

Effective Visitation Between Caseworker and Parents

Requirements

The PCSA is required to make face-to-face contact with each parent participating in and being provided services through the case plan no less than monthly to monitor progress on the case plan objectives.

At least one contact every two months must be made in the parents' home.

In the event that the initial attempt to complete a face-to-face contact with the parents is unsuccessful, the PCSA shall attempt to make a minimum of two additional attempts to complete the face-to-face contact within the calendar month.

When a safety plan has been implemented, the PCSA is required to monitor the effectiveness of the safety plan through visits to the family. An in-home safety plan requires a weekly home visit that includes face-to-face contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian. An out-of-home safety plan requires a weekly contact with the persons responsible for an action step (which may include a parent) either by telephone or face-to-face.

Purpose

A home visit with parents is face-to-face contact within their residence and provides an ongoing opportunity to assess the family. A successful home visit incorporates effective communication, partnership building with families, and an opportunity for the ongoing assessment of:

- Safety
- Risk
- Services
- Parents' strengths and needs
- Observation of interaction with children/family

Strategies for Accomplishing

Techniques for Building Rapport

- Approach each individual involved with an open mind.
 - It is important to review and be aware of the history an individual has with the agency; however, the history should not frame what a caseworker expects of parents.
 - Ask the parents open ended questions to garner the parents' expectations and input without non-leading questions.
 - Engage the parents in discussion so that they may identify the strengths for their family.
- Find out what is important to each parent.
 - Utilize family centered practice. View the family as a system of interrelated people that requires an individualized array of informal and formal services.
 - Ask the parents what changes they feel are important for their family. Parents who are engaged in identifying what changes are needed and identifying the approach or method to facilitate change are more likely to engage in the steps to achieve the desired outcome.
 - Ask the parents what they believe they have accomplished.
- Use mirroring. Take note of words used by the parents and try to incorporate them into the conversations.
 - Notice if parents use a nick name for a child.
 - If discussing a sensitive topic such as sexual abuse or sexual behaviors, determine what language is used by the family and incorporate their language into the conversation, not your own.
- Listen to the parents' explanation without correcting or arguing.
 - Allow each parent to fully respond and provide his/her input or view point.
 - Dialogue should be conversational. The conversation should not bombard parents with question after question.
 - Use reframing of the parents' experience in the discussion in order to assess the underlying conditions and concerns.
 - Engage in solution focused dialogue:
 - ✓ Resolution of barriers with a solution focused approach. For example, parents did not attend the last two counseling appointments because they did not have transportation. The caseworker should focus dialogue on how to resolve the transportation issue instead of criticizing the parents for not attending the session.
 - ✓ Empowering the family to resolve barriers and identify the resources readily available to the parents; even if they are not

acknowledged by the parents. For example, parents have a strained relationship with grandma; however, grandma has offered to provide transportation for the family to medical appointments or to purchase diapers.

- Ask questions rather than issue threats or commands.
 - Utilize reframing, mirroring, solution focused dialogue.
- Clarify expectations and purposes. Clearly explain the helping process and the caseworker's role in working together toward solutions.
 - If a safety plan is active, discuss the purpose of the plan and each action steps to reinforce the importance of the safety plan and determine its effectiveness.
 - A resource to assist a caseworker with specific strategies in working with families and to explain the assessment process is "Why Are You Asking Me That? Conversations to Engage the Family in the Assessment Process" developed by the Institute for Human Services. This resource is designed to address specific areas outlined within the CAPMIS toolset. It is applicable to conducting effective monthly visits with the parents given the need for the ongoing assessment of the parents' strengths and needs, protective capacities, and service provision. Information regarding this training and handouts can be accessed at: <http://www.ocwtp.net/CAPMIS/familystrengths.html>
- Help the parents retain a sense of control.
 - When there are no presenting safety issues, ask the parents if this is a good time to meet if it is an unannounced visit.
 - Ask the parents if you can come into their home.
 - Ask the parents how they would like you to address them. Some parents are more comfortable with using first names; however, some families and cultures may prefer a formal reference such as Mr. or Mrs. Smith.
 - Set aside time during each visit so that each parent has time to voice his/her concerns and to share what is important to him/her.
 - Consider the parents' schedule and activities when scheduling a visit.
- Clarify commitment and obligations to the working relationship.
 - Identify the caseworker's role with the family.
 - Provide assistance to meet the parents' needs in order to provide for the safety of the child.
 - Identify it is not the caseworker's responsibility to keep the child safe in the parents' home.
 - Inform the family why the agency is involved with them.
 - Clearly communicate what needs to occur in order to reduce the

agency's concerns for the family.

- Identify the role of the caseworker/agency and that of the service providers to the family. Explain the different roles of the employees within the agency that will be assisting the family (e.g. case aide involved in assisting with transportation).
- Acknowledge difficult feelings and encourage open and honest discussion of feelings.
 - Use strength based language.
 - Do not assign blame to the parents; acknowledge their challenges and barriers that impacts deficits.
- Be consistent, persistent, and follow through.
 - If you make a commitment, keep it. This demonstrates to the parents that you have the same expectation of yourself that you do of them.
 - Avoid canceling appointments if at all possible.
 - If there are activities that you can assist a family with volunteer to do so, such as providing a list of local counseling centers, provide phone numbers and addresses for resources.
- Promote participatory decision-making for meeting needs and solving problems.
 - At the end of each visit, a caseworker should take time to plan with parents for the next visit.
 - ✓ What do both the caseworker and the parents want to accomplish at the next visit?
 - ✓ Who should be present (parents, child(ren), or both?)
 - ✓ Review the activities both the caseworker and the parents will accomplish before the next visit.
 - Consider developing a task list with parents to highlight and focus the activities that are anticipated to occur by the next visit. This should identify activities for both parents and caseworker.
 - Jointly identify the agenda items to be covered at the next meeting with the parents. Stick with the agenda items and be consistent; provided there are no safety threats present.
- Ongoing assessment of Safety and Risk should include:
 - Reassess whether there are new or continued safety threats or concerns.
 - Reassess whether there are new or continued risk factors.
 - Assess parental strengths and needs and determine if the current case plan services are meeting the family's needs.
 - Examine if changes within the family dynamic have occurred that impact the safety of the children.

- Examine if a safety plan is needed.
- Examine if an effective safety plan is being implemented as planned and whether it is effective in controlling the safety threat.
- Assess if the parents' protective capacities have been enhanced or diminished.
- Assess if the child's vulnerability has increased or decreased.
- Observation during a home visit should include:
 - The parental interaction with the children.
 - The interaction with the family in their home setting to identify strengths, areas of difficulty or stress.
 - Parents utilizing enhanced or newly acquired skills.
 - The conditions in the home and a determination of how it impacts the safety of the children.
 - Other individuals visiting or residing in the home in relation to:
 - ✓ How frequent are these individuals in the home?
 - ✓ Are they living there?
 - ✓ Do they change or impact the risk levels or safety threats within the family?
 - ✓ Are these individuals a support or resource for the family?
- A review of case plan services should include:
 - Identification of any barriers in case plan services, such as transportation, availability of providers, costs, hours of service, child care.
 - Determination of the level of parental involvement in the case plan services.
 - Consideration of the need for additional services.

Things to Consider

Purposeful Visits with Parents

Parents experiencing a crisis who need the immediate assistance of a caseworker is a common occurrence in child welfare. It is important for a caseworker to be responsive to the parents' needs during a crisis. However, parental crisis should not account for all or the majority of a caseworker's contact with the family. While it is recognized that a caseworker is balancing the needs of multiple families, it is important to have regular contact with the parents to observe and interact with the parents during times of typical functioning. If the focus of a caseworker's contact with the parents is only crisis intervention a caseworker is not seeing a full or accurate picture of the parents' strengths and needs or family functioning. This crisis view has the potential to drive caseworker decision making. A caseworker being reactive to frequent crises of the parents has the potential to negatively impact decisions such as initiating court involvement or the placement of a child.

Scheduling a visit is one way in which a caseworker can combat the issue of parental or family crisis dominating the type or focus of the contact with parents. This will enable both the caseworker and the family to have input in determining the time and location for a visit. It also provides an opportunity to plan for the focus or purpose of the visit. Caseworkers interested in further examining resources to assist in planning purposeful visits can utilize the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections materials @ www.nrcpfc.org/ for additional research, handouts, and practice tips. Several resources are available within Information Services within the caseworker/child caseworker/family visiting section.

Separate Visits with Each Parent

Another factor a caseworker may need to consider when scheduling or having contact with parents is whether a time to meet or talk with each parent separately is needed on occasion. The relationship between the parents and the type and level of information that is anticipated to be shared during the visit may influence how the visit is arranged. Disclosure of personal information such as one parent struggling with parenting, drugs and alcohol, extended family or in-laws may impact the willingness of the one of the parents to have an open discussion. A parent having concerns regarding the actions or behavior of another parent may also influence when and how information is shared.

Intimate Personal Violence is another factor a caseworker should consider in making a decision regarding how or where to have contact with parents. It is important for a caseworker to consider whether each parent has the opportunity to safely communicate with the caseworker or whether intimidation or fear influences the type or extent to which information is shared. “In the child protection context, women who are abused by their partners may fear retaliation by the abuser or removal of their children if they reveal the full extent of the physical abuse. They may also have had bad experiences with helping systems that have endangered them. Thus, victims of violence may have to work through much coercion and fear of the abuser as well as previous negative experiences with other helping professionals in order to speak out truthfully.”¹ Caseworkers wanting to explore further resources to assist them in working with families who are experiencing intimate personal violence may want to consider reviewing David Mandel & Associates LLC material regarding the Safe and Together Model at <http://www.endingviolence.com/our-programs/safe-together/the-model>.

Safety Plan

A Safety Plan is a specific and concrete control strategy implemented

¹ **Accountability and Connection with Abusive Men: A New Child Protection Response to Increasing Family Safety**, Massachusetts Department of Social Services Domestic Violence Unit, Fernando Mederos Assistant Commissioner: Pamela L. Whitney Domestic Violence Unit Manager: Isa M. Woldegiorguis Copyright © 2004 Family Violence Prevention Fund

immediately when a family's protective capacities are not sufficient to manage the immediate threats of serious harm to a child. Ensuring child safety is an ongoing process that begins in intake and continues through case closure. Regular and frequent visitation with parents is required when a safety plan is active. It is the method by which a caseworker determines if the safety plan is effectively protecting the child. During visits with a child, the caseworker should examine whether:

- ✓ There are active safety threats (new or already identified).
- ✓ There are changes in the protective capacities of the parents.
- ✓ The persons responsible for an action step within the safety plan committed and implementing the plan as designed.
- ✓ The actions within the plan are sufficient to protect the child.
- ✓ The parents have access to service providers, supports and the children as determined in the plan.
- ✓ The parents are experiencing any difficulties with the implementation of the safety plan that may indicate the parent is no longer in agreement with the need for a safety plan or specific activities within the plan.
- ✓ Modifications are necessary within the plan to address any identified issues.

Documentation

The information that is documented within the case record is equally as important as the contact with the parents. Documentation should be completed timely and include:

- Date and time
- Location of the visit
- Duration
- Who is present
- Observations
- Information provided to the family
- Information learned from the family
- Assessment of parents strengths, resources and needs
- Reassessment of safety and risk
- Progress or barriers in meeting case plan goals
- Changes in family dynamics

A training to consider if you want to examine the issue of case documentation a little closer is "*The Documentation Dilemma*". It is a specialized workshop offered by the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program.

Resources

Ohio Administrative Code Rule:

- 5101:2-38-01 Requirements for PCSA Case Plan for In-Home Supportive Services Without Court Order
- 5101:2-38-05 PCSA Case Plan for Children in Custody or Under Protective Supervision
- 5101:2-37-02 PCSA Requirements for Completing the Safety Plan
- 5101:2-38-09 PCSA Requirements for Completing the Case Review
- 5101:2-38-10 Requirements for Completing the Semiannual Administrative Review
- 5101:2-40-02 Supportive Services for Prevention of Placement, Reunification and Life Skills
- 5101:2-39-01 Removal of a Child From His or Her Own Home

Ohio Revised Code:

- 2151.412 Case plans.
- 2151.419 Court's determination as to whether agency made reasonable efforts to prevent removal or to return child safely home.
- 5153.16 Duties of agency.

Resources

- Ohio Child Welfare Training Program @ www.ocwtp.net/CAPMIS/capmishome.html
- David Mandel & Associates LLC, Safe and Together Model @ www.endingviolence.com/our-programs/safe-together/the-model.
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections @ http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/caseworker-visiting.html
- State of Mississippi, Division Of Family And Children Services, Family Centered Strengths and Risk Assessment Guidebook.
- Christensen, D., and Antle, B. Engaging Child Welfare Families: A Solution-Based Approach to Child Welfare Practice. Center for Family Resource Development. <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/telefiles/Family%20Engagement.pdf>
- Kate Stepleton, Jean McIntosh, and Beth Corrington, *Allied for Better Outcomes: Child Welfare and Early Childhood*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2010, www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/strengthening-families/top-five/allied-for-better-outcomes-child-welfare-and-earlychildhood-august-2010.pdf.
- Lund, Therese Roe. And Renne, Jennifer, Child Safety: A Guide for Judges and Attorneys. American Bar Association and ACTION for Child Protection, Inc. 2009. http://www.actionchildprotection.org/documents/2009/pdf/The_Guide.pdf
- DePanfilis, D. and Salus, M.K. Child Protective Services: A Guide for Caseworkers. U.S. Department of Human Services. 2003.

