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Policy

If it is determined that a child is not safe in his/her own home, the Department has the responsibility for removing the child from that home and placing the child in a safe, temporary home.

Visitation with Parents and Siblings

The Department shall ensure that children under the Commissioner's care and custody be provided with visitation with their parents and siblings.

The Commissioner shall ensure that a child's visits with his or her parents occur as frequently as reasonably possible, based upon consideration of the best interests of the child, including the age and developmental level of the child, and shall be sufficient in number and duration to ensure continuation of the relationship.

If a child has an existing relationship with a sibling and is separated from such sibling as a result of a DCF placement, DCF shall ensure that the child has access to and visitation with their sibling throughout the duration of placement.

In determining the number, frequency and duration of sibling visits, DCF shall consider the best interests of each sibling, given each child's age and developmental level and the continuation of the sibling relationship. If the child and his or her sibling both reside within the state and within fifty miles of each other, DCF shall, within available appropriations, ensure that the child's visits with his or her sibling occur, on average, not less than once per week, unless the frequency of such visitation is not in the best interests of each sibling.

This policy shall apply to all siblings of a child, whether or not the siblings are in out of home placements, as long as:

- there is an existing sibling relationship, and
- the Department has removed at least one (1) of the children.

The Department shall comply with court orders regarding visitation. If circumstances change such that the visitation ordered by the court no longer serves the best interests of the child, the Social Worker shall notify an Assistant Attorney General (AAG) immediately.

Legal Reference: Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-10a.

Virtual Visitation Between Family Members

Whenever possible, visitation between a child and the child's siblings, parent, or guardian should take place in-person. Under the following circumstances, visitation may take place virtually instead of in-person:

- during a period of quarantine or isolation recommended by the Connecticut Department of Public Health when a visit participant or household member has symptoms of, or has been knowingly exposed to, a contagious illness (e.g., COVID-19) or
- when in-person visits cannot be accomplished because one or more participants are incapacitated due to health-related reasons
- one or more participants are out of state.

Virtual visitation may also be used to supplement (i.e., provide visits in addition to) regularly scheduled in-person visitation or telephone contact.

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Virtual Visitation Between Social Work Staff and Children or Families

For a virtual visit to take place, all participants must have access to technology that allows for two-way audio and visual communication (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Facetime).

At the discretion of the Program Supervisor or above, a Social Worker quarantining or in isolation for an illness may be permitted to conduct visits with children or families virtually instead of in-person.

Virtual visitation may also be used to supplement (i.e., provide visits in addition to) regularly scheduled in-person visitation or telephone contact.

Visitation for Separated Siblings

Visitation plans for siblings shall be developed and immediately implemented for all siblings not placed in the same out-of-home setting unless a written and signed statement from a mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist) states that visiting is not in the best interests of the siblings.

Sibling visits that are deferred for more than 60 days shall be recertified in writing by the mental health professional.

Thereafter, sibling visits shall be reviewed and updated at every administrative case review.

Motions to Cease Visitation

In all new cases in which the Department believes visitation with parents and/or siblings is not in the best interests of the child, the Department shall consult with an AAG regarding whether to file an ex parte Motion for Emergency Relief regarding visitation along with the Motion for Order of Temporary Custody and Neglect Petition.

In all pending cases in which visitation is ongoing, but the Department determines that such visitation no longer is in the child's best interests, the Department may temporarily suspend visitation without a court order. The social work staff shall document in the case record the reason why visitation is being suspended and the steps the parent or sibling must take for visitation to be reinstated. If visitation is suspended, the Department shall consult with an AAG regarding filing a Motion to Cease Visitation.

Case Plan Requirements regarding visitation

The following details regarding visitation shall be documented in the case plan:

- all factors related to decisions made by DCF regarding visitation between children, parents, and siblings;
- whether the Department has determined that visitation is not in the child's best interest, and, if so, the specific reasons that led to the determination; or
- if the Department determines that it is not in the child's best interests to provide the number, frequency, or duration of visits requested by the child's attorney or guardian ad litem (GAL), the specific reasons that led to the determination.

The administrative case reviewer shall address the issue of visitation during the case planning conference and at subsequent administrative case reviews to ensure that visitation decisions are properly carried out and documented in the case plan.

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Changes in Visitation

When a child is in out-of-home care, social work staff shall immediately inform the parents, guardians, or caretakers of any change in visitation or placement; and, except for emergencies, shall discuss such changes with them prior to implementation.

Social work staff shall use the following steps to notify parents, guardians, or caretakers:

- for a non-emergency situation, discuss any changes in visitation or placement prior to such change and for an emergency situation, attempt to discuss the reasons for the change within five (5) working days from the change;
- advise them of their right to challenge the Department's decision and to request a treatment plan hearing; and
- within two (2) working days, send them the DCF-469, "Notification of a Change in Visitation" to confirm a discussion or inform them of emergency changes.

Copies of the Notification of a change in visitation shall be provided to the attorney for the parent(s), attorney for the child, and any Guardian Ad Litem. A copy shall be kept in the case record.

Case Plan Hearings (Treatment Plan Hearings) regarding visitation

The Department's Administrative Hearings Unit shall not hold case plan hearings on the specific issue of whether visitation should cease, as the court has original jurisdiction over the matter.

Case plan hearings shall be held only regarding length, frequency, duration, and other details of the visits, unless a motion regarding those details is pending in court or has already been ruled on.

Cross Reference: DCF Policy 6-5, "Administrative Hearings".

Birth Certificate

A birth certificate shall be required for every child in DCF care. The child's Social Worker shall attempt to obtain a copy of the birth certificate from the child's family. If this is not possible, the Social Worker shall request that the RED obtain a copy from the appropriate agency.

Note: The original birth certificate shall be maintained in the child's case record with a copy in the RED file. The original shall be returned to the parent, legal guardian, or a youth over 18 years of age, at the time of case closing. A copy shall be kept in the Department's closed record.

Health Insurance

When a child is placed into the care and custody of DCF, the child's Social Worker shall provide the information required on the DCF-MA1, "Medical Assistance Form," and any supporting documentation to the MAU to ensure that medical coverage is granted for the child.

Cross Reference: Practice Guide, "Health Care Standards and Practice for Children and Youth in Care".

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Travel Out-of-State with a Foster Child

Written permission shall be obtained from the Area Office before a foster child can travel out-of-state for overnight trips.

Permission from the Area Office is not required for trips out-of-state with the foster parent for less than 48 hours or day field trips with an organization (e.g., school, church, scouts).

Cross Reference: Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard in DCF Policy 24-1, "Foster Care Services".

Permission to Travel Out-of-state

The child's legal status determines who may grant out-of-state travel permission.

The worker shall:

- obtain signatures on the DCF-2140, "Authorization For Out-of-State Travel for a Foster Child";
- provide the foster parent with a copy of the authorization form; and
- file a copy in the child's record.

If the child's legal status is...	Permission must be granted by....	Authorization Form
Voluntary Placement	Child's parent or legal guardian	DCF-2140, "Authorization for Out-of-State Travel for a Foster Child"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order of Temporary Custody • Committed to DCF • Parental Rights Have Been Terminated (TPR'd) 	Program Supervisor, Program Director or Regional Administrator	DCF-2140, "Authorization for Out-of-State Travel for a Foster Child".

Emergency Medical treatment while out of state

If the foster child needs emergency medical treatment while out-of-state, the medical provider or facility must obtain permission prior to providing treatment, as follows:

Type of Placement	Medical Provider Must Call...
Voluntary	Child's parent/guardian or, if not available, as below
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order of Temporary Custody (OTC) • Committed • TPR 	When regional offices are open: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Supervisor, • Program Director, or • Regional Administrator When regional offices are closed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careline Program Supervisor

Daycare for Foster Children

Foster parents may request assistance to pay for day care.

See: DCF Policy 24-1, "Foster Care Services Overview" for criteria and procedures.

Moving a Child in Out-of-home placement

The Department of Children and Families shall provide written notice to a child’s foster parent, the child, child’s attorney and/or guardian ad litem prior to any change in out-of-home placement.

For non-emergency removals from placement, the Social Worker shall provide the written notifications at least ten calendar days before removal. The notification to foster parent and attorney/guardian ad litem, shall include the reasons for the decision to remove the child and notice of the foster parent’s right to request a removal hearing if the foster parent disagrees with the removal. The child shall remain in the out-of-home placement until the expiration of the ten-day notice period or pending the resolution of any administrative hearing.

In an emergency situation notice shall be provided not later than two business days following the date of a change of placement.

Emergency means a situation in which an immediate threat to the physical or emotional health or welfare of a child exists or is suspected and there is no means of temporarily alleviating the threat.

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Written Notification of Removal

For foster parents, the Social Worker shall use the DCF-2082, "Notification to Foster Parent of a Child's Placement Change."

For attorneys and guardians ad litem, the Social Worker shall send a copy of the DCF-2082 via email to the office of the Supervising Public Defender at Pubdefdcfkids@jud.ct.gov.

A copy of the DCF-2082 shall also be sent to the DCF Administrative Hearings Unit at Central Office.

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Appeal by foster parent of removal

A foster parent shall have ten days from the date of receipt of the DCF-2082 to request a removal hearing.

Removal hearings are conducted pursuant to DCF Policy 6-5, "Administrative Hearings".

Request by Out-of-home placement for removal

When the foster parent or other out-of-home placement resource requests that a child be removed, the Social Worker shall meet with the foster parent or other caregiver, the foster parent's FASU Social Worker, the child, and, if appropriate, the child's parents:

- on the same day if the request is for immediate removal
- within five working days, in all other situations.

Topics for the removal meeting shall include but not be limited to:

- the reason for the request for the child's removal
- the impact upon the child of continuing the current placement
- services that may be offered to maintain the placement
- whether a respite placement is appropriate
- if the child is to be removed, whether and under what conditions the child may remain in the placement pending a planned move
- if and how the caregiver will continue his or her relationship with the child.

The Social Worker shall document in the computer system the results of the removal meeting including the reasons for all decisions made.

Cross Reference: DCF Policy 21-2, "Child and Family Permanency Teaming" and Child and Family Permanency Teaming Practice Guide.

Follow-up Activities by Ongoing and FASU Social Workers

If the placement can be maintained, the Social Worker shall arrange for any agreed-upon service(s).

If the outcome is to remove the child, the FASU Social Worker shall immediately begin the search for a new placement.

Counseling and support shall be provided to the child and the caregiver around issues of transition.

The Social Worker shall assist the child with issues of loss pertaining to the move to reduce the possibility of future placement failures.

A child who was not present at the removal meeting shall be informed in person by the Social Worker of the reasons for the move. The child shall be provided with information about any planned new placement and have pre-placement visits.

Creating a Life Book

An often used tool in the preparation of children for adoptive placement is the Life Book. A Life Book depicts major events in a child's life in writing, pictures and drawings. The book is usually put together jointly by the worker and the child, along with participation by other significant persons when appropriate.

Creating a Life Book (continued)

The process of preparing the book can take a long time, perhaps months, and should proceed at a pace that is comfortable for the child.

The book should be accurate in its explanation of events that have transpired. Any misconceptions can be corrected in the process.

Workers should phrase things in as objective a manner as possible. For example, the book could state the child's mother's age when the child was born, but not that the mother was too young. It might note that the parents were divorced because they had a lot of fights, but no judgement about the blame would be included.

The book should incorporate information about parents that is neutral and positive. For children who are not returning home, a physical description of the parents should be included, with pictures if possible. The interests, talents and occupations of parents can be listed and children can be encouraged to take pride in the positive attributes of their parents.

When children have lived in many places, each one can be identified with a date and related pictures of houses, schools, foster parents, significant child caretakers, acquaintances, and important neighborhood places.

Because children are not apt to have accurate information themselves, the worker needs to collect many details from various sources in order to assist the child with the book. Parents can be supported to involve themselves by giving information, providing pictures, or describing what some events were like, thus participating in the child's development in a substantial way.

Child(ren)'s Participation

Children can benefit from going back and revisiting former places where they have lived. This can help make their memories more real and also facilitate their ability to move on to new settings.

When photographs of significant people are not available, children can be invited to draw people as they remember them, or write or dictate a description. Their active participation in making the book is important by facilitating a child's perception of the past so that a sense of continuity is established and the present can be better understood and accepted.

Adoption Disruptions

Disruption is defined as the permanent removal of the child any time between placement and finalization of the adoption.

While all efforts should be made to avoid a disruption, it is important to recognize when the removal of the child is not only inevitable but necessary. Because of the Department's strong desire to make the placement work, workers may be prone to attempt to maintain the placement beyond the point where it should have ended, causing unnecessary hardships to both child and family.

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Adoption Disruptions (continued)

At the same time, while disruption should be discussed with the family as an option, workers should not assume that the adoptive parents are wavering in their commitment when they seek help for the child or admit to having problems with him.

Note: The child should not be removed precipitously without a careful evaluation of the situation.

Once the decision has been made to terminate the placement, it is important to determine as quickly as possible what the next placement will be for the child.

Meetings

A disruption meeting should be held and will include as many people involved with the child as possible. The purposes of the meeting are to:

- help the child's present and future needs;
- support the family in recovering from the disruption;
- improve practice, and
- demonstrate that the disruption is most likely the result of multiple factors, not the fault of any one person.

Cross Reference: DCF Policy 21-2-1, "Considered Removal: Child and Family Team Meetings, and the Practice Guide.

Identifying a Permanent Home

As noted above, it is important to determine the next placement as quickly as possible. The adoption resource liaison may be consulted to seek profiles of eligible pre-adoptive placements.

Cross Reference: DCF Policy 21-2-2, "Permanency Plan Teams: Family Selection".
