

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 8: Out-of-Home Services	Effective Date: February 1, 2020
	Section 12: Developing the Visitation Plan	Version: 8

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

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, or custodian unless an order for no visitation has been issued by the court and/or parental rights have been terminated. The [Visitation Plan](#) will be reviewed and adjusted at Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings or Case Plan Conferences and will be included in the child’s [Case Plan \(SF 2956\)](#). See policies [5.7 Child and Family Team Meetings](#) and [5.8 Developing the Case Plan](#) for further guidance.

DCS will determine if there is a preexisting visitation order for the noncustodial parent and, if an order exists, obtain a copy for presentation to the court. DCS will provide the court with a recommendation for visitation of the noncustodial parent, including incarcerated parents, if there is no preexisting visitation order or if the preexisting visitation order is not in the best interest of the child.

DCS will:

1. Ensure the initial face-to-face contact is made between the child and his or her parent, guardian, or custodian within 48 hours of removal; and

Exception: A Family Case Manager (FCM) Supervisor may approve phone contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian if extenuating circumstances exist.

2. Ensure face-to-face contact is made between the child and his or her siblings within five (5) days of removal. See [Practice Guidance](#) for additional information and possible exceptions for face-to-face contact.

The [Visitation Plan](#) provides parameters for visitation between the child and his or her parent, guardian, or custodian; any siblings; other family members; and other individuals with whom the child has formed a significant relationship. All [Visitation Plans](#) will include:

1. A goal of reestablishing, maintaining, and/or strengthening the bond that exists between the child and his or her family;
2. Face-to-face contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian at least once per week and at least twice per week if the child is an infant (age 0-1 year) or toddler (age 1-2 years); 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 individuals with whom the child has a positive, significant relationship as long as it is deemed appropriate, and does not negatively affect the child. This should not interfere with or disrupt the regular visitation of the parent, guardian, or custodian.

Note: All [Visitation Plans](#) must include alternative forms of contact (e.g., phone calls, cards, letters, photographs, or recordings) if face-to-face visits are not possible. If the court has ordered no face-to-face contact between the child and his or her parent, guardian, or custodian, alternative forms of contact may be requested to maintain and develop the parent-child bond. See policies [8.11 Parental Interaction and Involvement](#) and [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#) for additional information.

Code References

[IC 31-34-15-4: Form; contents](#)

PROCEDURE

The FCM will:

1. Make diligent efforts to schedule initial face-to-face contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian and siblings as required;
2. Document all requests for visitation in the case management system contacts within three (3) business days;
3. Convene a CFT Meeting and/or Case Plan Conference to assist in the development of the [Visitation Plan](#). See policies [5.7 Child and Family Team Meetings](#) and [5.8 Developing the Case Plan](#) for further guidance;
4. Ensure the written [Visitation Plan](#) includes the following components:
 - a. A visitation goal,
 - b. Parameters of contact (i.e., who, what, and how often),
 - c. Supervision (i.e., the degree of supervision necessary for each person who will visit and who may provide supervision). See [8.C Tool - Supervision of Visits](#) for additional information,
 - d. Visit logistics (e.g., location, time and length of visits, and transportation),
 - e. Appropriate activities during visitation, in particular, developmental activities, parenting activities, and any special considerations and/or 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 noncustodial parent, if appropriate (see additional information regarding [Noncustodial Parent Visitation](#) below), and
 - h. Provisions for face-to-face contact and/or other alternate forms of contact with persons whom the child has a positive, significant relationship, if appropriate and does not interfere with case plan goals or have a negative impact on the child;
5. Engage the CFT in problem-solving regarding any barriers to visitation (e.g., transportation). See policy [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#) for additional guidance;
6. Utilize alternative forms of contact when circumstances prevent face-to-face visitation or make it an extreme hardship (e.g., phone contact, email and electronic communication, drawings, cards, and/or letters). Circumstances which may necessitate occasional or consistent use of alternative forms of contact include a parent or sibling who:
 - a. Is incarcerated,
 - b. Resides in another state,
 - c. Refuses face-to-face contact, and/or
 - d. Is placed in a residential treatment center with restricted or no visitation;
7. Ensure all parties understand the [Visitation Plan](#) fully, and obtain signatures of all parties involved in implementing the [Visitation Plan](#);

8. Review with all parties how the [Visitation Plan](#) will be implemented, monitored, and adjusted throughout the life of the case. See policy [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#) for further guidance;
9. Facilitate the convening of the CFT and/or Case Plan Conference, within 30 calendar days of removal or decision to begin concurrent planning, by identifying a second permanency plan. See policy [5.15 Concurrent Planning](#) for further guidance;
10. Submit any preexisting court ordered visitation plans along with the proposed [Visitation Plan](#) to the court for approval; and
11. Ensure the approved [Visitation Plan](#) is documented in the case management system, included in the [Case Plan \(SF 2956\)](#), and updated as needed.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Guide the FCM to ensure all duties are completed timely and appropriately;
2. Ensure the [Visitation Plan](#) is documented in the case management system, included in the [Case Plan \(SF 2956\)](#), and updated as needed; and
3. Ensure any deviations from best practice are documented in the case management system.

Noncustodial Parent Visitation

The FCM will:

1. Determine whether a visitation order for the noncustodial parent exists and, if so, obtain a copy for presentation to the court;
2. Provide the court with a recommendation for visitation with the noncustodial parent, including incarcerated parents, if there is not an existing order or if the order is not in the best interest of the child; and
3. Document the approved [Visitation Plan](#) in the case management system.

Visitation For Families Where Domestic Violence Has Been Identified

The FCM will:

1. Work with the CFT to develop a [Visitation Plan](#) for the family;
2. Offer separate visitation time for the non-offending parent and the alleged domestic violence offender;
3. Consider recommending supervised visitation if the child is afraid of the alleged domestic violence offender or either parent has physically abused the child;
4. Not inform the alleged domestic violence offender of the non-offending parent's visitation time; and
5. Ensure there is no overlap of parental visitation time.

Note: Ample time should be included for the non-offending parent to pick up or drop off the child or to arrive or leave the premises without being forced to interact with the alleged domestic violence offender. The non-offending parent should not be expected to transport the child to or from visits with the alleged domestic violence offender.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Sibling Visitation

Sibling visitation should be promoted for every child who is placed in out-of-home care, including visitation with siblings who are not in out-of-home care. However, face-to-face contact between the child and his or her siblings within five (5) days of removal may not be possible or appropriate for a child:

1. Placed in one (1) of the following:
 - a. Residential placement;
 - b. Hospital; or
 - c. Juvenile Detention Center;
2. Who has entered out-of-home placement due to a serious safety risk posed to that child by a sibling, and a court has not yet ruled on the appropriateness of the sibling visitation; or
3. When a court has ordered that the siblings shall not have contact with each other.

The child, resource 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. **When face-to-face contact does not occur between the child and his or her siblings, alternate forms of contact should be considered and the reasons for delay or lack of contact must be documented in the case management system.**

Visitation with Incarcerated Parent, Guardian, or Custodian

Children benefit from maintaining contact with their parent, guardian, or custodian, especially when reunification is the goal. The Indiana Department of Corrections (DOC) may permit children to visit with their incarcerated parent unless the parent has a sex offense as a basis for the commitment. The FCM should contact DOC to determine whether the incarcerated parent may or may not have visitation with children.

The FCM should also contact the county jail and/or federal prison facility, when applicable, to determine whether the incarcerated parent, guardian, or custodian may or may not have visitation or other contact with the child.

FORMS AND TOOLS

1. [Visitation Plan](#) – Available in the case management system
2. [8.C Tool – Supervision of Visits](#)
3. [Case Plan \(SF 2956\)](#) – Available in the case management system

RELATED INFORMATION

Importance of Maintaining Parent, Guardian, or Custodian Contact

A child has the fundamental right to visit with his or her parent, guardian, or custodian. Ideally, the relationship developed between a parent and child consists 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 to not feel abandoned by his or her parent, guardian, or custodian.

Importance of Maintaining Sibling Contact

The longest lasting relationship a child shares is often with his or her siblings. This bond helps a child develop his or her own unique identity. When siblings cannot be placed together, the ability to maintain contact with each other may 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 \(SF 2956\)](#).

Visitation Rights

The child and his or her parent, guardian, or custodian retain the right of reasonable contact with each other unless a petition for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) has been filed or the court has restricted contact.

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