

DSS Policy and Procedure Guide

Division 03: Child Welfare

Chapter 01: Director's Policies

Item 001: Mandatory Face-to-Face Contacts/Documentation Timeframes

Suggested changes send to: [DSS PSOA](#) Mailbox

Issued: **February 17, 2016**

References: California Department of Social Services
Division 31 Regulations [31-320](#), [31-325](#), [31-330](#); All
County Letters [09-11](#), [11-77](#), [13-13](#), [14-38](#), [14-50](#)

Revisions in Red

Replaces Issue: July 12, 2013

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Preamble

Child Welfare Policy and Procedure Guides are meant to be used as tools to relay best practice and staff expectations. It is understood that specific case scenarios may not always align themselves with the stated practices and that at all times what is of paramount importance is the Safety and Well-being of the children we are charged to protect.

Policy

Pursuant to State of California Child Welfare Services Division 31 Regulatory Codes, Department of Social Services (DSS) staff shall have face-to-face contact at least once each calendar month with children, parents and out of home care providers.

Procedure

Contacts with Children and Non-Minor Dependents (NMD)

Although Federal and State mandates indicate that monthly contacts between the Social Worker (SW) and child/NMD must be made at least 50 percent of the time in the child/NMD's placement, Fresno County's expectation is that the ongoing SW will conduct face-to-face contacts with all children and NMDs in their current placement residence monthly. The following exceptions apply:

- The child's or NMD's whereabouts are unknown.
- The child is in an **Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)** placement and there is a SW in the placement state seeing the child and providing reports.

It is understandable that there may be other circumstances where it is in the child/NMD's best interest not to have contact at the placement. However, Federal and State guidelines specify that no more than two consecutive monthly visits can be held outside of the placement.

If a child or NMD is placed in a group home, face to face contact must be made at least once each calendar month with at least a 2-week time frame between visits.

Whenever possible and practicable, the **SW** shall visit the child or NMD alone and in a quiet and private setting. **The child/NMD has the right to be interviewed outside of their placement.**

SWs may conduct unannounced home calls with dependent children and NMDs when there are concerns regarding the safety of a child or NMD, or when the **SW** is responding to an emergency response referral alleging abuse or neglect in the placement home. Every effort will be made to attempt to address concerns during normal working hours.

SWs will seek approval from their **Social Work Supervisor (SWS)** prior to having another **SW** join them on a face-to-face contact visit. **SWSs** may approve joint **SW** visits when it is in the best interest of the child or NMD or when **SW** safety is a concern.

The purpose of **SW** contact with the child or NMD is to assess the safety and well being of the child and to achieve the following objectives/responsibilities:

- Verify the location of the child.
- Assess the physical, emotional, social, and educational development of the child or NMD.
- To the extent possible, engage the child or NMD in the development of the case plan.
- Gather information about the child or NMD to identify needed services to be included in the case plan, and monitor the effectiveness of those services provided to meet the needs of the child or NMD.
- Assess the ability of the child or NMD to maintain a relationship with siblings, relatives, and others who are important to the child or NMD.
- **Assist the child in preserving and maintaining religious and ethnic identity.**
- Establish and maintain a helping **and engaging** relationship between **SW** and the child or NMD.
- Solicit input from the child or NMD on **their** future and to inform the child or NMD as to current and future placement plans and progress, and to discuss these plans and progress with the child or NMD.
- Evaluate and assess the child's educational needs and progress and the potential need for special educational services such as an Individual Education Plan.
 - **For youth 16 years of age or older, this includes having access to existing information regarding the educational options available, including, but not limited to, the coursework necessary for vocational and postsecondary educational programs, and information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education. DSS Education Liaisons can help the SW in obtaining this information.**
- Complete a walkthrough of the home to observe the child or NMD's sleeping arrangements, living space, backyard and any other area of the home the child or NMD may have access to.
- Document and address any significant changes to the placement home and/or the addition of any apparatus in the home or on the property that may pose a risk to the safety and well being of the child or NMD, e.g., swimming pools, trampolines, exercise equipment, etc..
- **Document and address any changes to adults living in the home.**

NOTE: At least once every six months, during the regular monthly contact, the SW must inform every child/NMD in an out-of-home placement of their personal rights (see [Attachment A](#)). For youth age 12 and older, this includes age-appropriate, medically accurate information about reproductive health care, the prevention of unplanned pregnancy, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Public Health Nurses (PHNs) assigned to Child Welfare can help SWs obtain this information.

Contacts with Parents/Guardians

All parents/**guardians** named in a case plan shall be visited by a SW at least once each month, unless the parent/guardian's whereabouts are unknown. If the parent/guardian is not available for face-to-face contact for any reason, the SW shall attempt to maintain monthly contact via telephone, letters, or **e-mail**.

The purpose of **SW** contact with the parent(s)/guardian(s) named in the case plan is to achieve the following objectives/responsibilities:

- Verify the location of the parent(s)/guardian(s).
- Assess the functioning of the parent(s)/guardian(s) as it pertains to meeting the child's basic and special care needs, and the safe maintenance of the child in the home.
- Gather information to assess the effectiveness of services provided to meet the needs of the parent(s)/guardian(s) and to monitor the progress of the parent(s)/guardian(s).
- Establish and maintain a helping **and engaging** relationship between the **SW** and the parent(s)/guardian(s).
- **Counsel the parent(s)/guardian(s) as to current placement, visitation and case progress.**

Contacts with Out of Home Care Providers

All out of home care providers (**Foster Family Agency**, County Home, Group Home, Relative, **and Non-Relative Extended Family Member**) are to be contacted by a SW at least once each calendar month. If there is an exemption to monthly contact, the contact with the care provider must take place no less than once every six months.

The purpose of **SW**/out-of-home care provider contact is to achieve the following objectives/responsibilities:

- Monitor and assess the quality of care provided, including the location and safety of the child or NMD, and the ability of the out of home care provider to meet the child's basic and special needs, if any (e.g. health and educational needs).
- Gather information to assess the effectiveness of services provided to meet identified goals.
- Verify data and information for court reports.
- **Establish and maintain a helping and engaging relationship between the SW and the care provider.**
- Assess and address any needs or concerns the care provider may have in regards to caring for the child or NMD.

Documentation

All contacts with children, NMD, parents and care providers shall be **narrated** in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) within 7 working days from the date of contact. Emergency and crisis contacts shall be **narrated** in CWS/CMS within 24 hours.

If a SW has their monthly contact with a child/NMD outside of placement, the SW is required to document in CWS/CMS and in the court report the location of the contact and the reason or reasons why the visit occurred outside the child/NMD's residence.

When the SW has reviewed the Personal Rights with the child/NMD, the SW shall narrate this in CWS/CMS. The SW shall leave one signed copy of the Personal Rights with the child/NMD and place another signed copy in the case file.

On or before the 21st day of each month, staff shall report to their SWS any mandatory face-to-face contacts not yet completed for that month. It will be the responsibility of each SWS and Program Manager to ensure compliance with monthly contact requirements and timely documentation.

Attachment A
Foster Youth Personal Rights

- (1) To live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where he or she is treated with respect.
- (2) To be free from physical, sexual, emotional, or other abuse, or corporal punishment.
- (3) To receive adequate and healthy food, adequate clothing, and, for youth in group homes, an allowance.
- (4) To receive medical, dental, vision, and mental health services.
- (5) To be free of the administration of medication or chemical substances, unless authorized by a physician.
- (6) To contact family members, unless prohibited by court order, and social workers, attorneys, foster youth advocates and supporters, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), and probation officers.
- (7) To visit and contact brothers and sisters, unless prohibited by court order.
- (8) To contact the Community Care Licensing Division (559- 243-8080) of the State Department of Social Services or the State Foster Care Ombudsperson (1-877-846-1602) regarding violations of rights, to speak to representatives of these offices confidentially, and to be free from threats or punishment for making complaints.
- (9) To make and receive confidential telephone calls and send and receive unopened mail, unless prohibited by court order.
- (10) To attend religious services and activities of his or her choice.
- (11) To maintain an emancipation bank account and manage personal income, consistent with the child's age and developmental level, unless prohibited by the case plan.
- (12) To not be locked in a room, building, or facility premises, unless placed in a community treatment facility.
- (13) To attend school and participate in extracurricular, cultural and personal enrichment activities, consistent with the child's age and developmental level, with minimal disruptions to school attendance and educational stability.
- (14) To work and develop job skills at an age-appropriate level, consistent with state law.
- (15) To have social contacts with people outside of the foster care system, including teachers, church members, mentors, and friends.
- (16) To attend Independent Living Program (559-600-6689) classes and activities if he or she meets age requirements.
- (17) To attend court hearings and speak to the judge.
- (18) To have storage space for private use.
- (19) To be involved in the development of his or her own case plan and plan for permanent placement.
- (20) To review his or her own case plan and plan for permanent placement, if he or she is 12 years of age or older and in a permanent placement, and to receive information about his or her out-of-home placement and case plan, including being told of changes to the plan.
- (21) To be free from unreasonable searches of personal belongings.
- (22) To the confidentiality of all juvenile court records consistent with existing law.
- (23) To have fair and equal access to all available services, placement, care, treatment, and benefits, and to not be subjected to discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, ethnic group identification, ancestry, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical disability, or HIV status.

(24) To have caregivers and child welfare personnel who have received instruction on cultural competency and sensitivity relating to, and best practices for, providing adequate care to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in out-of-home care.

(25) At 16 years of age or older, to have access to existing information regarding the educational options available, including, but not limited to, the coursework necessary for vocational and postsecondary educational programs, and information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education.

(26) To have access to age-appropriate, medically accurate information about reproductive health care, the prevention of unplanned pregnancy, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections at 12 years of age or older.