpetrator in serious physical and/or sexual abuse cases.
 - d. Verify all non-contracted persons supervising or monitoring visits, and/or transporting children meet the following criteria:
 - i. Approved background check and FamLink check per the background check policy.
 - ii. Valid driver's license if transporting. The transportation vehicle must be registered, insured and equipped with approved child restraints (car seat, lap and shoulder belts).
 - iii. Willing and able to intervene to keep the child safe.
 - iv. Able to prioritize the safety and well-being of the child.
 - v. Willing and able to enforce visit rules, court orders, limitations and activities.
 - vi. Maintain confidentiality.
 - vii. Report observations during visits and transports to the caseworker (e.g. behaviors, interactions, and concerns).
 - e. Review visit plans at all shared planning meetings and monthly supervisory case reviews and assess the following:
 - i. Changes needed in the level of supervision based on risk factors or safety threats and safety planning.
 - ii. Changes in permanency plan or legal status.
 - iii. Changes in the well-being of the child.
 - iv. Progress and compliance with services and any impacts on risk Changes to the visit plan to increase the number of visits and move to unsupervised (if not already occurring) within 90 days of a proposed trial return home.

- v. Recommendations to limit or terminate visits when one or more of the following conditions occur:
 - 1. Therapist recommends decreasing or suspending visits due to harm to the child.
 - 2. The child is at risk of physical or emotional harm due to the visits.
 - 3. The child's educational progress is negatively impacted by the duration and frequency of visits during school hours.
 - 4. The supervisor or monitor of the visits is threatened.
 - 5. The parent appears to be under the influence of substances. The visit may be stopped immediately but may resume after review of the visit plan.
- f. Prior to changing a visit plan:
 - i. Review recommended changes with the parent, youth (if age 14 and older), caregiver and supervisor.
 - ii. Inform the AAG of recommended changes.
 - iii. Inform the court of any changes in the visit plan in dependency cases.
 - 1. A court hearing is required prior to changing the visit plan unless the child's safety is jeopardized or the court order allows changes in visits without a hearing.
 - 2. If a court has ordered visits to occur and the visit will not occur as ordered, contact the AAG immediately to determine if an emergency hearing is needed.
- g. Create a visit referral for all supervised and monitored visits (paid or unpaid) in FamLink.
- h. Review the visit referral every six months. If supervised or monitored visits are continuing, update the referral in FamLink and resubmit the reauthorization for supervisor approval.
 - i. The referral for supervised or monitored visits must include an explanation of:
 - 1. Why visits cannot be unsupervised.
 - 2. Why visits are not being supervised by a non-contracted provider, if using a paid provider.
 - 3. Any continued risk factors or safety threats to the child.
 - ii. All initial requests must be approved in FamLink by the supervisor.
 - iii. All reauthorizations must be reviewed by the supervisor and forwarded to the area administrator (AA) for approval every six months. The AA must review and approve in FamLink requests for reauthorizations of supervised or monitored visits every six months.
- i. Document in FamLink:
 - i. Efforts made to consult with law enforcement regarding changes to parent, child or sibling visits when a parent or sibling has been identified as a suspect in an active criminal investigation for a violent crime that may impact child safety in relation to visits.
 - ii. Consultation with the AAG prior to the dissemination of any information about the parent or sibling suspect shared by law enforcement.
 - iii. A visit plan for each child, including reasons for level of supervision: unsupervised, monitored or supervised.
 - iv. All parent-child visits in a case note and include the following:
 - 1. Date, time and location of visit/contact
 - 2. Participants in the visit/contact
 - 3. Form of contact (face-to-face in-person, video chat (Skype), FaceTime or email)
 - 4. Use the following types:
 - a. Visit-Unsupervised
 - b. Visit-Monitored
 - c. Visit-Supervised
 - d. Visit-Did not occur. No Show
 - e. Visit-Cancelled-No Make Up Required

- v. When a parent-child visit includes a sibling, use both parent and sibling visit case note types to record the visit
 - vi. Upload reports from contractors or approved natural supports into File Upload
 - vii.
- 2. To conduct sibling visits the assigned caseworker must:
 - a. Develop a written visit plan that includes the level of supervision, location, frequency, duration, transportation, and any other necessary details.
 - b. Determine the level of supervision and necessity for sibling visits based on:
 - i. Age of the children.
 - ii. Children's perspective and input for youth 14 and over.
 - iii. Best interests of the children, including safety, health, and well-being.
 - c. Review the visit plan with case participants when there is:
 - i. An increase or decrease in safety threats.
 - ii. A change in circumstances which causes an approved exception to apply. Obtain supervisor approval when an exception applies.
 - iii. A change in circumstances when the reason for the exception no longer exists.
 - iv. A change in the well-being of the child.
 - d. Review the visit plan and any recommended changes:
 - i. During all shared planning meetings and monthly supervisory case reviews.
 - ii. During monthly health and safety and caregiver visits.
 - e. Document in FamLink:
 - i. A visit plan for each child.
 - ii. All sibling visits or contacts in a case note including the following:
 - 1. Date, time, and location of visit or contact.
 - 2. Participants in the visit or contact.
 - 3. Type of contact (in-person visit, phone call, video chat (Skype), FaceTime or email).
 - iii. Use the following case note type:
 - 1. Visit-with siblings
 - 2. Use both parent and sibling visit case note type when a visit includes the child's parent and sibling.
 - iv. Upload reports from contractors and approved natural supports into File Upload.
- 3. Exceptions for Sibling Visits
 - a. When sibling visits are not occurring, the approved exception or reason must be documented and approved by the assigned caseworker's supervisor. Approved exceptions are:
 - i. A court order prevents or limits visits or contacts.
 - ii. CA determines visits or contacts are contrary to the child's health, safety or welfare.
 - iii. CA determines visits or contacts will hinder reunification efforts.
 - iv. Child or sibling are developmentally able to determine his/her needs for sibling contact and request that contact occur less than two times per month, or not at all.
 - v. Parent of a non-dependent sibling objects to or wishes to limit visits or contacts with the dependent sibling.
 - vi. The facility where the child or sibling resides prohibits or limits visits or contacts with siblings (i.e., during an intake period at an in-patient facilities).
 - vii. Child is on the run from their placement for a majority of the calendar month.
 - viii. Child is not complying with visitation arrangements.
 - b. Document for all exceptions or other reasons siblings are not having visits or contacts in the Sibling or Incarcerated Parent Visit Details tab on the Visit Plan and Referral page and obtain supervisor approval in FamLink.