



MEMORANDUM

TO: DCF All Staff
FROM: Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes
DATE: April 20, 2023
SUBJECT: New Announced Unannounced Visitation Guidance

Ensuring child safety is the primary responsibility of the Department of Children and Families and is the focus of all our collective efforts.

Utilizing both unannounced and announced visitation balances family engagement and child safety. Family engagement includes conducting quality assessments of safety, risk, strengths and needs. This is accomplished through face-to-face contact and direct observation. Child safety must be continuously assessed using the ABCD paradigm with all families and should inform the frequency and purpose of visitation.

If a safety factor has been identified and child(ren) have been assessed to be in imminent danger, or at significant risk, an unannounced visit must occur. For all other circumstances, announced visitation shall be the preferred action.

Virtual visits were used under the public health emergency during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are no longer permitted as the sole means of assessing safety in standard practice. Virtual visits used to supplement information gleaned during in-person visits, **must not take the place of the minimum required visitation standards per DCF policy.**

Best practice dictates an assessment of the appropriateness of unannounced visits. These critical decisions are made through case consultation and supervision with the rationale clearly documented in the case record.

When determining whether to conduct announced or unannounced visits, **staff should consider:**

- The age and vulnerability of the child(ren), including children who are not enrolled in school or not visible to the community,
- Parental protective capacities
- Level of parental engagement and participation in services
- Current substance misuse,
- Mental health instability,
- Concerns regarding home conditions
- Nature of allegations
- The family's child protective services history and how it impacts the current situation

- If a safety plan is in effect
- If there is a family arrangement
- Any current court involvement
- History or current protective/restraining orders
- Changes in family circumstances or new information about family dynamics
- Inability to contact the family after two scheduled announced visits within 30 days

All of the above are factors that may be impacting child safety and may require staff to conduct unannounced visits with the family.