



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Visitation Plan Work Aid

Supplemental to DCS Policy: 16.31 Permanency Planning for Children/Youth in the Department of Children's Services Custody; 16.38 Face to Face Visitation with Dependent and Neglected and Unruly Children in DCS Custody; 16.43 Supervised and Unsupervised Visitation Between Child/Youth, Family and Siblings

The primary purpose of visitation is to maintain the parent-child relationship, reduce the child/youth's sense of abandonment and preserve their sense of belonging as part of a family and community. Visitation is imperative for the child/youth's and parents' well-being and is fundamental to permanency.

All custody Family Permanency Plans (FPPs) for a child/youth and family will require a need record regarding visitation. Progress on visitation can be updated as needed and should track progress as appropriate. The visitation plan should be purposeful and have a positive effect on the child/youth's need for safety, well-being, and permanency.

The following items should be considered when creating the visitation plan action steps:

1. Expectations for all parties clearly identified making concerted efforts to work with the parents' and child's schedules;
2. The first visit should occur as quickly as possible in order to maintain attachments with the parents. Frequency of visitation thereafter should occur at a minimum weekly taking into consideration the child/youth's age, social, emotional, and cognitive development;
3. Depending upon the circumstances of the case, the level of supervision should be determined to ensure the child/youth's physical and emotional safety. Based on this assessment, the duration of visits and location must be conducive to the level of supervision making concerted efforts for the location to be home-like as possible encouraging natural parent-child interaction;
4. Maintaining all familial relationships is important for the child/youth's well-being and must be preserved. During the Child and Family Team process, the family's support system should be identified and what family members can participate in visitation;
5. Parents should be encouraged to prepare developmentally appropriate and interactive activities in which the child/youth can participate during each visit. Parents should also provide any necessary items their child/youth may need (i.e., diapers, change of clothing, etc.) during the visit;
6. Transportation arrangements must be addressed well in advance of each visitation to avoid the cancellation of visits; and,
7. In situations when a visit must be cancelled, guidelines should be put in place to allow ample time for all parties to be informed.

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Supplemental to: DCS Policies 16.31, 16.38, 16.43

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8. All court orders involving visitation must be followed. DCS must obtain court approval to prohibit all visitations with parents whose parental rights are intact.

Preparing the Child/Youth and Parents for Visitation

Family Service Workers (FSWs)/Juvenile Service Workers (JSWs)/Contract Agency Workers should assist in the success of visitation by preparing the child/youth and parents of expectations identified in the visitation plan. This can be done by the following:

1. Remind parents of the date/time/location of the visit;
2. Discuss planned activities with the child/youth if not already approved;
3. Identify behaviors that will not be acceptable and why;
4. Outline any boundaries that are needed to ensure well-being and safety; and,
5. Discuss any agency services that will be provided during the visit such as coaching for the parent, child/youth's counselor for observation, or an individual that will supervise or monitor the visit.

Debriefing Following Visitation

The FSW/JSW must debrief at a minimum of once per month with the parent and child/youth to assess what worked well and what did not in order to provide continued support for both parties and make possible modification to the visitation plan. The FSW/JSW should be familiar and understand possible reactions by the child/youth and parents around visitation to appropriately address any specific needs.

Reactions in which to be familiar regarding the child/youth are:

- Normal feelings of loss and separation;
- Being anxious and fearful;
- Conflict of loyalty to parents and foster parents;
- Feeling a lack of control;
- Thinking this is their fault;
- Being defensive when they feel their parents are being criticized; and,
- Regressing to babyish behaviors, whining, acting out after visits, having nightmares, and bed wetting.

Reactions in which to be familiar regarding the parents are:

- Expressions of pain, anger, and fear due to losing custody of their child/youth;
- Competing for their child/youth's affection or loyalty making unrealistic promises or undermining the foster parents;
- Reacting to lack of control by wanting certain requirements for visitation location or activities;
- Using alcohol or drugs before a visit; and,
- Canceling or not showing up for visits.

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Reviewing the Visitation Plan

The visitation plan should be reviewed during all Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs). Any significant modifications (i.e., supervision changes in visitation, length and location of visitation) with the visitation plan may require a court review.