

## Points to Remember About Visitation

- **Purposes of child/family visitation:** The two primary purposes of child/family visitation are to allow children to maintain relationships with their parents, siblings, and others who cared for them prior to placement and to develop relationships with individuals that may be a permanent placement resource or a permanent connection. Therefore, child/family visitation is important for maintaining family connections even when reunification is not the permanency goal. Birth family connections allow children the opportunity to develop permanent positive attachments, preserve these ties, and learn to maintain long-term relationships. A large number of children return to their family of origin when they age out of the system. The child has a right to visit with his/her parent, even when the parent is in prison.
- **Frequency and duration:** Generally, the more frequent, the better. The frequency of visits in concurrent planning is based on the unique needs of the family and child rather than on arbitrary policy guidelines. *Family visitation should take place at a minimum of one visit every two weeks, with at least weekly visitation whenever possible for all families with a goal of reunification.* The younger the child, the more frequent the contact must be in order to maintain relationships. Generally, infants and young children tend to tolerate shorter visits better than longer visits. Siblings must visit at least twice per month.
- **Inclusion of all team members, especially resource parents:** Successful concurrent planning and visitation requires collaboration between the county Children and Youth Agency, the resource family, the child's family and service providers. *Resource families must understand their role in concurrent planning and visitation, including that at times, they may be asked to supervise visits and/or have visits in their home between the child and his/her family. Concurrent planning emphasizes the resource parent teaming with the biological parent during visitation. Both sets of parents will require education and support of child welfare professionals in this effort.*
- **Setting:** Visitation should occur in settings that encourage the most natural interaction between family members, while minimizing any risk/safety concerns to the child that may exist. A regular visitation plan can and should be enhanced by including parental and family participation in normally occurring events in the child's life (e.g., school conferences, medical appointments, church programs, and athletic activities, etc.). Effective visits will be memorable. They require creativity, cultural responsiveness, and fun!

## Points to Remember About Visitation (continued)

Technology and social media (Skype, texting, Facebook, myspace etc.) is becoming increasingly popular as a way to supplement family visitation. When safety can be assured, technology provides tools in helping children and youth to maintain connections with the important people in their lives.

- **To supervise or not to supervise:** Use supervision only when needed to protect children from harm, assess protective capacities, and/or to facilitate family members' learning (mentored visitation). Possible supervisors can be a county Children and Youth Agency employee, a service provider employee, a resource parent, a biological family member, a family friend or other individual approved by the court or agency.
- **Transportation and other supports:** Consider the barriers to frequent and meaningful child/family visitation. Engage all known resources to develop a plan to address barriers by providing the necessary supports.
- **Visitation will evoke emotions:** Deterioration in a child's behavior before or after visits is to be expected. This usually signifies that the child is still attached to the family member, which is the purpose of visitation. Resource parents need support to help manage children before and after visitation.
- **Final point about visitation:** Visitation must **never** be used as a reward or punishment. Changes in visiting arrangements should reflect assessment of risk and safety to the child and progress toward achieving the permanency goal, not attempts to reward or punish either the child or the parents' behavior.

