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Approved:	Cynthia K. Walcott, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 9/2/2008
Supersedes:	Social Services Policy 35 Contact Standards	Dated: 2/2/1995

Purpose

The relationship between the social worker and a child, his or her family and caretaker is central to assuring safety and achieving permanency. The value of social worker contact has been affirmed by the findings of the Federal Child and Family Services Reviews, which concluded social worker contact was the single most important way to promote and achieve positive outcomes for children and youth¹.

This policy provides general guidelines for the quality of social worker contact with children, families and caregivers and required standards for the frequency of face-to-face, in-home or in-placement visits.

Policy

Role of the Social Worker


In order to promote the safety, permanency, wellbeing and law abidance of the children and youth we serve, regular contact by the social worker is critical. Often, other service providers are contracted to provide additional therapeutic and supportive services. However, contact by these service providers cannot substitute for regular contact with division social workers.

Minimum face-to-face, in-placement setting contact requirements with children and youth in custody have been established by the federal government. This policy emphasizes those home visits as a necessary form of contact for children, families and caretakers.

Visiting parents in their own homes (custody or non custody cases) enables the social worker to better assess safety and to build relationships with families that enable them to successfully work towards achievement of the case plan goal.

Visiting children in their own homes or in placement allows the social worker to see the interaction between the child, family members and caregivers and helps them to successfully work towards achievement of the case plan goal.

¹ Administration for Children and Families. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Findings from the Initial Child and Family Services Reviews, 2001-1004, available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/monitoring/results/index/htm>.

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Guidelines for Quality of Contact

There are several key elements that quality visits should include (See Child Welfare Caseworker Visits with Children and Parents by the National Conference of State Legislators at www.ncsl.org/programs/cyf/caseworkervisits.htm). When possible visits should be:

- Primarily held in the child or youth’s living situation (family or foster home) at times convenient for children/youth and caretakers;
- planned in advance of the visit and used as an opportunity to discuss issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment;
- used to complete a formal or informal assessment of the issues that impact safety and other issues or goals identified in the case plan;
- used as opportunities for open dialogue and meaningful consultation with and by children/youth, parents and caretakers;
- individualized whenever possible, such as providing separate time for discussion with children/youth, parents and caretakers; and
- supportive and skill-generating, in order that children/youth and families feel safe in dealing with challenges and change, and are provided skills and tools to take advantage of resources and services.

Contact Standards

Based on federal requirements and current research, one face-to-face contact per month with child/youth, parent and caretaker by the social worker is the contact minimum, with the majority of the visits conducted in the placement setting.

Additional recommended monthly contacts, based on factors such as increased risk or change of circumstance may be necessary. Together, the social worker and the supervisor should decide if additional contact is needed. The supervisor should document agreements about increased contact on the Supervisory Contact Summary (FS-261).

In determining the appropriate level of contact over and above the minimum (see chart on page 3), the following factors should be considered:

- The current level of risk² to the child or youth in his or her living situation and, for youth on probation, the level of risk to the community³;

² The level of risk in CPS family and CPS custody cases is measured by the SDM Risk Assessment.

³ The level of risk in probation cases is measured by the YASI

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- the level of contact needed to monitor the child's situation (younger children placed at home may require more frequent visits), to minimize the risks and to improve the capacity of the child or youth's caretaker to provide safe, appropriate care; and
- major life events, such as reunification, termination of parental rights, adoptions and passage to adulthood.


The supervisor may also approve alternative plans for parent contact when the child is in out of home placement and the safety of the social worker is an issue, these agreements should be documented on the Supervisory Contact Summary (FS-261).

Contact standards go into effect immediately upon case opening.

**Contact Standards for Children/ Youth in Custody and their Parents and/or Caretakers
(Excludes out of state ICPC placements)**

In State and out of state Placement	Time Frame	Child/Youth Contact	Parent Contact (Parental Rights Intact)	Caregiver Contact
Home or any non-crisis placement	First 30 days	1 face to face visit in the placement setting within the 1 st week after placement, and two more contacts in the first 30 days	3 contacts overall, with 1 face to face visit in the home if the goal is reunification.	<u>Foster Home</u> : 3 contacts overall, with 1 face to face visit in the home. <u>Residential</u> : weekly phone contact
Home or any non-crisis placement	After the first 30 days	1 face to face visit in the placement setting per month, and 1 phone contact per month (when developmentally appropriate)	2 contacts overall, with 1 face to face visit in the home if the goal is reunification.	<u>Foster Home</u> : 2 contacts overall, with 1 face to face visit in the home. <u>Residential</u> : 2 contacts overall, with 1 face to face visit on site
Any crisis/emergency placement ⁴	First 30 days and there after	1 face to face visit in the placement setting within the 1 st week and monthly thereafter, and twice weekly phone contact	1 face to face visit in the home if the goal is reunification and weekly phone contact.	<u>Placement</u> : 1 face to face visit on site within the 1 st week and monthly thereafter, and twice weekly phone contact.

⁴ Examples: Woodside, NFI Hospital Diversion, Brattleboro Retreat, Sand Hill, 204 Depot St, 206.

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The requirements for face to face contact with the child, parent and caregiver may be met with one contact in which both are seen as long as the contact includes a formal or informal assessment of the issues that impact safety and risk, progress toward achieving the case plan goal and whenever possible, provides separate time for discussion with child/youth, parents and caretakers. These components must be documented in case notes.

For any child on runaway, the social worker will maintain appropriate efforts to locate the child, as per Policy No.155, Runaway, Abducted and Missing Youth.

Contact Standards for Youth who are Placed Out of State and Supervised by ICPC

Children and youth who are being supervised by another state through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) must be visited in the foster home or institution no less frequently than every 6 months (see FS Policy 181 Interstate Compact of the Placement of Children). The FS caseworker should request a report on each visit and document such visit in the automated case note system.

Contact Standards for Open Family Cases (non custody)

For non custody cases the risk level, as determined by the Family Risk Assessment, will guide the decision to close or open a case for ongoing services (see Policy 56 Substantiating Child Maltreatment) and will determine the contact standards. Contact standards go in effect immediately upon case opening.

Monthly contact for *substantiated* cases with very high or high risk levels and for *unsubstantiated* cases with very high risk levels are 3 contacts overall with 1 face to face visit in the home.

Contact Standards for Juvenile Probation Cases (non custody cases)

Research shows that youth who possess the highest likelihood of achieving negative outcomes (i.e. recidivism) need intensive services and that low risk cases need only minimal services. The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) determines the level of risk so we can allocate our resource efforts to higher risk youth.

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Contact standards go into effect immediately upon case opening.

Contact Standards for Youth on Probation (non custody cases)

Risk Level	Contact Requirement (any setting)
Low	1 contact per month
Low Moderate	1 contact per month
Moderate	1-2 contacts per month
Moderate High	1-3 contacts per month
High	2-3 contacts per month
Very High	2-4 contacts per month