Subject: Face-to-Face Visitation with Dependent and Neglected and Unruly Children in DCS Custody


Standards: DCS Practice Model Standards – 6-509C, 6-513C, 7-200A, 12-102, and 12-201
COA: (FP) PA-CFS 15.07, PA-CFS 17.04, PA-CFS 17.05, (FP) PA-CFS 17.06

Application: This policy applies to all DCS Employees/Contract Providers.

Policy Statement:
All children in the custody of DCS with an adjudication of dependent and neglected or unruly and those with Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) involvement shall be visited and seen face-to-face on a regular basis. However, DCS supervisory discretion is permissible in special circumstances to allow visitation alternatives when the child’s and family’s unique situation warrants it.

Purpose:
To establish standards for face-to-face visits between the child, family, and social service workers including alternative methods of visitation under special circumstances.

Procedures:

A. Outcomes and Frequency for Face-to-Face Visits
All face-to-face visitations are to be made in accordance with the Visitation Protocol.

B. General Guidelines for Face-to-Face Visits
1. Face-to-face visits with children are made through a mix of home, placement, school, community, daycare and office visits and are consistent with the child’s safety needs. In most cases visits with children at school should be associated with prescheduled meetings. School should not be a common visitation environment.
2. If the child is placed in a DCS foster home, visits between the Family Service Worker (FSW) and the child occur at least twice monthly (with more visits during the first two months of placement per the Visitation Protocol) with at least one visit in the child’s placement monthly. If the child is placed in a contract agency foster home or congregate care setting, the FSW will see the child at least once a month face to face and at least once a quarter in the child’s placement.
3. Face-to-face visits between the FSW and the child must include a private conversation, out of the presence of the foster parent or other caregiver to assess and monitor the child’s safety and well-being. The FSW can observe their physical
and emotional health, their developmental progress, and their behaviors and affect. In cases of non-verbal children, an attempt at a private conversation should occur using other means of communication such as sign language, drawing pictures or usage of electronic devices. For school-age children, the FSW can assess their education and school progress and performance. It also gives the child an opportunity to ask questions and to express feelings and concerns about their situation.

4. A visit in which the FSW/contract provider worker sees the child, caretaker and/or Birth Parent/Guardian satisfies the visitation requirement for each, provided that individual meetings occur with all parties.

5. An unsuccessful visit (no one is home) does not satisfy the requirement for visitation.

6. Denial/cancelation of visitation is prohibited as a disciplinary action of the parent or child.

7. The Child and Family Team will create a visitation plan during the development of the permanency plan as a visitation need record. The visitation plan should be updated during all Child and Family Team meetings. Any significant modifications (i.e. supervision changes in visitation, length and location of visitation) with the visitation plan may require a court review. Refer to the Visitation Plan Work Aid for assistance.

8. All visitation plans must comply with any applicable court orders.

9. The face-to-face visits should include individual and private conversation with each custodial child, age permitting.

C. Documentation of Supervision of Children

1. All case contacts and activities described in this policy are documented in case recordings in compliance with DCS Policy 31.14, Documentation of TFACTS Case Recordings.

2. Face to face contacts are recorded in the current child welfare information system.

3. Private meetings between the FSW and the child, outside of the presence of the parent or foster parent/caretaker, is specifically documented.

4. Contract providers must follow the guidelines established in the Contract Provider Manual regarding documentation and submission of visits.

5. Supervision of children placed in Tennessee under the auspices of Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) will be in accordance with this policy and will be documented in TFACTS and on CS-0430, Quarterly Progress Report on Child in State Custody. (Refer to ICPC Practices and Procedures Manual).

D. Usage of Skype

Section 422(b)(17) of the Social Security Act does not recognize videoconferencing or similar forms of technology as meeting the requirements for face to face visits between caseworker and child. Skype for Business, as a tool, can therefore only be used to supplement visitation requirements that are outlined in the Visitation Protocol, not to replace any of the requirements.

Examples of supplemental usage of Skype for Business include, but may not necessarily be limited to:

1. Parent/child visitation/family therapy when the parent cannot travel long distances;
consideration should be given to the child’s age and circumstances;
2. Parent participation in medication management appointments when travel is not feasible or possible;
3. Supplemental parent/child visits beyond those required in the protocol;
4. CFTM participation with an incarcerated parent or parent unable to travel to a meeting;
5. Supplemental contacts where an out of state provider has responsibility for the monthly face to face contact;
6. Usage for meetings between Alternative Work Space staff and Team Leaders;
7. Usage by Family Support Worker and Foster Parent Support staff to communicate with foster parents in crisis situations; and,
8. Supplemental visits between worker and child if regular face-to-face has been met.

Note: Staff is to use only Skype for Business software installed by DCS IT staff.

E. Data Systems Documentation
1. Placement information for children/youth in DCS custody is entered into the current child welfare information system according to best practice and in a timeframe that allows for the needs of the child/youth being placed. This includes: disruptions, move toward permanency, move to a lower level placement, or change in foster home.
2. Events not documented elsewhere in the current child welfare information system or needing fuller explanation are entered into Case Recordings which are recorded and completed within thirty (30) days of date of occurrence.

Forms:
CS-0430, Quarterly Progress Report on Child in State Custody

Collateral documents:
The Interstate Compact on The Placement Of Children Practices and Procedural Manual
Contract Provider Manual
Visitation Protocol
Visitation Plan Work Aid

Glossary:

Term: Contract Provider Worker:
Definition: Any employee of an Agency that has been contracted by the Department of Children’s Services to provide Case Management services and functions in the role as a DCS Family Service Worker.