

Quality Visitation

Research identifies¹: Child welfare professional visits and interactions with children are the cornerstone of practice and one of the most important ways to promote positive outcomes for children. The core focus of visits is the protection of children. Visits are the mechanism for monitoring safety and providing services to promote the well-being of the child and the child's family and caregivers. The quality and frequency of caseworker visits is related to improved:

- Assessment of children's risk of harm; (safety at home and in out-of-home care)
- Assessing the need for alternative permanency options;
- Identification and provision of needed services, and
- Engagement of children and families in case planning and decision making.

Key elements for quality visits include:

- ☞ Scheduling the frequency of visits based on the needs of children and families.
- ☞ Conducting visits in the home and at times convenient for the child and out-of-home care providers.
- ☞ Planned in advance of the visit, with issues noted for exploration and goals established for the time spent together.
- ☞ Open enough to offer opportunities for meaningful consultation with and by children and out-of-home care providers.
- ☞ Individualized with sufficient private time with the child to discuss any concerns.
- ☞ Focused on the child and family's case plan and the completion of actions necessary.
- ☞ Exploring changes in the child's family and out-of-home care providers' circumstances on an ongoing basis.
- ☞ Supportive and skill generating, so that children, families, and out-of-home care providers feel safe in dealing with challenges, with change and have tools to take advantage of new opportunities or manage existing difficulties.
- ☞ Quality visits are enhanced by child welfare professionals who examine their own and the agency's' performance, as well as how well the family is functioning relative to the support and services provided. (What was the impact/effect of the visit? How did it advance the case plan progress/adjustment to placement, *etc?*)

¹ Child Welfare Caseworker Visits with Children and Parents, National Conference of State Legislatures, September 2006, adapted by ACTION for Child Protection, Inc for Substitute Care visits. October 2009

Quality Visitation, cont'd

Content of a Quality Visit

While the actual content and topical areas may shift according to the purpose of the visit, much of what needs to occur readily falls into several categories/processes.

- ✓ Explain the purpose of the visit.
- ✓ Follow up on any issues from the last visit.
- ✓ Ask what the participants want to accomplish during the visit. Ask the child separately.
- ✓ Assess any significant changes that have occurred since the last visit with the child, out-of-home care caregivers or with the home.
- ✓ Focus the interview in the context of now and your plan for the visit (*e.g.* initial safety assessment, case planning, and or case plan evaluation, visitation, reunification, permanency, *etc.*).
- ✓ Assess/identify any safety issues that impact the child or the out-of-home care arrangement.
- ✓ Identify any serious health or basic needs issues that have emerged and effect child safety or the out-of-home care arrangement.
- ✓ Interview the child individually in a private space.
- ✓ Observe the child's physical health, appearance, and affect.
- ✓ Observe the parent or out-of-home caregiver and child's interaction; child/other children's interaction.
- ✓ Talk with the child about what is happening with their parents and siblings. Cover the visitation plan and issues.
- ✓ Talk with the child about the out-of-home care setting, the caregivers, other children, *etc.*
- ✓ Assess progress being made toward achieving case plan goals; and whether recommended services are being received on the schedule laid out in the case plan.
- ✓ The case plan continues to be appropriate; an assessment/reassessment of service needs was performed.
- ✓ Assess the sufficiency of the Safety Plan.
- ✓ Respond to each and every issue the child brings up even if it seems to be a casual reference or trivial to you.
- ✓ Listen and attend to the out-of-home caregiver(s)' concerns and questions.
- ✓ Avoid aligning with child or out-of-home caregivers.
- ✓ Avoid aligning the child and out-of-home caregiver(s) against one another.
- ✓ Make no promise that you cannot keep.
- ✓ ALWAYS, every time do the following:
 - Put yourself in the child's place, and
 - View the placement through the eyes of the child.