

# PERMANENCY PLANNING

## Parent/Child Visitation

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### Policy

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) shall ensure that children under the Commissioner's care and custody are provided with visitation with their parents and siblings.

DCF shall ensure that a child's visits with his or her parents occur as frequently as reasonably possible.

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### Visitation

Visitation is a right of the children and their parents. When placement is necessary to ensure child safety, it is essential to swiftly create ongoing opportunities for children to see their parent(s) and for parents to have meaningful interactions and contact with their children.

Following the child's separation from home, the initial parent-child contact should occur as soon as practically and logistically possible, within two to five days of the child's placement. Early visits can help the child adjust to placement and minimize the trauma of separation.

The frequency of visitation should:

- correlate with the child's age and development
  - be of adequate duration to maintain the parent/child relationship
  - be consistent with the child's permanency goal
  - be scheduled at least weekly for children older than 5
  - occur at a higher frequency for children under 5, especially for infants
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### Preparation and Planning for Visitation

Preparing parents, caregivers, and children and the individuals supervising the visits is critical to successful visitation. This can reduce anxieties, fears, and helps to clarify expectations and responsibilities. The assigned social worker, with support from the foster care support worker, will engage all parties in planning to ensure visits go smoothly and that they provide positive experiences for both parent and child.

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### Visitation Plans

Family input is the key to effective visitation planning. Engaging the parents in creating their visitation plan helps facilitate their commitment to the plan and encourages reunification. The social worker will incorporate the family's choices and preferences into the plan to the extent possible.

In addition to documenting the goals, activities and logistics of the visits (frequency, duration, location, visitation participants), the social worker will ensure the visitation plan also includes parental expectations which outline the specific behaviours or actions that may result in the visit ending early.

All parties should be provided written notice of the visitation Plan. When changes are made to the visitation plan, staff shall notify all appropriate parties. In addition to the visitation schedule, additional contact between parents and their children may occur through phone calls, texts and virtual contact to further support the continuity of family relationships.

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### Visitation Plans (continued)

Visitation plans are reviewed in supervision and in permanency teaming meetings. The plan should be modified as case circumstances change. These reviews are inclusive of feedback from all individuals who supervise visitation.

**Cross-reference:** DCF Policy 23-4, Out of Home Placement

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### Determining Level of Supervision

Supervised visitation is essential to ensure a child's physical and emotional safety, as well as to strengthen the parent/child relationship and enhance parental protective actions.

The level of supervision needed is determined primarily by safety concerns and presenting risk factors that impact child safety.

The social worker, in consultation with their supervisor, will determine whether visits are supervised based on the following:

- safety (assessed through SDM, ABCD Paradigm)
    - consider nature and severity of abuse
    - potential abduction of child
  - presenting risk factors and whether they can be controlled
  - progress with case plan objectives and specific steps, including feedback from community providers involved with the family
  - age and child vulnerabilities
    - child's protective capacity to engage in safety planning efforts
    - child expresses or demonstrates fear of parent
    - parent's ability to respond to the child's specialized needs
  - parental protective factors and capacities
  - evaluation of current visitation plan
  - child's permanency plan
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### Communication and Collaboration

Ongoing communication between all parties involved with visitation is critical.

The social worker shall:

- observe at least one parent/child interaction monthly
- communicate regularly with the child and child's caregiver to assess impact of visitation
- communicate regularly with the individuals supervising the visit
- provide ongoing feedback to parents about interactions with their children
- assess relative's capacity to supervise visits and ability to establish boundaries, set limits, and intervene if necessary
- update the visitation plan when appropriate

If it becomes necessary to end or cancel the visit, the individual supervising the visit shall immediately notify the assigned social worker or social work supervisor and if necessary, involve security and/or contact their supervisor for assistance.

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### Reviewing the Visitation Plan

Visitation plans are reviewed monthly in supervision and more formally during permanency teaming meetings. In order to assess whether the visitation plan should be modified, it is important to obtain direct feedback from the person supervising the visit, and all parties involved with visitation.

The feedback provided shall inform the decision whether a modification to the family's visitation plan can be pursued.

**Cross reference:** Permanency Planning Guide, 25-0PG

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### Evaluating the Visitation Plan

Prior to modifying the visitation plan, the social worker and supervisor shall consider the following information:

- consistency and quality of parent/child interactions
- child's reaction to visitation
- feedback from individuals supervising visitation
- progress with case plan goals
- age and child vulnerability

**Cross reference:** Permanency Planning Guide, 25-0PG

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### Supervisory Review

The family's visitation plan is reviewed monthly during supervision.

Based on the information gathered, the social work supervisor shall determine whether the visitation plan can be adjusted.

If during the last two consecutive monthly reviews there has been minimal or no progress made, consideration should be given to modifying the visitation plan to include a more intensive level of parent coaching/guidance around visitation.

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### Progression of Visitation

If during the monthly review of visitation, the family has experienced multiple successful visits, the social worker, in consultation with their supervisor, can modify the family's visitation plan to change one element - either an increase in frequency or an increase in duration of the visit. To maintain a safe, successful visit, it is important not to change too much of the plan at once.

If the modified change is successful, the visits can, over time, gradually move to more normal family interactions. The goal is to slowly increase parental responsibility during visits and move towards unsupervised contact in the parent's home while safely assessing the parent's ability.

This progressive approach ensures child safety, allows parents to practice new skills, provides opportunities for the DCF to assess parenting skills and progress, and helps the child achieve more timely permanency.

If problems occur after a change to the visitation plan, the family should return to the prior visitation plan that was successful and assess what may have contributed to the problems.

### **Transitioning from Unsupervised to Overnight**

The social worker, in consultation with their supervisor, shall consider the following when transitioning from unsupervised contact to overnight visits:

- case plan objectives have been met or close to being achieved
- safety concerns have been addressed
- consistent and quality parent/child visitation and interaction
- risk factors have been adequately controlled
- SDM reunification assessment has been completed and supports the plan to reunify.

Transitioning from supervised to unsupervised visits or from unsupervised to overnight visits requires program supervisor approval.

DCF must notify the child's attorney prior to any change from supervised to unsupervised visitation.

When a child is still under an order of temporary custody, any determination to move to unsupervised visitation needs the approval of program supervisor level or above.

**Cross reference:** ABCD Child Safety Practice Model and Safety Planning Guide

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### **Decreasing, Suspending or Terminating Visits**

The social worker, in consultation with their supervisor and Program Supervisor will consider the following when deciding to decrease, suspend or terminate visits:

- identify the specific parental behaviours or significant child reactions which are having a negative impact on the child and/or parent/child relationship and efforts to address concerns.
- child's behaviours (unconnected to visitation) are significantly impacting the quality of parent/child interactions and having a detrimental impact on the child's functioning.
  - consultation with and support from the regional resource group, legal, medical professionals, psychiatric, or other appropriate professionals as applicable prior to the termination or suspension of visits
  - if during visitation, the parents' behaviour presents danger to the child, the visit will be terminated immediately.

**Cross-reference:** DCF Legal Policy 6-6, Superior Court for Juvenile Matters

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### **Virtual Visitation between Family Members**

The practice of DCF is to provide in person visitation whenever possible. Visitation may take place virtually instead of in-person under the following circumstances:

- 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).
- when in-person visits cannot be accomplished because one or more participants are incapacitated due to health-related reasons.

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- 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.

\*Cross Reference: C.G.S. section 17a-10a (21)

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**Documentation** Narratives describing visitation and all changes to the visitation plan should be documented in the electronic record.