

Principles of Good Visitation Practice

Adapted from Kathleen Ohman, Ph.D. University of Denver Child Welfare Training and Research Project

- The primary purpose of visitation in most cases is to allow children to maintain relationships with their parents, siblings, and others who cared for them prior to placement. The younger the child, the more frequent the contact must be in order to maintain relationships. Especially for young children, frequency is much more important than length.
- Visitation plans should change over time dependent on progress toward reunification, with visits typically moving from being supervised to unsupervised, increasing in length, and requiring more responsibility on the part of parents.
- Family members and caregivers should be actively involved in developing visitation plans. This not only increases the probability that all participants understand and will comply with the plans but also assures that plans take into account all participants' needs, resources, and concerns.
- Caseworker efforts should be directed toward determining optimal visitation plans, that is, plans that will best meet individual children's and parents' needs, and that will complement other aspects of the case plan.
- Visitation should **never** be used as a reward or punishment. Changes in visitation arrangements should reflect assessment of risk to the child and progress toward achieving the permanency goal, not attempts to reward or punish either the child's or the parents' behavior. Parents' acts or behaviors that are unrelated to the safety of the child are not grounds for prohibiting or canceling visits. For example, a parent who continues to use drugs, but does not present a safety risk to the child, should continue to visit the child.
- Visitation should occur in settings that encourage the most natural interaction between family members while minimizing any existing risk to the child. It can and should include parental and family participation in normally occurring events in the child's life, for example, school conferences, medical appointments, church programs, and athletic activities.
- Reunification should not occur until the family has safely completed unsupervised visits of gradually increasing length in the family's home. Without extensive visits, the actual change achieved and risk to the child cannot be adequately assessed.
- When reunification is not the plan, consideration should be given to continuing connections between parent and child and significant others.
- When parental rights are terminated and there is to be no continuing contact between parents and child, consideration should be given to a good-bye visit between parents and child.
- A determination must be made concerning continuing visitation between the child and siblings placed elsewhere and other family member contacts.