

GUIDELINES FOR VISITATION FOR CHILDREN IN AGENCY CUSTODY

Trumbull County Children Services is committed to providing children in Agency custody with quality and consistent visitation with their parents and siblings. Generally this visitation is initially scheduled weekly for one hour. As progress is made on the case plan objectives, visitation is generally increased in frequency and duration. In addition, restrictions may be relaxed.

Visitation is a critical period for the child and family. Emotions are high and the child's separation from his/her family is often exacerbated at each visit. However, it is also an excellent opportunity for Children Services to learn about family interaction and family dynamics. It also presents a good opportunity for the caseworker to provide valuable casework counseling with the family, either before or after the visit. It is noted that research indicates that reunification or permanency can be realized quicker through quality visitation in a least restrictive setting.

In the past, all visitation which needed to be supervised or monitored to some degree, took place at Children Services. With the opening of the Solace Center, community based visitation center, another alternative was presented for parent/child visitation. This is a valuable alternative and one which Children Services will continue to utilize. *However, it is critical to case movement and Court preparation, that Children Services be more hands-on with parent/child visitation.* Therefore, the following guidelines have been developed.

1. Caseworker involvement with parent/child visitation does not substitute for the monthly contact with the child at the foster home. This monthly contact must still take place, although it can occur on the same day as a visit, if the caseworker is transporting the child to or from the visit and the caseworker spends quality time with the foster parent and child to observe interaction and assess adjustment.
2. Immediately following a child being placed in Children Services custody, all initial visitation must take place at Children Services.
3. Twice a month caseworkers are to schedule time before or after the visit to spend with the parent, reviewing the case plan objectives, discussing progress, identifying any obstacles toward progress and modeling appropriate parenting techniques. This time for casework counseling can be listed on the visitation schedule for the parents so it becomes a formalized expectation of the parents.
4. To move visitation to the Solace Center, the caseworker must discuss the case with their supervisor, who must approve a referral to the Solace Center. Cases which are high profile Court cases or where interaction between the parent and child has already been deemed to be inappropriate should not be referred to the Solace Center and should continue to take place at Children Services. An exception to this rule would be a parent who has been ordered to stay off Children Services' property. It is noted that it is a rare exception for visitation to be suspended or terminated. This decision is to be made only after much deliberation between the caseworker, supervisor, legal department and senior supervisor.

12. Caseworkers are to complete form #CSB-050, "Trumbull County Children Services Visitation Information" with the family. This form is to be completed prior to visits occurring at the Agency and is to be kept in the family case file.

13. Caseworkers are to document all parent/child/sibling visits on form #133, "Monthly Contact Sheet" regardless of where the visits take place. This form asks specific questions regarding details of each visit and must be filled out completely and kept in the family case file.

14. Case Aides and Family Support Workers are to complete form #CSB 023 "Visitation Assist Form" for all visits they start, end, and/or monitor. This completed form is to be given to the caseworker and kept in the child's file.

15. Caseworkers are to ensure that form #ODHS 1444, Part B, Section 2, "Placement/Visitation" accurately reflects the current visitation schedule and is amended as changes occur.

2-17-05

MP

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