

ONGOING SERVICES

Voluntary Placement

23-2-1 Page 1 of 4

Policy

The Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families, shall furnish protective services or provide and pay, wholly or in part, for the care and protection of children other than those committed by the Superior Court whom, he/she finds in need of such care and protection from the state.

The purpose of the voluntary placement is to help parents who may need assistance for a short period of time, by providing basic care for their child(ren) in an out-of-home setting.

For example, placement may be arranged for a child while a parent is undertaking an inpatient course of treatment or needs specialized training in caring for a child's special needs.

Legal Reference: Conn Gen Statutes Sect. §17a-90

Assessment

Prior to determining whether a voluntary placement is appropriate, the Department shall assess the needs of the family, the presenting problem, circumstances of their situation, family dynamics, risk factors and resources available to them.

The assessment shall also examine the suitability and willingness of the extended family to care for the child. The worker shall identify available supportive services within the community which can enable parents to adequately care for the child, and shall assess the family in utilizing these resources.

If, after assessing the situation, it appears that the parent(s) or guardian will not be able to provide continued basic care, that family support and/or community resources are not available or are insufficient to meet the needs of the child, and that the situation may be remedied within a short period of time, DCF may, upon receipt of a written request of the parent(s), enter into an agreement to provide voluntary placement.

Serious Risk of Abuse or Neglect

Under no circumstances is voluntary placement to be considered when the child is at serious risk of abuse or neglect. If evidence exists to support a petition of abuse or neglect, a petition must be filed.

If a child is in imminent danger, consideration must be given for a Ninety-Six (96) Hour Hold or seeking an Order of Temporary Custody.

A voluntary placement may not be used as a substitute for any court actions.

SDM Risk Assessment

The Social Worker shall use the SDM tools to determine the degree of risk and safety to the child.

Request for Voluntary Placement

A request for voluntary placement must be completed on each separate child for whom a voluntary placement is requested by completing the DCF-526, "Request for Voluntary Placement". The DCF-526 must be signed and dated prior to the placement.

ONGOING SERVICES

Voluntary Placement

23-2-1 Page 2 of 4

Not to Exceed Ninety (90) Days Without Extension

A voluntary placement shall not exceed ninety (90) days.

If the parent or guardian requests an extension, the worker must request an extension from the Regional Administrator giving a full explanation and justification of the appropriateness of continuing the voluntary placement for an additional thirty (30) days.

If granted, neglect petitions shall be immediately filed, but no later than 120 days from initial placement. All requests must be made at least five (5) days before the end of the agreed upon time.

Administrative Case Review

All voluntary placements require case plans and reviews as specified in Policy 20-1, "Case Planning".

Court Determinations

No child shall remain in voluntary placement beyond one hundred twenty (120) days without a court determination that continuing in placement is in the child's best interest. The Department has no authority to hold a child, simply because a petition has been filed. Therefore, petitions should be filed by the ninetieth (90) day. If such an approval is not obtained, custody cannot be maintained.

For a Title IV-E eligible child receiving voluntary placement services continued eligibility requires that a judicial determination be made prior to the 181st day of placement that:

- a continuation in the parent(s) home would be contrary to the welfare of the child, or
 - that is in the child's best interest to remain in care.
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Changing Placements

Whenever a child is to have a change in placement, such changes must be discussed with the parent(s) or guardian prior to the change. In the case of emergencies, the worker shall inform the parent(s) or guardian as quickly as possible. Such notification shall be made on an oral basis followed by a written notice.

Social work staff shall:

- discuss any changes with the parent(s) or guardian in all non-emergency situations;
- advise the parent(s) or guardian of their right to challenge the Department's decision and of their right to request a treatment plan review;
- attempt to notify the parent(s) or guardian immediately by telephone and confirm in writing, utilizing DCF-2030, "Notification to Parent(s)/Guardian of Change of Placement", within two (2) working days, of the change in placement including the reasons for the change; and
- attempt to discuss the reasons for the placement change within two (2) working days in all emergency situations and to complete the DCF-2030 within two (2) working days to provide written notification with a return receipt.

Note: Please refer to DCF Policy 23-4 "Out-of-Home Placement Cases".

ONGOING SERVICES

Voluntary Placement

23-2-1 Page 3 of 4

Termination A parent or guardian who voluntarily places their child with DCF may at any time ask for the child's return. The child must be returned within twenty-four (24) hours by DCF unless there is evidence that suggests the child will be at risk if returned home. If such evidence exists, DCF shall take all appropriate legal action for the protection of the child.

Termination of a voluntary placement occurs under the following conditions:

- within twenty-four (24) hours of a parent's or guardian's request;
- by agreement of DCF and the parent(s) or guardian(s);
- when an Order of Temporary Custody has been issued which finds that it is not in the child's best interest to return home;
- when the child has been committed to the Department pursuant to the disposition of a neglect petition; and
- when the immediate return of the child would present such a level of danger to the child that a Ninety-Six (96) Hour Hold or motion for order of temporary custody is needed to ensure the safety of the child.

The Social Worker shall:

- upon the receipt of a request by the parent(s) or guardian, return the child from a voluntary placement within twenty-four (24) hours, if no grounds exist to suggest this is not in the best interest of the child;
- immediately file a petition with the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters if it is determined that the parent(s) or guardian is unwilling or unable to provide protection or meet the child's basic needs;
- notify the parent(s) or guardian of the decision to file petitions as soon as the decision has been reached, unless it is felt to jeopardize the safety or health of the child;
- attempt to notify the parent(s) or guardian by telephone within twenty-four (24) hours of the decision to return the child and to follow this with written notification within thirty-six (36) hours;
- not hold the child from return from the parent(s) or guardian unless there is a court approval or an agreement with the parent(s) or guardian or their legal representative; and
- update the request for voluntary placement and file this information in the legal section of the child's uniform case record.

Rights of Parents

Parent(s) have a right to:

- visit on a regular basis in a setting conducive to positive interaction;
- participate in the development and administrative review of case plans, including an expression of comments and objections;
- appeal any decision made by the Department through the Department's review or fair hearing process;
- receive all information germane to their child's case in a language they understand; and
- all legal rights and protection that apply to any child placed in DCF care.

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ONGOING SERVICES

Voluntary Placement

23-2-1 Page 4 of 4

**Rights of
Parents**
(continued)

DCF will provide to each parent whose child is in voluntary placement a:

- name, address and telephone number of the child's placement;
 - name, address and telephone number of the child's Social Worker;
 - written notice of any change in the visitation schedule and the reasons for the change; and
 - written notice of any change in the placement and the reasons for the change.
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