

## **Maintaining Sibling Connections When a Child is in Substitute Care**

### **Requirements**

- Upon removal of a child from his or her own home, efforts shall be made to place siblings in the same substitute care setting to maintain connections between siblings.
- If joint placement is not possible, the agency must document the efforts to place the siblings together and why those efforts were not successful.
- If joint placement is contrary to the safety or well being of any child, the agency must document in case record the reasons why joint placement or visitation will compromise the safety or well-being of the child.
- If the children are placed separately, the agency must develop a written visitation plan providing frequent visitation and ongoing interactions between siblings unless it is contrary to the safety or well-being of one of the children.
- Visitation between siblings shall occur no less than monthly and is not dependent upon the foster parent's ability to transport the child.
- If visitation is contrary to the safety or well being of any child, the agency must document in the visitation plan the reasons why visitation will compromise the safety or well-being of the child.

### **Purpose**

Visitation and communication with family is a child's right. It is not a special privilege, and should never be used as a reward or consequence for behavior.

Maintaining family relationships, including sibling bonds, reduces the trauma of removal and enhances overall well being of the child. Frequent and ongoing communication is critical for a child to stay connected to siblings and is necessary for successful and timely reunification. Regular visitation strengthens relationships, and supports and assists the caregiver.

### **Strategies for Accomplishing**

- If siblings cannot be placed together, attempt to place them in close proximity to one another and provide ways for them stay in touch in addition to scheduled face to face visits (e.g., phone calls, e-mail, etc.). Conduct periodic reviews to determine whether there are newly available placement options that would allow siblings to be placed together.
- Confer with the parents and children (if age appropriate) when creating the visitation plan.
- Do not make sibling visits contingent upon parental visits. If the parents cancel a

visit, allow the visit between siblings to occur.

- Make special visitation and communication plans for holiday and birthday celebrations, or other significant family events (e.g., graduations).
- When possible, arrange for siblings to attend school or participate in other activities together (e.g., boy/girl scouts, community groups, recreational activities, etc.).
- Ensure that both maternal and paternal family connections are addressed in the visitation and communication plan.
- Try to use foster parents who are able and willing to take sibling groups exclusively for placement of sibling groups.

### **Things to Consider**

Removing a child from his or her home is a temporary disruption; the family bonds remain. Restrictions on visitation and communication should only occur when there is a safety concern.

In those instances where safety is an issue, supervised visits can be used for sibling visits as well as parental visits.

Visits should be in a comfortable, safe setting that encourages children to participate fully. If two parents or custodians are involved, the case worker should meet with both regularly and avoid engaging and communicating only with one parent or custodian.

### **Resources**

#### **Applicable Ohio Administrative Code Rules:**

**5101:2-38-05** PCSA Case Plan for Children in Custody or Under Protective Supervision.

**5101:2-39-10** PCPA Case Plan for Children in Custody or Under Court-Ordered Protective Supervision.

**5101:2-39-01** Removal of a Child From His or Her Own Home.

<http://emanualstest.odjfs.state.oh.us/emanuals/>

#### **Other Information and Resources:**

Fostering Connections To Success and Increasing Adoptions Act 2008, P.L. 110-351:

[http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Public\\_Law\\_110-351.pdf](http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Public_Law_110-351.pdf)

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections

[http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering\\_connections/education.html](http://www.nrcpfc.org/fostering_connections/education.html)

Child Welfare Information Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>