



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL

**Chapter 8:** Out-of-Home Services

**Effective Date:** 7/1/08

**Section 12:** Developing the Visitation Plan

**Version:** 2

### **POLICY: EXPANDED**

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will develop a Visitation Plan for every child in out-of-home care within five (5) days of removal with input from the child and the child's parent/guardian/custodian; unless, no visitation has been ordered by the court, parental rights have been terminated. The Visitation Plan will be reviewed and adjusted at the initial Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting or case plan conference. See separate policy, [5.7 Child and Family Team Meetings](#).

DCS will determine if there is a preexisting visitation order for the non-custodial parent and obtain a copy if one exists for presentation to the court.

DCS will provide the court with a recommendation for visitation of the noncustodial parent if there is no preexisting order or if the preexisting order is not in the best interest of the child.

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will:

1. Assure that the initial face-to-face contact is made between the child and his/her parent/guardian/custodian within 48 hours of removal.

**Exception:** Phone contact may be made with supervisor approval if extenuating circumstances exist (i.e. parent/guardian/custodian is hospitalized).

2. Assure face-to-face contact is made between the child his/her siblings within five (5) days of removal.

**Note:** Sibling visitation should be promoted for every child who receives foster care, including visitation when all siblings are not in foster care. The child, foster parent, Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Court Appointed Special Advocate, (CASA), or agency responsible for care, treatment, or supervision of the child may request sibling visitation.

The Family Visitation Plan provides parameters for visitation between the child and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s)/custodian(s), sibling(s), family members, and other individuals with whom the child has formed significant relationships. All Visitation Plans will have the following:

1. Goal of reestablishing, maintaining and/or strengthening the bond that exists between the child and his/her family;
2. Face-to-face contact with the parent/guardian/custodian at least once per week and at least twice per week if the child is an infant (age 0-1) or toddler (age 1-2); unless the court has ordered otherwise.
3. Face-to-face contact with the child's siblings at least once per week; and
4. Face-to-face contact with other adults with whom the child has a positive, significant relationship as long as deemed appropriate and does not negatively affect the child.

This should not interfere with or disrupt the regular visitation of the parent/guardian/custodian.

**Note:** All Visitation Plans must include alternative forms of contact (e.g., phone calls, cards, letters, photographs, recordings) to supplement face-to-face visits. If the court has ordered no face-to-face contact between the child and his/her parent/guardian/custodian, alternative forms of contact may be requested, if appropriate to maintain and develop the parent/child bond. See separate policies, [8.11 Parental Interaction and Involvement](#), and [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#).

#### Code References

N/A

#### **PROCEDURE**

The FCM will:

1. Approve or deny all verbal or written requests for visitation with the child and document in ICWIS contacts within 3 business days;
- Note:** FCM must consult with supervisor prior to denying sibling visitation requests.
2. Convene the CFT to assist in the development of the Visitation Plan;
3. Ensure that the written Visitation Plan includes the following components:
  - a. A visitation goal;
  - b. Parameters of contact (who, what, how often);
  - c. Supervision (i.e. the degree of supervision necessary for each person who will visit and who may provide supervision). See [Tool 8.C - Supervision of Visits](#)
  - d. Visit logistics (e.g., location, time and length of visits, transportation, etc.); and
  - e. Appropriate activities during visitation, in particular, developmental activities and parenting activities, and any special considerations/accommodations regarding visitation.
  - f. Alternative forms of contact (e.g. phone calls, cards, letters, photographs, or recordings to supplement face-to-face visits).
  - g. Provisions for contact with the non-custodial parent, if appropriate.
  - h. Provisions for face-to-face contact and/or other forms of contact with persons whom the child has a positive, significant relationship, if appropriate and does not interfere or negatively affect
4. Engage the CFT in problem-solving regarding any barriers to visitation (i.e., transportation). See separate policy, [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#)
5. Utilize alternative forms of contact when circumstances prevent face-to-face visitation or make it an extreme hardship, (e.g., phone contact, email exchanges, audio and video recordings, drawings, cards, letters, etc.). Circumstances that may necessitate occasional or consistent use of alternative forms of contact include:
  - a. Parental incarceration,
  - b. Parents who reside in another state,
  - c. Parents who refuse face-to-face contact, and
  - d. Parents or siblings who are placed in residential treatment centers with restricted or no visitation

6. Ensure that all parties understand the plan fully, and obtain signatures of all parties involved in implementing the plan;
7. Review with all parties how the plan will be implemented, monitored, and adjusted through out the life of the case. See separate policy, [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#);
8. Submit the completed visitation to the Court for approval; if there is a preexisting order that conflicts with the visitation plan; and
9. Ensure that the approved plan is documented in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS) Visitation Log.

### **Non-Custodial Parent Visitation**

The FCM will:

1. Determine if there is an preexisting visitation order for the non-custodial parent and obtain a copy, if one exists, for presentation to the court.
2. Provide the court with a recommendation for visitation of the non-custodial parent if there is no preexisting order or if the preexisting order is not in the best interest of the child.
3. Document approved visitation plan in ICWIS.

### **PRACTICE GUIDANCE**

N/A

### **FORMS AND TOOLS**

1. Visitation Plan - Available in ICWIS
2. [Tool 8.C – Supervision of Visits](#)

### **RELATED INFORMATION**

#### **Importance of Maintaining Parent/Guardian/Custodian Contact**

Children have the fundamental right to visit with their parents. Ideally, the relationship developed between a parent and child is one of bonding, healthy dependency, and nurturing. Each of these elements of the parent-child relationship is important for the emotional well-being of the child. Regular visits and contact will help the child not to feel abandoned by his/her parent/guardian/custodian.

#### **Importance of Maintaining Sibling Contact**

The longest lasting relationship a child shares is often that between their sibling. This bond helps a child develop his/her own unique identity. When siblings cannot be placed together, the ability to maintain contact with each other can help alleviate the emotional impact of removal for each child.

#### **Visitation Goal**

The visitation goal should be consistent with the permanency goal outlined in the child's Case Plan.

#### **Visitation Rights**

Parents/guardians/custodians and children retain the right of reasonable contact with each other, regardless of the permanency goal, unless parental rights have been terminated or the

court has restricted contact. In addition, the juvenile court may appoint a GAL or CASA if a child receiving foster care requests sibling visitation.

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