

## **POLICY VII-J: DIVISION CONTACT WITH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS, LEGAL CUSTODIANS, AND LEGAL GUARDIANS INVOLVED IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT CASES**

01/2016

Regular communication and quality interaction between the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the biological parents, the legal custodian, or legal guardian from whom the child was removed (hereinafter to be referred to only as biological parents) throughout the life of an out-of-home services case are critical to sustaining parental engagement and providing appropriate support to help the family work toward achieving reunification.

Early engagement with biological parents whose children have been removed from the home is a first step to the overall success of the case. The family may often view the Division's involvement as an unwelcome intrusion. This perception may result in a wide range of reactions from the family including, but not limited to, defensiveness, hostility, resistance, and ambivalence. Nonetheless, the Division must examine the underlying cause of the parents' behavior and try to empathize with the parents by striving to engage them in the assessment and case planning process from the beginning of the out-of-home placement case.

When a Family Service Worker (FSW) is assigned to an out-of-home placement case, he or she will conference with the investigator or on-call worker who removed the child from the home within 72 hours of case assignment. The goal of this conference is to gather all pertinent information the investigator may have regarding the family and reasons for removal. The FSW assigned to the out-of-home placement case will use this information, along with other relevant sources to include any past agency involvement with the family as documented in CHRIS, to begin completing the initial Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) for the family and case plan (see Policy IV-A: Family Assessments and Policy IV-B: Services Case Plan and related procedures for more information).

Within five days of the child's entry into the out-of-home placement, the FSW who is primary (i.e., the FSW investigator if not yet assigned to an FSW case worker or the FSW foster care case worker if the assignment has been made) will attempt to reach the biological parents by phone to schedule the first visit with the biological parents in their residence to update the biological parents on the status of the case at that point and begin the assessment and case planning process. FSWs are encouraged to make this visit as early during the five days following removal as possible. Scheduled visits are preferred, but unannounced visits are acceptable as necessary. If the parents are not at their residence when the FSW attempts the initial visit, the primary FSW will continue to attempt a face-to-face meeting with the biological parents as soon as possible by trying to reach the parents by phone to schedule a visit and/or making unannounced visits to the home.

Following the initial face-to-face visit with the biological parents, the FSW will meet with the biological parent(s) at least weekly in the residence of the biological parent(s) during the first month the case is opened. Both announced and unannounced visits are appropriate depending on the dynamics of a particular case.

After the first month of the open case, the FSW and FSW Supervisor will determine whether the frequency of in-home visits with the biological parents will continue to be weekly or be adjusted to bi-weekly, or, in limited circumstances for cases progressing extremely well, monthly. During these visits, the FSW caseworker will:

- A. Assess parents' progress on case plan services and goals;
- B. Assess parents' new or developing needs, strengths, and/or risks;
- C. Include parents in the ongoing assessment and case planning process;
- D. Respond to parents' questions and concerns; and,
- E. Provide support and guidance to parents as needed.

If in-home visits with the biological parents will be held on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, the Division will also use other forms of communication with the family to maintain weekly contact and update them on various aspects of their case and their children's progress as appropriate. Other forms of communication may include telephone calls, text, and email as well as contact with the family through transports and family-centered staffings.

## **Procedure VII-J1: Caseworker Contacts with Biological Parents**

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The Family Service Worker will:

- A. Conduct the first face-to-face visit with the biological within five days of the child entering an out-of-home placement in order to:
  - 1) Introduce him or herself, if not already completed;
  - 2) Ensure the parents understand the reason for removal;
  - 3) Collect any information critical to their child's health and well-being not already given to the FSW investigator or on-call worker at the time of removal including but not limited to:
    - a) Child's allergies,
    - b) Child's medications,
    - c) Child's school and/or other educational information,
    - d) Behavioral information regarding the child,
    - e) Child's likes and dislikes,
    - f) Support items for the child such as stuffed animals,
    - g) Names and contact information for potential relative and fictive kin placements.
  - 4) Begin gathering information about the strengths and needs of the family to assist with the completion of the CANS and case plan.
- B. As part of meeting due diligence in establishing in-person contact with the parent(s), complete as many of the following activities necessary in order to complete the first in home visit or any visits thereafter:
  - 1) Conduct the appropriate Division of County Operations (DCO) record checks to attempt to obtain a valid address for the parent(s).
  - 2) Ask the local, county, and state law enforcement agencies to check their records for information that may the parent(s).
  - 3) Ask relatives and friends of the parent(s) to provide information to help locate the parent(s).
  - 4) Contact the local post office, utility companies, and schools to request a check of their records.
  - 5) Conduct the Lexis Nexis search to attempt to locate the parent(s).
- C. Document contacts with biological parent(s) in the case contact screen (workload/case/services/contacts) with the purpose of "Family Contact."
- D. Update the CANS and/or case plan as appropriate based on parent visits and other contact.