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## POLICY 1005 – Visitation

### A. POLICY

The primary purpose of visitation is to:

- a) Maintain the parent-child attachment
- b) Reduce a child’s sense of abandonment
- c) Preserve their sense of belonging as part of a family and community.
- d) Prepare for Reunification

A child needs to have regular contact with their parent(s), as this relationship is the foundation of child development. Research shows that children who were visited frequently exhibited fewer behavioral problems than children who were visited infrequently or not at all. Children that had frequent contact with their parents showed less anxiety and depression than children that had infrequent or nonexistent visits. (Cantos & Gries, 1997)

Visitation is fundamental to permanency. It facilitates permanency planning, promotes timely reunification, and helps in the decision-making process to establish alternative permanency plans.

Maintaining family connections has life-long significance for a child. Visitation maintains their relationships with siblings and others who have a significant role in a child’s life. When a child loses family connections, they also lose family history, medical history, and cultural information. Even when reunification is not likely, parents, siblings and extended family continue to be important in a child’s life.

Visitation is also critical in helping a child maintain relationships with siblings and others that have a significant role in the child’s live.

### B. PROCEDURES

1. Visitation between children in foster care and their family should be scheduled regularly with a minimum amount of time between visits. Ideally, visits should be held several times per week, however, that is contingent upon the child’s age and development, as well as, the permanency goal.
  - Very young children need physical contact to maintain attachment with parent(s). They need to know that their parent(s) care for them.
  - School aged children and youth can utilize phone calls, e-mails, and texts in addition to regular visits to maintain contact with their parents.
  - Caseworkers will consider if the family can benefit from a Visitation Host to supplement visitation already offered by the caseworker.
2. The family’s Visitation Plan should be developed jointly by the caseworker and the parents or guardians, and in consultation with the Child Attorney or CASA, the child’s tribe if the child is an Indian child, the child’s foster parents, and where appropriate, the child. The

Visitation Plan shall be clearly documented in both the Family Service Plan and the Child Plan.

3. The Visitation Plan must contain the following elements:
  - Date the plan starts
  - Person to be present for visits (parents, siblings, grandparents, kin, etc.)
  - Frequency
  - Arrangements for monitoring or supervision, if necessary
  - Visitation location
  - Transportation arrangements
4. The caseworker, in conjunction with the parents, determines the location of the visit. Visits may take place in the family home, foster home, DFS office, recreational, or other areas suitable for the purpose of the visit. It is important to find ways for the parent and child to have natural interactions.
5. Possible objectives for family visits may include:
  - Establishing and/or strengthening the parent-child relationship
  - Instructing parents in child care skills
  - Helping parents become involved in the child's school, church, or community activities
  - Helping parents gain confidence in meeting their child's needs
6. Ideally, visits should involve parents in routine activities of parenting, such as:
  - Attending the child's school functions
  - Special occasions
  - Medical check-ups
7. Fathers have a significant impact on the lives of their children and should receive equal consideration and involvement in visitation. They should also be kept equally informed about their child's appointments and activities.
8. When a child's parent is incarcerated, special arrangements will be necessary to support visitation. If the parent's incarceration was related to abusing a child, the impact of contact with the parent(s) on the child will need to be assessed. A therapist's assessment and recommendation should be considered before implementation of the visitation plan.
  - A child should be prepared about the contact they will have with a parent in prison. They should know if contact with the parent will be via telephone or if they will be seeing their parent in a small room versus a large room with other inmates.
9. After Family Court approves the child's goal change to APPLA, and when in the best interest of the child, the caseworker will continue to facilitate regular contact between the youth and their family. These contacts may take place in community settings, at the foster home, or anywhere else child's team determines to be appropriate.
10. After Family Court approves the Division's recommendation to change the child's goal to TPR/Adoption, visitation between the child and will be decided by the child's team based on the needs of the child.
  - If the families visit sporadically or inconsistently throughout the life of the case and suddenly wish to increase visitation after the TPR petition has been filed in Family Court, the family should be directed to file a Petition for Visitation in Family Court.

- If the family has legal representation and the subject of visitation comes up, the family's attorney should contact the Division of Family Services' Deputy Attorney General directly to discuss further.
11. For youth aging out of foster care, increased visitation with their family is key to determining which family members will be a supportive resource to them when they leave.
  12. All contacts between a youth and their family must be documented in FOCUS.
    - Visitation for the primary and secondary caregivers will be documented in FOCUS under "caregiver visitation".
    - Visitation for relatives, siblings, and others who have a connection to the child will be documented in FOCUS under "preserving connections".
  13. Visitation should not be used as a punishment or reward. Increased or reduced visitation should be related to an assessment of safety and not linked to other measurements.
    - Visitation between a youth and their family can only be suspended by DFS for two reasons:
      - i. Continued contact presents safety concerns for the youth.
      - ii. Continued contact with the family would not be in the best interests of the youth.
    - The caseworker must request a hearing in Family Court to set visitation limits if the parent's conduct during visitation affects the child adversely. Any modification of court-ordered visitation must be requested and approved through Family Court.
  14. If the family or youth decides they no longer want to have visitation the caseworker will clearly document this in a FOCUS Progress Note. Efforts to resolve the issue surrounding the decision to cease contact must be documented, as well.
  15. There may be times when a child returns home for a brief period of time. If this home visit is only temporary and not the last stage in reunification, this home visit shall be considered a Temporary Home Visit.

**Sibling Visitation**

1. Visitation between siblings must occur at least monthly.
2. If visitation between siblings is detrimental to the children, the caseworker must document in FOCUS the reason why sibling visitation is not occurring.

**C. FOCUS**

All visitation needs to be documented in the FOCUS Case Record under "Visitations". Each child will have details about the visitation and a visitation schedule. The visitation schedule should consist of the following information:

- Date of Visitation
- Visitation Status
  - Scheduled
  - Completed
  - Missed
  - Rescheduled – Acceptable
  - Rescheduled – Unacceptable

- Quality of Caregiver-Child Interaction
  - Strong or Adequate
  - Limited or Destructive
  
- Condition
  - Monitored
  - Supervised
  - Unsupervised
  
- Visitation Worker, name and role

If a child returns home for a brief period of time and then returns to placement a NEW Placement event is completed in FOCUS. Under “Placement” select “New Placement” and “Home Placement – Temporary Home Visit”.

When the child leaves the home the caseworker will need to end the “Home Placement – Temporary Home Visit”.

**D. FORMS** Use the DFS policy website to access any forms:  
<https://kids.delaware.gov/policies/dfs-policies>

Visitation Planning and Reflection Tool  
Visitation Observation Checklist  
Visitation Host Guidelines