



IMPROVING PRACTICE IN VISITATION PIP 1.6.2

Trainer Guide

U·A·L·R

School of Social Work

IMPROVING PRACTICE IN VISITATION

SECTION I – Introduction and Agenda

TIME: 20 Minutes (9:00 – 9:20)

COA Standards Addressed:

- ❖ G7.3.07
- ❖ G7.3.01

Competencies Addressed:

- ❖ 101-3
- ❖ 104-1
- ❖ 104-2
- ❖ 104-7
- ❖ 104-10
- ❖ 104-13
- ❖ 206-8
- ❖ 301-1
- ❖ 301-2

Objectives: Participants will

- Become acquainted with trainers and other participants.
- Explore hopes and expectations for this training.
- Receive an overview of the training model.
- Review the COA Standards and Competencies for this training.

Materials

- Name tents for each participant and trainer (consider using multiple colors for small group set up during the training day)
- Participant Manuals

A. Introductions and Housekeeping

Begin the training by introducing yourself to the participants and welcoming them to training. Explain to the participants that this training was developed as a requirement of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) intended to emphasize the importance of visits, and increase location options for visits. Additionally, focus group sessions were completed to determine common barriers to the frequency and quality of visits between children in out-of-home placement and their families. Information from the focus group sessions is included throughout this training curriculum and a copy of the finding will be provided later in the training day.

Set the stage in the beginning that participants are expected to take part in activities and exercises to enhance learning from the curriculum. Going around the room, ask the participants to introduce themselves, tell what county they work in, how long they have been with DCFS and tell how visitation fits into their job/role at this time. Take a read on the group composition to see if the participants know each other from working together or being in trainings together.

Cover a few “**housekeeping**” issues. These topics should include but are not limited to:

- Sign-in sheets: The sign-in sheets must be signed in the morning and after lunch.
- Smoking Areas: Training academies are non-smoking environments. Direct smokers in the group to approved smoking locations.
- Training Academy Facilities: Direct participants to restrooms, phones, message boards, and kitchen area.
- Cell Phones/Pagers: Ask all of the participants to turn their cell phones and pagers to silent or off. At the very least, have the devices where they can be reached quickly and cause little disruption to the other participants.
- Attendance: Participants are expected to attend the entire training. No partial credit is will be given.

B. Review of the Agenda, Competencies, and COA Standards

Take a few minutes to review the “**Agenda**” with the group on page 1 in the Participant Manual. Next briefly cover the “**Competencies and COA Standards**” that will be addressed in this training on page 2 of the Participant Manual.

SECTION II – Definition, Purpose, and Policy on Family Visits

TIME: 30 minutes (9:20-9:50)

Objectives: Participants will

- Learn the definition for family visitation.
- Learn the purposes for family visitation.
- Learn policy on family visitation and maintaining family ties.

Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Participant Manuals
- Handout 1, “DCFS Policy and Procedure on Family Visitation”
- “Heart of Reunification” poster

A. Definition and Purpose of Family Visits

Ask participants to turn to page 3 in Participant Manual, “Definition and Purposes of Family Visits.” Ask for a volunteer to read the definition to the group.

Definition of Family Visits - “Parent visitation is the scheduled, face to face contact between parents and their children in foster care. The visit is the primary child welfare intervention for maintaining and supporting parent-child relationships necessary for successful reunification.”

This definition is from the Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Now ask the participants to give purposes for family visitation. List the answers on the whiteboard. Ensure the following purposes are covered:

- Lessen the impact of separation on child and family
- Promote active parental involvement
- Make progress toward goal of reunification
- Provide an opportunity to practice different interactive behaviors in areas of discipline, family activities, positive reinforcement, and tuning in to wants and needs of child
- Improve quality of parent-child interaction
- Improve role functioning of parent
- Enhance development of both child and parent
- Enable visit supervisor to get to know family as they interact together
- Increased family contact during placement means the children are more likely to return home
- Maintain relationships within the birth family
- Help family members face the reality of their situation

Set-up Note: Make the “Heart of Reunification” poster (in Resource section) and put it somewhere in the room before the training begins. Refer to it after the next point.

Lead a discussion about research indicating that children who have family contact during placement are more likely to return home, and are likely to return earlier than those who lack contact with important people in their lives. In the article “Making the Most of Visitation,” visitation is called the “heart of reunification.” Refer to the poster.

B. Policy on Family Visitation

Ask participants to volunteer their understanding of current policy and procedure pertaining to visitation and briefly discuss. Refer them to Handout 1, “DCFS Policy and Procedures on Family Visitation.” Policy and Procedure points to cover:

- **PROCEDURE (III-A4): Out-of-Home Placements Outside the Initiating County** – “The Family Service Worker in the initiating (primary) county will arrange and help provide transportation for parent/child visits,” and “The Family Service Worker (secondary) in the resident county will assist the initiating county in arranging for the parent/child/sibling visits.”
- **PROCEDURE (VI-A2): Concurrent Planning** – “The concurrent planning process will include initiating the completion of the Life Story Book for all children in out-of-home care.” Later in the training, the Life Book will be presented as something that the children and parents can work on together during visitation.
- **POLICY (VI-B): MAINTAINING FAMILY TIES IN OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS** –
 - “Families and children have reasonable opportunities for personal visits, communication by telephone, and involvement in life events such as teacher conferences, school and community events.”
Note: Trainer may want to make some visual aids for this point, such as a picture of a school, telephone, community event, etc.
 - Visitation between siblings should be included in the visitation planning.
 - “The preferred location for the visit is the parent’s home, or...in the most homelike setting possible. Office visits are a last resort.”
 - “Siblings shall live together in the same foster home.”
 - Children in DCFS custody will be able to visit grandparents and great grandparents if visitation rights are granted by the courts.
 - “...visits between siblings and with relatives may continue after TPR if visitation was established prior to TPR. Visitation after TPR will continue until an adoption placement is made or the Out-of-Home placement is closed.” This point is also stated in POLICY (VI-F) on Judicial Hearings.

- **PROCEDURE (VI-B1): Maintaining Family Ties in Out-of-Home Placement –**
The Family Service Worker will:
 - Develop a plan for visitation within 5 days of placement,
 - Arrange for visits to occur no less than weekly,
 - Place infants with minor mothers in the same foster home,
 - Arrange sibling visitation no less than every 2 weeks, and
 - Arrange visits between child and grandparents.
- **PROCEDURE (VI-F1): Case Review Judicial Hearings for Children in Out-of-Home Placement –** “The Family Service Worker will make a recommendation to the court to continue visits between siblings and with relatives who have established visitation prior to TPR, if this is in the child’s best interest.” This recommendation is to be documented in the “Permanency Planning Hearing Court Report” (CFS-6024).

BRIEF BREAK

SECTION II – Forming Attachments

TIME: 25 Minutes (9:50 – 10:15)

Objectives: Participants will

- Review how attachment develops.
- Learn the definition and cycle of attachment.
- Learn the influence attachment has on child development.
- Become familiar with negative affects children experience after separation from parents.

Materials

- Refreshments provided to create feelings of nurturing
- Handout 2, “Heart of Attachment”
- Whiteboard or flipchart and markers for each small group
- Participant Manuals
- “Maintaining Family Ties” poster

A. Nurturing Memories Exercise

This exercise will warm-up the group, help them get in touch with feelings associated with childhood care giving, and emphasize the importance of being nurtured and loved as a child. Small, seemingly insignificant acts of love and nurturing can have great affects on children. Use sensory words, such as the way something smelled, felt or sounded as much as possible in the following exercise.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to identify the variety of key people children have nurturing attachments with in their lives.

Materials

No materials needed for this exercise.

Methodology

1. Introduce this segment by inviting participants to recall a brief memory from childhood in which they felt loved and nurtured. Point out that in order to relate to how a child may experience relationships and events, it is important to remember how it felt to be a child. Give the group a few minutes to think about a memory.
2. Share a personal childhood memory, such as being rocked to sleep by grandmother, or an older sibling teaching you to skate in the driveway. Share the feelings that accompany the memory like nurturing and security.

3. Go around the room and ask each participant to share a childhood memory. **Trainer may want to make notes on the whiteboard for later reference.**

Trainer Note: This can be a powerful emotional experience for participants so allow enough time to fully process with the group. Also, let the participants know that they may continue to experience childhood memories in the days following this exercise. This can evoke strong emotions. Encourage them to take care of self.

Processing:

- Similarities related to senses like touch, taste and smell, such as having your hair brushed by an older sister or the smell of tobacco like grandpa used to have in his pocket.
- There are differences in what each person may consider “nurturing,” for example some people may find having their hair brushed painful while others may find it nurturing.
- These memories still have the power to elicit specific feelings, even years later in adulthood.
- Notice who was involved in creating the memories (parents, grandparents, extended family, teachers, etc.).
- Things that happened in childhood whether good or bad, still affect us today.

B. Attachment

Refer participants to **page 4 in the Participant Manual, “Attachment.”**

Trainer Note: Use the following as a refresher on attachment as most workers have previously received training on this material. Start the discussion on attachment by reading the definition:

Attachment is the social and emotional relationship children develop with significant people in their lives.

Explain that it is a reciprocal process in which the adult recognizes and responds to the infant’s signals and meets the physical and emotional needs of the child. Give participants **Handout 2, “Heart of Attachment.”** Use this to illustrate the reciprocal nature of attachment. Now refer the participants back to **page 4** in the Participant Manual.

- Attachment is a reciprocal process.
- The adult recognizes and responds to the infant's signals and meets the physical and emotional needs of the child.

- The adult regularly engages the child in social interactions. Examples are: singing to baby, eye contact with baby, naming people and things for baby.

Point out that attachment influences development in the following areas:

- Language/Communication
- Trust/Positive World View
- Self-Esteem
- Sense of Security
- Learning through Social Interactions
- Self-Reliance

Adapted from information provided at the 19th Annual Association for Play Therapy International Conference.

C. Effects of Separation in Relation to Family Visitation

After emphasizing the importance of secure attachment formation, point out that when children are in out-of-home placements:

- They will suffer the effects of being separated from the people they are attached to, and the world that they know (i.e. their home, school, church, friends) no matter what the circumstances were that brought them into custody.
- Care must be taken to maintain this attachment in the healthiest way possible to minimize the negative affects of separation for the child.

Read the following passage from the book, "Maintaining Family Ties: Inclusive Practice in Foster Care" by Sally E. Palmer. Trainer can use "Maintaining Family Ties" Poster in the Resource section to make a poster.

"A child's reaction to separation is likely to be exacerbated by lack of family contact. Children who do not have ongoing contact with their families are likely to feel abandoned. Rather than freeing children to form new attachments, a sense of having been abandoned probably increases children's emotional dependency on their parents." Children who are not visited seem to 'pine' for and idealize absent parents in attempts to satisfy their longings. Even when children become young adults and leave foster care, they usually seek their family of origin."

SECTION III – Grief and Loss in Relation to Family Visitation

TIME: 20 Minutes (10:15 – 10:35)

Objectives: Participants will

- Become familiar with the stages of grief related to the visitation process.
- Learn about ways adults often deal with a child's grief issues.
- Learn how a parent's unresolved grief issues can undermine case compliance and reunification efforts.
- Receive information on helping children and parents pass through the stages of grief and work toward resolution of grief issues.

Materials

- Participant Manuals

A. Grief and Loss

Introduce the subject of grief and loss by letting participants know this is a difficult subject for most people. Stress the importance of becoming familiar with stages of grief and the variety of ways children and parents might experience grief. Sometimes the family service workers or foster parents are the only ones involved enough to help the child face and deal with the strong emotions of separation from their family. The following points are based on information from "Maintaining Family Ties: Inclusive Practice in Foster Care." Mention that:

- Professionals working with adults experiencing grief and loss often encourage active grieving yet they are less likely to do this with children (probably because it is so painful to watch a grieving child).
- Adults tend to protect children from grief feelings and reactions by trying to distract them or by assuming their parent(s) can be replaced. This encourages children to use defenses such as denial and detachment to deal with separation, which can have a permanent stunting effect on their emotional development.

Ask participants to share other reasons that professionals might feel uncomfortable working with people experiencing grief and loss. If not mentioned by participants during discussion, share the following reasons:

- Painful reminders of personal loss
- Unresolved grief and loss issues
- Feelings of discomfort or helplessness
- Feelings of guilt or remorse
- Anger toward one or more of the parties involved

End this discussion by encouraging participants to be aware of and acknowledge their own feelings surrounding grief and loss in order to minimize negative impact on case practice.

B. Stages of Grief and Loss Related to Foster Care and Visitation

Ask participants to turn to page 5 in the Participant Manual, "Stages of Grief and Loss Related to Foster Care and Visitation." Introduce this topic by asking the participants if they are familiar with the stages of grief. Explain these stages are a general way of conceptualizing the emotional and behavioral phases a grieving person experiences in reaction to loss.

Trainer Note: The trainer should be able to assume that the participants have a basic understanding of grief and loss from other trainings. Trainer may choose to make this a listing activity instead of reading over the material, such as, assign one stage of grief to each table and ask that one person give examples of behaviors demonstrating that stage. This could be an opportunity to tap into the participants' expertise. Also, trainer may consider making a poster of the stages of grief to use as a visual cue.

Review the following points:

- It is possible to move back and forth through these stages.
- Each person requires different amounts of time to work through each stage.
- Family members may go through more than one stage during the span of a visit.
- A person may become "stuck" in one stage.
- The goal of working through the grief process is to reach the final stage of acceptance or resolution.
- Professionals can help a person move through these stages by providing education, acknowledgment, and acceptance.

Briefly discuss the stages of Grief and Loss and their relationship to visits in foster care.

Shock:

Parent: reluctance to accept situation, may not be interested in visiting.

Child: reluctance to talk about parents or past.

Denial:

Parent: deny any problems, blame the agency and others, and refuse to take responsibility for situation "it's not my fault."

Child: act as if nothing has happened, appear happy and unaffected.

Anger:

Parent: may say angry things about foster parents, hostile to staff during visits, unable to focus on child during visit.

Child: may become aggressive toward foster parents, siblings and others, may say things about parents they do not mean.

Depression:

Parent: not show up for visits, may show up under the influence of drugs or alcohol, may lose hope.

Child: disturbance in eating or sleeping patterns, isolating and not interacting with others.

Acceptance:

Parent: willing to work with agency and foster parents, ready to deal with problems and work toward case goals.

Child: more involved with family of origin during visits, may become more interactive with foster family.

Each person needs to move through these stages to begin to progress and heal. Often, people move back and forth through the stages until reaching acceptance and resolution. The time it takes to move through these stages is different for each person. If a person becomes stuck in a stage, development and progress toward case goals and family reunification can be delayed indefinitely.

Adapted from 1988 Center for Development of Human Services; New York State Child Welfare Training Institute; Buffalo State College.

Knowing how grief affects family members and the visit process will explain certain behaviors and “normalize” them for the family and the visit supervisor. For instance, if a parent is hostile during a visit, this behavior can be seen as “normal” and necessary given the stage the parent is currently experiencing. Rather than taking it personally or becoming angry, the visit supervisor may see this in a positive light because the parent is progressing through a necessary step in the process.

Read the following passage from W.L. Haight et al:

“Unresolved grief and trauma surrounding a mother’s forced separation from her child may leave her with little energy to engage actively in services that could strengthen her abilities to parent now and in the future. Such responses also could affect a mother’s abilities to focus on and interact with her young child during visits. Clearly, for reunification to succeed, child welfare interventions must go beyond what many mothers described as punishment or even trauma to themselves and their families. Interventions must actually strengthen women to become more effective people...”

Conclude this section by asking the group to suggest ways they could assist clients in moving through the stages listed above. Add these suggestions if not brought up by group:

- Provide education on the stages of grief in an age appropriate format. For example, give parents and teens a copy of the stages of grief chart and discuss with them, let them know that children will

also go through these stages, help younger children identify their feelings and let them know its O.K. to feel this way.

- Help/allow children and parents to talk about their feelings.
- Name and validate feelings of family members. Give an example: "You are dreading the visit day and *feeling angry* because I have to sit with you while you visit your child. It is not unusual for parents to feel this way."



BREAK

SECTION IV – Roles of Visit Supervisors

TIME: 40 Minutes (10:50 – 11:30)

Objectives: Participants will

- Share knowledge about what roles are currently being played during visits in different offices.
- Learn numerous roles visit supervisors can play in the visitation process.
- Receive information about the importance of each role.

Materials

- Flipcharts and markers for each small group
- Participant Manuals

A. Which Hat to Wear?

Introduce the next small group exercise by telling participants that the visit supervisor plays many roles or “wears many hats” during the supervised visitation process. Some families require more involvement than others. Some offices or agencies place different responsibilities with the visit supervisor. This exercise will highlight the numerous duties and responsibilities a visit supervisor needs to fulfill during the visit process.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to increase awareness about the many different roles that can be played by the visit supervisor. Emphasis will be placed on learning what others are currently doing in the field during visits.

Methodology

1. Divide the participants into small groups of 4-6.
2. Ask each group to list on the flipchart the different roles and responsibilities a visit supervisor assumes during the visit process.
3. Now ask them to indicate which of these roles and responsibilities the members of the group currently assume in their office. Give each group 10-15 minutes to complete this task.
4. Pick a reporter from each group to share the list with the larger group.

Processing

- After each group has shared what they found to be the current visit practice of their group members, ask participants to turn to **page 6 in the Participant Manual “Roles of Visit Supervisors.”** Go over this list, focusing on roles/responsibilities that did not come up in the group exercise. Add any pertinent teaching points after each role of a visit supervisor is listed:
 - Educate parents and foster parents about family visitation
 - Schedule visits
 - Assist parents with visit planning
 - Ensure child safety
 - Make sure rules of visitation are followed
 - Monitor parent-child interaction
 - Model appropriate interaction with child
 - Limit setting
 - Educate parents on parenting techniques
 - Learn more about the family
 - Assess levels of attachment and bonding
 - Point out family strengths and give positive feedback
 - Develop relationships and build trust with parents
 - Facilitate age-appropriate activities
 - Process visit with parents, child, and foster parents, deal with emotional fall out after the visit
 - Update visit plan as needs of family change
 - Encourage creativity when planning visits
 - Document interaction or the lack of during the visit
 - Clean up service after the visit, or sometimes before
 - Visit police keeping children and parents in the visit area
 - Others?

End this section by informing group that the supervised family visit process is complex. Explain that many of the roles listed above will be explored further during this training. Take this time to validate the participants for all of the work that they do.

Trainer Note: Trainer may want to consider breaking for lunch if it is close to noon due to the length of the next section.

SECTION V - Developing the Visitation Plan

Time: 60 minutes (11:30-12:30)

Objectives: Participants will

- Learn the important parts to a “quality” visitation plan.
- Learn to develop a visitation plan that focuses on a quality visit between the children and their families.
- Learn to individualize visitation plans for specific needs of each family.
- Receive key points on detailed documentation of visits.

Materials

- Colored markers all around the room
- Participant Manuals
- Blank paper
- Handout 3, “Blank Calendar Page”
- Handout 4, “Family Visit Observation Form”

A. Exercise: A Plan of My Own

During this exercise, participants will consider what type of plan they would need to minimize their trauma, and maintain ties to family, friends, and their familiar environment.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to foster empathy and understanding related to the effects of visitation on children and families by inviting participants to develop their own visitation plan. This will also emphasize the importance of an individualized visit plan.

Materials

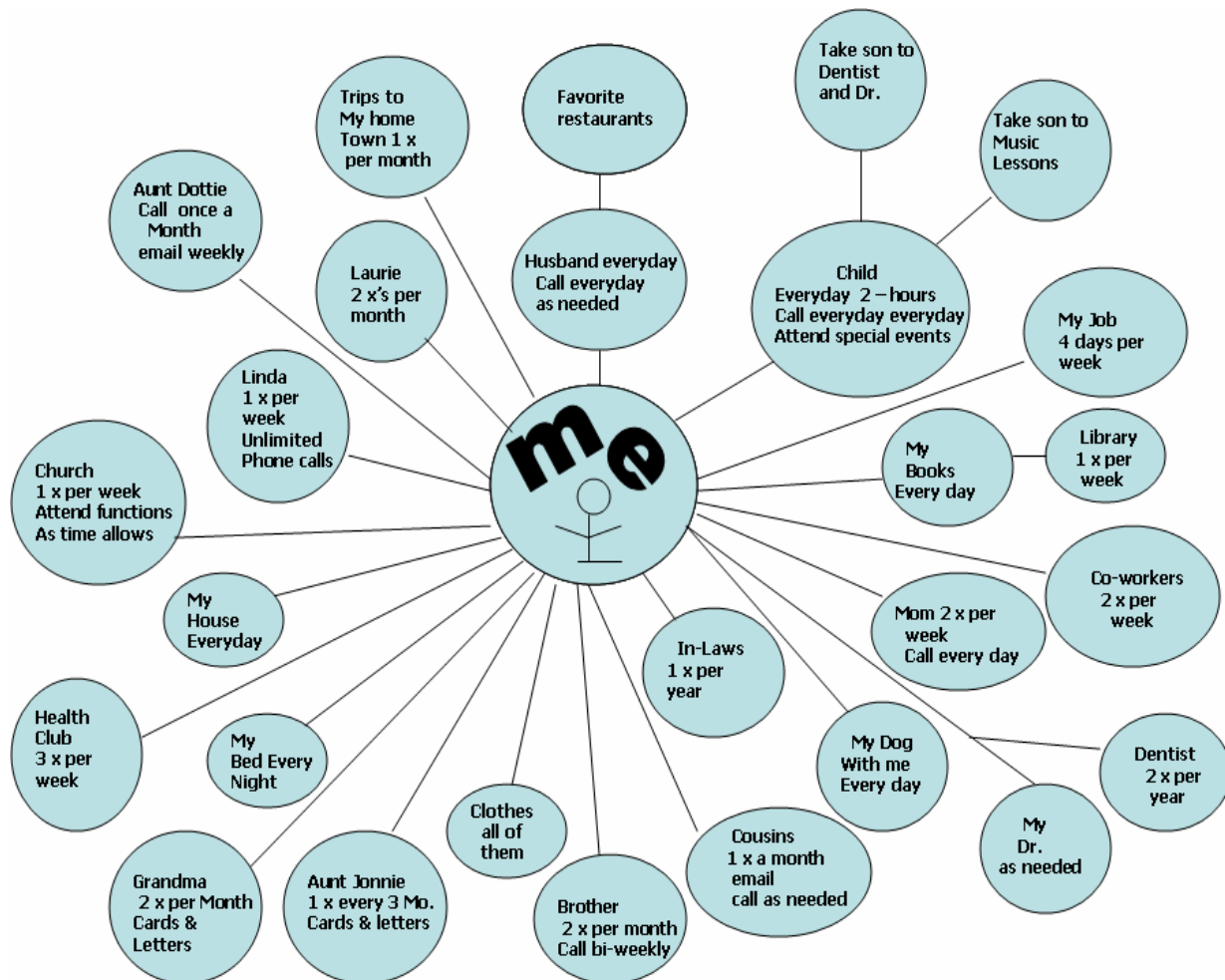
Blank paper, markers, stickers, participant manuals

Methodology

1. Refer participants to the example ecomap on page 7 in Participant Manual “It’s All About ME, ME, ME!”
2. Tell them they will make their own plan using the ecomap example provided as a guide, however, there is no “right way” to make their plan. Instruct them to develop the plan as if it were happening today from their adult perspective.
3. Ask participants to imagine that, as of this moment, they are in DCFS custody. They need to identify the important people, animals, places, events, and things in their lives. Their plan will attempt to preserve their bonds with them and to maintain relationships. The plan will need to detail 1) whom they will visit, 2) how often, 3) the

location, and 4) method of contact. They will also identify which material possessions they want and need.

4. Before they begin, refer them to **page 8 in the Participant Manual "This Matters to Me."** Hand out the blank sheets of paper.
5. Briefly review this list of things that might be important to them and encourage them to include these in their plan. Invite them to add to the list if they wish.
6. Ask them to draw up their plan. Encourage them to be creative and use whatever materials they wish, such as, different colors and stickers. Allow 10-15 minutes for completion.



This Matters To Me

People		Places	
Spouse	Nieces	Home	Office
Parents	Nephews	School	Church
Siblings	Pets	Home of relative	Restaurants
Grandparents	Neighbors	Neighborhood	Yard
Girl / Boy Friend	Clergy	Medical offices	Garden
Aunts / Uncles	Co-workers	Library	Park
Friends	Teachers	Theater	Lake
Cousins	Coaches	Health Club	
Health care providers			

Events		Things	
School events	Weddings	Food	Photos
Funerals	B-Day party	Bed	Clothes
Birthdays	Births	Toiletries	Books
Hospital visits	Sports	Tools	Music
Club meetings	Concerts	Videos	Computer
Family reunions		Automobile	Appliances
Recreation activities		Telephone	Mail
Caring for someone ill		Kitchen equipment	
Visiting family and friends		Equipment for hobbies & sports	

Processing

- Facilitate group discussion about plans the participants develop using the following questions:
 - What thoughts and feelings did you experience?
 - Would it be important for you to be able to give your input on your visit plan?
 - As difficult as the process of separation and visitation is for an adult, how is it for children?
- Ask them to consider that adults have the ability to understand circumstances (such as the reason a loved one missed a visit). Children often have a distorted view of complicated circumstances and blame themselves.
- Adults have the ability to understand time frames. How do children perceive time? Point out that a week can seem like forever to a child.
- What would you need to know if the visit was canceled or any other type of contact was delayed or terminated?
- Ask the participants to think about the following questions:
 - Who would you want to supervise your visits?
 - Would you feel comfortable being watched while you visit with one of the people on your list?
 - Could you be yourself and act naturally in front of the visit supervisor? Point out that it may be difficult to get a true picture of an individual or family in an unnatural setting.
 - Would you be afraid to express your true feelings to the visit supervisor?
 - How would you feel if someone you care about had a conflict with the visit supervisor during the visit? Point out that, for children, it is frightening to witness a parent and the visit supervisor having conflicts.
- Finally, ask participants to revise their visitation plan reflecting the typical visitation practices in their county office. This is typically 1-2 hours, supervised in the office, possibly in a cubicle or in an area with other families. No evenings, weekends or holidays are available.
- Give them a few minutes to revise and ask them to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their revised plan.

B. Specifics of Visitation Planning

Next, tell participants that the group will be looking at factors involved in visit planning.

Scheduling

“The first step in facilitating visitation should be to set up a regular, written visitation schedule. Written schedules encourage parents to adhere to the visitation plan and often lead to more visits. [Note: Comments from parents of children in foster care \(that participated in the focus group\) indicated that they did not get a written copy of the visitation schedule.](#) “Since they are essential to visits, birth and foster parents should be directly involved in setting up visitation schedules. Involving them and respecting their preferences for visit times and locations demonstrates to parents that they are important members of the team.”

Refer participants to [Handout 3, “Blank Calendar Page.”](#) It is a great idea to provide all persons participating in the visits (including parents, children and foster parents) with a tangible reminder of visit times and locations. Blank calendar pages can be printed and kept on hand. It is also a good idea to write other important dates on the calendar together such as:

- Medical appointments
- Counseling appointments
- Court dates
- School activities
- Job responsibilities

Frequency of Visits

Inform participants that research supports the following information about frequency of visits:

Frequent visits positively affect the behavior of children in foster care.

- Children who have frequent contact with parents show less anxiety and depression than children with infrequent or nonexistent visits.
- More frequent visits may be associated with shorter foster care stays.
- Frequent visits help children adjust to foster care.
- Ask for examples from their experience that support this research.

In the event of missed visits:

- Children may be worried about their parents or feel that it is their fault.
- Let the foster parents know that the parents missed the visit so that they can comfort the child.
- Call the parents to find out why the visit was missed and report back to the child.
- If visits are frequently missed, transport the children to the visit only after parents have arrived.
- Encourage parents to call and explain the missed visits to the child.

This information was adapted from “Children’s Services Practice Notes” from the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children’s Resource Program.

C. Exercise: Discovering New Locations for Visits

DCFS policy states the county office is the “last resort” for a location to hold family visitation. Conduct the following short exercise to help participants identify alternate visit locations.

Purpose

The purpose of this exercise is to encourage creativity and generate ideas when picking a location for visits.

Materials

Flipcharts, markers, participant manuals

Methodology

1. Divide participants in small groups of 4-6 people.
2. Ask them to identify possible locations for family visits and record them on the flipchart. Allow 5 minutes.
3. Refer them to **page 9 in Participant Manual, “Here, There, and Everywhere.”** Suggest they write down locations suggested by the group.
4. Ask one person from each group to present ideas.

Processing

- Suggest these locations if not mentioned by the group:
 - Home of parents or extended family members
 - Home of trusted family friend
 - Home of foster parent
 - Parks
 - Zoo
 - Favorite restaurants
 - Movies (maybe for a special visit, Birthdays)
 - Library
 - Medical appointments
 - School functions
 - Church
 - Museums
 - Therapist’s office
 - Play games in the parking lot or in the grass next to the building
- Point out that some places will gladly donate tickets. Some of these locations can be used as special outings that occur as schedules will allow, in addition to other visits.
- Always consider the parents financial situation when suggesting alternate visit locations. For example, don’t expect parents to pay for a meal at a restaurant if they are financially unable. [See the focus group report \(parents complained that often they could not afford to buy food](#)

for their child when the visits were at McDonald's or some other restaurant).

In the event that visits occur in the DCFS county office, consider that some agencies are better equipped than others to host successful family visits. Ask participants to share with the group about the visitation room in their office. Ask them to suggest important elements in the physical space where visits are held. Some of these are:

- Private space
- Clean room and equipment
- Child safety proof area
- Comfortable furniture
- A space for worker to observe visit unobtrusively
- Age appropriate toys

D. Documenting Visits

Now, discuss the importance of documenting visits for all parties involved in the case (parents, children, agency, court system, etc.). It can be difficult to know what to look for and write about during visits.

Refer participants to **page 10 in Participant Manual, "Observation of Parent-Child Visit."** Tell them that some documented information is straightforward, for example: *date, time, who was present, and cancellations*. Behavioral indicators of healthy parent-child interaction can be more subjective and much more difficult to identify. This list will be helpful when making notes during visits:

Parent's Behavior

- Demonstrates affection toward child.
- Praises and recognizes accomplishments of child.
- Attends to the safety of the child; is protective, responsive to the child being in danger or risk.
- Plays and interacts with the child.
- Reinforces positive and age-appropriate behavior with the child.
- Uses effective discipline and controls for the child's age and development.
- Comforts and helps the child when needed.
- Fulfills promises made to child.
- Has ideas and recommendations for next visit

Child's Behavior

- Responds to parent; looks forward to seeing the parent.
- Accepts the direction of the parent.
- Looks to the parent for help and comfort.
- Likes the activity the parent used in the visit.

Adapted from People Potential, A Service of the Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

Trainer Note: If time permits and/or the trainer feels the need to have an activity at this time, a role play activity could be conducted here. Two participants could play the role of the parents, one participant could be the visit supervisor, and the rest of the class could use the “Family Visit Observation Form” to document the visit.

Refer participants to **Handout 4, “Family Visit Observation Form.”** This is a sample form that can be used to document visits. It can be modified to suit their needs. They may choose to make their own notes during visits and then key in CHRIS.

Remind the participants that there may be times that parents want to review visit notes. Ending this section, point out that objectivity is something we always strive to maintain.



LUNCH

SECTION VI – Educating the Team

TIME: 50 minutes (1:30-2:20)

Objectives: Participants will

- Learn key points and the importance in educating parents, foster parents, and children about the visitation process.
- Will practice ways to improve visitations when something has gone wrong.

Materials

- Participant Manuals
- “Making Visits Work” poster

A. Parent Education

Start this section by telling participants that one of the most important roles of the visit supervisor is that of educator. This segment will focus on learning how to educate parents, children, and foster parents about the visitation process.

Remind participants of the individual plan they completed earlier today. Ask them to remember how they felt while imagining they were in DCFS custody. Lead a discussion around the following points:

- In reality, most people would have many questions about this traumatic experience and what the future would hold.
- Most people don't even know what questions to ask about agency policy and procedure, or about the visit supervisor's own preferences for handling visits.
- Providing verbal and written information for parents, along with careful planning in beginning work with the family can greatly influence and set the tone for future interaction with the family.
- Avoid assumptions about what parents “ought to know.”
- Avoid assumptions about parenting abilities they “should have.”

Set-up Note: Make a poster of “Making Visits Work” (found in the Resource section) to refer to for this next section.

Read this following excerpt from “Making Visits Work, Loar (1998):
“Successful visitation also relies on accurate assessment of birth parents’ strengths and needs...most visitation plans assume that birth parents understand what their child goes through if they don’t show up for a visit, and that parents have leisure and recreational skills independent of drugs, alcohol, sex, danger, and violence.”

Other common assumptions are that birth parents know how to:

- *Play with their children,*
- *Talk politely with their children,*
- *Enjoy their children's company,*
- *Separate from the visit their frustration, shame, and humiliation over losing custody,*
- *Read to children or read and understand court reports, contracts, priorities, or, major and minor requirements.*

These assumptions do not always hold true. By overestimating parents' abilities, visitation planners can unwittingly undermine family reunification.” (Loar, 1998)

Refer participants to **page 11 in the Participant's Manual, “Parent Education.”** Ask the participants to take a couple of minutes to read over the following points. Allow a few minutes for comments or discussion.

Parent Education

- Don't assume parents have already received important visit information.
- Clearly explain importance and purpose of visits. Parents need to plan for and fully participate in the visits. Let them know what is expected.
- Explain your role as visit supervisor.
- Develop rules and guidelines **specifically for each family** with parent participation.
- Rules may include: advance notification of visit cancellation, timeliness, who will be allowed to attend visits.
- Specify for all visitors the subjects which shall not be discussed when children are present (such as sexual abuse allegations, negative comments about foster parents, pressing child for location information, or any other information that may be upsetting or harmful for the child).
- Discuss child safety measures such as remaining in sight of visit supervisor.
- Seek alternate visit supervisors including trustworthy relatives or other supportive people in their social network.
- Provide schedule information: time, frequency, length, location and transportation options. Provide a monthly calendar for all parties.
- Provide visit information in written form so that parents are able to

refer to it as needed. May add other helpful information such as parenting tips.

- Let parents know what they may bring to visits such as food, clothing, favorite toys, games, a camera, etc.
- Discuss appropriate visit activities.
- Discuss emotional aspects of visits for parents and children.
- Ask parents to refrain from discussing case specifics or compliance during visits.
- Encourage creativity in maintaining contact with child such as mail, email, telephone, tapes, photographs, etc.
- When possible, include parents in child's activities including medical appointments and school activities.
- Ask parents to provide feedback to foster parents through notes and not the child.
- Remind them that the visit plan is always a work in progress.

B. Teaching, Coaching, & Modeling Exercise: Opportunities for Parent Education

Point out that professionals who work with children and families must teach parenting skills, coach, and encourage family members to make positive changes, and often, they must model appropriate interaction and communication skills.

Ask participants to consider the tools a visit supervisor needs to work with children and families. Just as a carpenter uses hammers, nails and saws, a visit supervisor has the ability and knowledge to communicate so parents and children can understand. Refer the participants to [page 12, "Tools for Successful Visits."](#) Examples of these are:

- Appropriate discipline
- Age appropriate activities
- Stages of child development
- Healthy parent-child interaction
- Positive reinforcement
- Reframing and redirection skills
- Advocacy
- Identify the feelings of others
- Assessment skills
- Others?

Reinforce that the visit supervisors often have the most power to affect change in a family because they are directly observing and intervening as the parents interact with their children. Discuss with the group that parenting classes are not enough. However, the visit supervisor needs to know the content of information taught in the classes to assist parents with putting information into practice.

Purpose

Using short case scenarios, participants will practice using knowledge and skills while planning interventions and strategies for successful family visitation.

Materials

You will only need participant manuals for this exercise.

Methodology

1. Divide participants into small groups.
2. Refer them to pages 13-14 in the Participant Manual, "Opportunities to Teach, Coach, and Model."
3. Assign 2-3 scenarios to each group (however many time allows).
4. Ask groups to come up with solutions to teach, coach, and model parents for more successful visits in these situations. Remind participants they can use pages 11-12 to help with this exercise. Record the suggestions in their manuals.
5. Remind them to use some of the tools that have been discussed.
6. Allow approximately 10-15 minutes for this exercise.
7. Ask someone from each group to read their scenarios and reports their ideas for intervention.

Processing

- Use the key highlighted in blue to point out possible interventions for each scenario.

OPPORTUNITIES TO TEACH, COACH AND MODEL

1. A single parent is visiting with his/her four children in your office. Two of the children have behavior problems and are hyperactive. One child appears to feel insecure and clings to the parent. The parent is overwhelmed and has difficulty controlling the children during visits. **KEY:** a) review parenting information, b) assist parent with limit setting, c) introduce age appropriate activities, d) establish rewards, e) teach redirection skills, f) encourage parent to invite friend or relative to assist with visits, g) explore alternate visit locations.
2. The visitation room is over-scheduled and more than one family is forced to visit in the room. The environment is chaotic. The only location alternative is your cubicle or the lobby. The parents are complaining that they are “on display” and that they “have no privacy.” **KEY:** a) acknowledge and validate feelings, b) explore alternate visit schedule, c) explore alternate visit locations.
3. A couple is visiting their two children in the office. After they greet the children, they sit at the table and talk. The children play on the floor with toys. The parents seem to enjoy watching them play. **KEY:** a) reiterate purpose and importance of visits, b) redirect parental attention to children, c) engage parents and children in joint activities.
4. A parent is visiting with his/her four-year-old son each week. He has been very sad and anxious since being placed in care. He is exhibiting regressive behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb sucking. His speech is regressing as well. The parent wants to play games and speaks in a loud cheerful voice to cheer him up during visits. The parent is very energetic. The child wants to sit in his parent’s lap. He is very quiet and seems sad. The parent get annoyed that the child “hangs all over her” and tells him to “go play,” “be a big boy,” and “stop whining and talking baby talk.” They seem out of tune with each other. **KEY:** a) educate parents on age appropriate behaviors, b) provide information on grief and loss, c) include a therapist, d) interpret child’s needs for parent, e) increase parent-child contact through increased visits, phone calls etc., f) reframe negative comments, g) include foster parents.
5. A parent is visiting his/her three children in the office. The children are hyperactive, destroying office property, and hitting each other. The parent is frustrated and keeps saying “ya’ll are so bad, I’m gonna whip your butts if you don’t stop.” The children won’t listen to her. You think she should know how to discipline them, after all, she had parenting classes a few months ago when the children were placed in foster care. **KEY:** a) instruct on parenting techniques and appropriate discipline, b) positively reframe as opportunity for parents to practice information learned in classes, c) remind parent of rules and guidelines.

6. You are working with a parent who is very loving and appropriate with the children during visits. However, the parent is often late and has started to miss visits. KEY: a) assess parent's emotional stage regarding separation and visitation, b) allow time for parent to express thoughts and feelings outside of visits, c) discuss effects of missed visits on children, d) review calendar with parent and modify if necessary.
7. A parent is visiting with a teenage daughter. The parent is often critical, and today told the teen that she was "dressed like a tramp, and I hope I don't find out your whoring around." The teen was clearly hurt and stated that she "dresses like everyone else." KEY: a) reframe negative statements, b) educate parents on age appropriate behaviors, c) facilitate communication between parents and foster parents.
8. A parent is trying hard to connect with his/her six-year-old child during visits, and brought a monopoly game to play. The child enjoyed helping the parent get the pieces set up, but then knocked them on the floor. The parent is upset because the child didn't want to play. KEY: a) give parent positive feedback, b) identify appropriate items parent can bring, c) assist with planning activities.
9. A parent repeatedly engages you in conversation during visits while the children are playing. The parent discusses personal problems with you and clearly needs to talk to someone. KEY: a) redirect attention, b) debrief parents, c) referral for therapy, d) initiate parent-child interaction.
10. A parent is visiting with his/her teenage son in your cubicle. The parent is trying to maintain a relationship and shows interest in every aspect of the teen's life. The parent asks questions about his friends, foster home, and school, yet the teen won't talk and becomes irritated. At times the teen becomes hostile with the parent and has stated to miss visits. KEY: a) initiate activities between parent and teen, b) explore alternate visit supervisors and locations, c) referral for family therapy, d) give parent positive reinforcement.
11. A parent frequently becomes angry at his/her child's foster parents and tells the child things like "tell them not to cut your hair," or "they don't know how to dress you, tell them you won't wear those pants," and "don't call that woman Mama, I'm your Mama!" The child looks very anxious when this happens. KEY: a) increase parent's awareness of the child's feelings, b) remind parent of visit rules and guidelines about foster parents, c) allow parent to write notes to foster parent instead of sending messages through the child, d) direct parent to express concerns outside the visit.

12. A parent visits his/her baby each week in the office. Although the parent holds the baby, feeds and changes her, the parent doesn't seem to know how to nurture the baby. The baby is usually held facing outward. The parent attempts to sooth the baby by bouncing, tickling, and speaking in a loud voice. The baby often becomes fretful and the parent hands the baby to you and goes out to smoke. **KEY:** a) acknowledge parent's frustration, b) model parenting skills, c) initiate attachment and bonding activities (eye contact, soothing voice tones, nurturing touch, d) provide ongoing feedback focusing on parent's ability to "tune in" to baby.

Wrap up the parent education section by suggesting that parents be given a folder with visit information, the visit observation guidelines and documentation form that will be used. Also include calendar and parenting tips. New information can be added to the folder as needed.

Trainer Note: It would be helpful to make an example of parent education folder with your favorite parenting tips and visit information to pass around the group.

C. Foster Parent Education

Introduce this brief section by stating that foster parents receive training on many of the issues related to visitation during their foster parent training. Inform participants that based on a study conducted with foster parents regarding visitation, three areas of concerns were highlighted (W.L. Haight):

1. The intensity and complexity of children's responses to visits.
2. Unfulfilled expectations for visits (keeping promises to child regarding who will be there, what they will do, and what will be brought to visits).
3. Visit Cancellations

Point out that foster parents may feel unskilled and at a loss when dealing with their strong emotional reactions and the strong emotional reactions of children. The visit supervisor can play an important supportive role to foster parents. Refer participants to **page 15 in Participant Manual, "Tips for Supporting Foster Parents."** Review the following with the participants:

- Keep them informed.
- Seek their input on visitation schedule.
- Let them know what to pack for visits such as; diapers, bottles, snacks, medicine etc.
- Encourage them to send progress notes, school papers, and photographs for the parents.
- Involve foster parents with the child's therapist.
- When appropriate, encourage them to allow "least restrictive" contact between parents and children.

D. Child Education

Refer participants to **page 16 in Participant Manual, "Children and Family Visits."** Review these points with the group:

- Providing age appropriate information to children about foster care and family visitation is crucial because they are the most vulnerable individuals in the out-of-home care situation.
- Work with the child's therapist to plan for interventions that will help child deal with complex emotional issues.
- Children may act as if they do not care or they understand more than they really do about complex events.
- Children distort information about time and events.
- Many of the ill effects of living in an unstable family and a subsequent removal may not fully manifest until much later (teenage years or early adulthood).
- Even if it seems clear that family reunification is not possible, frequent meaningful visits will positively affect current and future adjustment to a new family living situation.
- Make a visit calendar with children.
- Encourage children to maintain contact with parent through telephone calls, cards, and emails.
- Help children to determine how they will let others know their situation and how much information they will tell peers.
- Provide honest and objective information to children regarding reasons for removal from family of origin so that children do not blame themselves. Age and maturity level of child will determine how much information they can understand.
- Let children know why visits are canceled. They worry about parents and may feel they are the reason visits were missed. Encourage parents to speak directly to children about missed visits.
- Help child communicate feelings to other adults.
- Children communicate through play and the use of non-verbal mediums of self expression. Make these tools available for children: crayons, paper, markers, art supplies, books, games, and toys.

- Make an effort to find age appropriate books and videos that pertain to out-of-home placement issues in order to enhance communication and normalize their feelings.

Trainer Note: Inform participants that play activities and materials will be explored more in the last section of the training.

BREAK

SECTION VII – The Last Visit

TIME: 25 minutes (2:35-3:00)

Objectives: Participants will

- Review dynamics involved in termination visits.
- Learn how to minimize the damage to the children during the last visit.
- Learn how to help the parents make the last visit meaningful for the children.

Materials

- Participant Manuals
- Handout 5, “Results of Focus Group Sessions Specific to Family Visitation”

Trainer Note: The trainer may opt to move this to the next to last section of the curriculum using it to sum up that sometimes all of the best efforts in family visitation still fail, or the trainer may choose to cover it at this time allowing the training to end on a fun note.

An alternative in this section is to ask the participants at each table to brainstorm about how to make the TPR visit different from other visits and more meaningful to the child. Ask each table to report what they came up with. Then briefly review any points below that did not come up.

Remind the participants that there is a web training, “Maintaining Family Ties after TPR” that covers the dynamics of the last visit in more detail. Many should have already completed this training.

A. Termination Visits

Begin this segment by telling participants that termination visits are the most difficult visits for everyone involved. Agency staff has a variety of ways to cope with the highly charged, emotional situation. They may be angry with parents and think if the parents had done what they were supposed to do, this would not be happening. They may hope the parents cancel the visit. Often, the last visit is planned like any other visit but it should be planned very differently.

Parents may not be able to deal with their strong emotions about termination of parental rights or the last visit with their children. They may not show up for the visit. They might arrive for the visit under the influence of alcohol or other substances. Their anger at the agency may prevent them from focusing on the children.

Take a few minutes to revisit the new POLICY (VI-B) allowing visits to continue after TPR if visits were established before TPR. It is difficult to

determine or even imagine the possible effects on children in the short or long term. These are measures that visit supervisors can take to minimize damage to everyone involved and facilitate resolution for parents and children. Refer participants to **page 17, in the Participant Manual, "The Last Visit."** Briefly discuss the following points with group and solicit spontaneous feedback from participants.

- Involve the family therapist or the child's therapist to the greatest extent possible.
- Give as much advance warning as possible to parents and children that the last visit is imminent.
- If your relationship with the parents is adversarial, find a trusted co-worker or supervisor to facilitate the last contacts with the family.
- Pre-planning is crucial for this visit. Try to fulfill the wishes of the parents and children for the last visit.
- Parents need to have their pain acknowledged. This will reduce the likelihood of avoidant behaviors such as drinking or not being able to show up for the visit.
- Parents need to be educated about the harmful effects the termination and final visit have on their children.
- Parents need to know that there are things they can do to help their children heal and reach resolution.
- Parents need to be encouraged to put their emotions aside for this visit and focus on helping the children feel free to move forward in a new family living situation. Parents can do this by telling children it is not their fault. They can let children know that they will be okay and they want the child to have a happy life.
- Ask parents to write letters and provide meaningful objects for the children to take with them.
- Take photographs or video for the family.
- Assist parents in planning for self care before and after the visit (having a supportive friend or relative present, seeing their therapist immediately).
- Attempt to have the visit in a neutral, private setting.
- Ask someone to assist you with visit supervision.

- Work more closely with child's caregivers before and after the termination visit.
- Before, during, or after (whichever is the most appropriate for the situation) tell the family and child(ren), if age appropriate, about the Arkansas Mutual Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry. Families can register family information for the child(ren) to receive when they turn 18, and the child(ren) can register their information after they turn 18 so their family can find them if they would like.

Finally: Take care of yourself! Talk with supportive co-workers and plan activities after the visit that will provide emotional support. These visits are very difficult for agency staff members and can bring up personal grief and loss issues.

Give participants Handout 5, "Results of Focus Group Sessions Specific to Family Visitation." Covering the highlights of this document can help solidify the topics covered thus far in this training.

SECTION VIII – Play Time

Time: 50 minutes (3:00-3:50)

Objectives: Participants will

- Review the importance and power of play.
- Practice games to teach parents to do during visitation with their children.
- Review nurturing activities that parents can do with their children in visitation.

Materials

- Paper towels
- Participant Manuals
- Handout 6, “Visit in a Box”
- Handout 7, “Life Book”

A. The Power of Play

Introduce this segment by emphasizing the power of play:

- Play is the language of children
- Play is the first language for adults
- Play helps children and adults express difficult emotions
- Play creates alliances and builds relationships
- Play activities increase bonding and attachment

Visit in a Box Exercise

Agency staff have limited resources and must always be on the look out for cheap fun. There are numerous books on songs and games for children. Encourage participants to explore resources. Tell them that some of these books are listed in the suggested reading list. Give participants Handout 6, “Visit in a Box.”

Trainer Note: These materials and activities are interchangeable and the trainer may wish to substitute his/her own favorite personal and professional resources. Have Fun!

Purpose

This section is designed to teach fun and inexpensive activities that can be introduced during family visits. Demonstrate the possibility of maintaining a portable, inexpensive resource for children and families.

Materials

A box filled with items listed below for the “visit in a box” demonstration. This container has something for each stage of child development.

Plastic Box (clear)	Crayons	Markers
Paper	Misc. art supplies	Cotton balls
Lotion	Powder	Chutes and Ladder
Candy Land	Checkers	Nurf Ball
Bubbles	Playing Cards	Go Fish
Dice	Tape Measure	Music
Fingernail polish	Hand Mirror	Life Books
Fun Pads		

Methodology

1. Bring out the box and inform participants that this box contains inexpensive activities for everyone ranging in age from birth to adult. It is portable and can be used to entertain children in your office whether they are there for visits or just having to wait.
2. Next, show all of the items in the box and suggest ideas for using them (see below). Some of these items will be used in play in just a few minutes.

Crayons, Markers, Paper: Drawing and coloring is a great joint activity for children and parents. Children love to draw pictures for their parents to take with them after the visit. Make sure that parents give positive feedback about drawings and assure children they will display them proudly. Some examples of coloring pages could be copied and given out to the participants to take back to the office.

Art supplies: Everyone expresses themselves through art.

Fun pads: Keep copies of color pages and fun pad activities to entertain children. Older children like mazes and puzzles

Chutes and Ladders, Candy Land, Go Fish: Games that young children can enjoy provides opportunities for parents to praise and interact with children.

Bubbles: Source of numerous games. Wedding bubbles are small and inexpensive.

Tape Measure: Children like to be measured to see how tall and strong they are. Record the date and their measurements on a chart or have child and parent draw picture of child with height and other positive characteristics (beautiful smile etc.) listed on the drawing.

Nerf Ball: These balls are good for all ages. Younger children can sit in a circle and roll ball to family members. Older children can play basketball with a box or trash can serving as the basket.

Checkers, Playing Cards, Dice: These are good games for older children.

Music: Creates different environments for family visits. Children like to sing and dance, and hopefully, parents will join in. Teens can share favorite music with parents. This is a great tool to facilitate communication with teens. Ask parents and children to bring music they enjoy.

Fingernail Polish: Teens like to use fingernail polish. Having parent paint child's nails can be a nurturing activity.

Lotion and Baby Powder: Using these items is a way to nurture younger children through physical touch.

Hand Mirror: Parents can hold mirror to reflect child and point out positive things about child such as beautiful smile, big brown eyes, etc.

Cotton Balls: Can be used for numerous games, inexpensive and portable.

Life Books: Every child needs one. This can be a project to be completed over several visits. Visit supervisor can work on these with children as well. Refer participants to **Handout 7, "Life Book."** They may already have copies of blank Life Books and this is just a basic example of the DCFS life book they can copy as needed.

Trainer Note: The remainder of this section is devoted to full class participation in play activities.

3. Tell participants that they will practice some activities so they can teach parents how to play with children. A well planned visit facilitates attachment, bonding, communication, positive reinforcement, and appropriate behavior.
4. Refer participants to **page 18 in Participant Manual "Play Activities We Learned Today."** Encourage them to make notes on how to do the activities. Demonstrate the following:

Songs: Teach participants a song that young children enjoy. Encourage group to sing with you. Teach a song you feel comfortable with such as "Twinkle, Twinkle" or "Itsy Bitsy Spider."

Follow My Claps: Stand in front of group. Make up short clapping rhythms and then ask group to repeat the rhythm. Use praise and positive reinforcement. Make sequences more difficult each time. If time allows, let a participant be the clapping leader.

4. Divide participants in groups of two. Everyone must have a partner for the remaining exercises (these activities will reinforce interaction between the child and parent).
Play the following games:

Thumb Wars: Instruct participants to clasp hands with each other and get ready for a thumb war. Remind them to instruct parents to let children experience victories. Now say...1, 2, 3, 4, I challenge you to a thumb war. Let participants play about 4 rounds.

Cotton Ball Touch: Ask one partner to close their eyes. Tell the other partner to touch them very lightly on the face, arm, or hand to see if the person can feel the cotton ball. Children love the anticipation of this simple game. Next, tell participants that they will play cotton ball hockey with their partner. Each person sits on opposite sides of a table. One partner makes a goal with hands. The person with the cotton ball gets 3 chances to blow the cotton ball across the table into to goal area. This game can be played many ways and new rules can be created by children.

Bubble Games: Each partner has bubbles. Tell them they will play bubble tennis. One partner blows a bubble and each takes a turn keeping it in the air, by blowing, until it pops. Next, ask them to play bubble pop. One person blows as many bubbles as they can while the other tries to pop them all. Next, ask participants to form two lines and end up facing their partners. One pair walks through the line to get a bubble shower. The other group showers them with bubbles. Then the next couple goes through the line (just like showering the newlyweds after the wedding). Tell them not to get bubbles in their eyes.

Newspaper or copy paper Basketball: Have everyone wad up several pieces of newspaper into balls. Ask one person to go to the other side of the room and make a basket with his/her arms. The other partner attempts to throw their newspaper balls into the basket. Adjust the distance between partners based on age and ability. The shooter can throw the ball in a variety of ways to make the game more fun (over the shoulder, between the legs, under and over-handed). Then let the other partner take their turn being the shooter.

Trainer Note: The focus for the final two activities will be nurturing and will transition the group toward the end of training day.

Lotion: Make sure that everyone has access to lotion bottles. Tell participants that when working with parents and younger children, parents can lotion the child's hands, arms and feet. This encourages attachment through physical touch and helps the child feel nurtured. However, the participants can put lotion on their own hands for these activities. After their hands have lotion, ask one partner to keep eyes closed while the other traces a letter or number on his/her arm or hand.

The partner who is tracing asks the other one to guess what they are drawing. Remind them that when doing this with children, adjust the level of difficulty based on age and ability. Give clues if needed and always lots of praise!

Tower of hands: Ask participant to get lots of lotion on their hands. Gather the entire group in a huddle. Put your hand in the middle and ask each person to stack their hands on top of yours. The tower gets taller as the person who has their hand on the bottom keeps putting it on top. Do long enough for everyone to stack hands a few times.

Now pass out the paper towels!

Ask for feedback about the activities as participants return to their seats. Point out that games can be made out of the simplest things.

SECTION VIII – What’s In It For Me?

TIME: 10 minutes (3:50-4:00)

Materials

- “Incentives to Improve Practice” poster

Tell participants that as you wrap up, you want to point out some advantages to putting some of these ideas into practice. It may not be realistic to expect busy staff members to put all of this information into practice, but invite them to add some of the ideas to their repertoire as they work with families.

Trainer Note: Trainer can make a poster of the “Incentives to Improve Practice” points (found in the Resource section) so the participants can say/yell these all together.

Highlight these incentives for visit supervisors to practice information learned in the training today:

- ✓ Cases close faster
- ✓ More successful outcomes on cases
- ✓ Get to know families better
- ✓ Build more positive relationships
- ✓ Set an example for other staff members
- ✓ Provides the opportunity to be creative
- ✓ Make a huge difference in the lives of the children you work with
- ✓ You will have MORE FUN while working with families

Thank participants for coming and ask them to complete evaluations.



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INCENTIVES TO IMPROVE PRACTICE

- ✓ Cases close faster
- ✓ More successful outcomes on cases
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MAINTAINING FAMILY TIES

“A child’s reaction to separation is likely to be exacerbated by lack of family contact. Children who do not have ongoing contact with their families are likely to feel abandoned. Rather than freeing children to form new attachments, a sense of having been abandoned probably increases children’s emotional dependency on their parents.” Children who are not visited seem to ‘pine’ for and idealize absent parents in attempts to satisfy their longings. Even when children become young adults and leave foster care, they usually seek their family of origin.”

-from “Maintaining Family Ties: Inclusive Practice in Foster Care” by Sally E. Palmer

MAKING VISITS WORK

“Successful visitation also relies on accurate assessment of birth parents’ strengths and needs...most visitation plans assume that birth parents understand what their child goes through if they don’t show up for a visit, and that parents have leisure and recreational skills independent of drugs, alcohol, sex, danger, and violence.

- Loar

DO NOT ASSUME THAT...

Birth parents know how to:

- Play with their children,
- Talk politely with their children,
- Enjoy their children's company,
- Separate from the visit their frustration, shame, and humiliation over losing custody,
- Read to children or read and understand court reports, contracts, priorities, or, major and minor requirements.

These assumptions do not always hold true. By overestimating parents' abilities, visitation planners can unwittingly undermine family reunification."

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The Division of Children and Family Services



**Legislative Analysis Research and Planning
Planning Unit
January 2004**

Focus Group Sessions
Input Regarding Visitation Between Child in Placement and their Parent
January 2004

Family life is too intimate to be preserved by the spirit of justice. It can be sustained by a spirit of love, which goes beyond justice.

--Rienhold Niebuhr

The family is one of nature's masterpieces.

--George Santayana

How pleasant it is for a father to sit at his child's board. It is like an aged man reclining under the shadow of an oak, which he has planted.

-- Walter Scott

The true measure of any society is not what it knows but what it does with what it knows

--Warren Bennis

Introduction:

The primary purposes of visiting are to maintain parent-child relationships and reduce the sense of abandonment that children experience in placement. Our agency policy states: "Families and children shall have reasonable opportunities for personal visits, communication by telephone, and involvement in life events such as teacher conferences, school and community events. A plan for visitation shall be developed between a child in out-of-home placement and the family and siblings, whether or not the siblings are in out-of-home placement. The preferred location for the visits is the parents' home or, if that is not possible, in the most homelike setting possible. Office visits are a last resort."

The publication entitled *Visiting Between Children in Care and their Families: A Look at Current Policy* notes that researchers have found a relationship between parent-child visiting and children's well being while in care. Furthermore, children in care who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to have high well-being ratings and to adjust well to placement than are children less frequently or never visited.

Purpose and Methodology:

In developing the Arkansas Program Improvement Plan based on findings from the Child and Family Service review, staff wanted to explore with parents and siblings how to improve connections and ascertain appropriate visitation with their children placed in foster care. The purpose of a focus group is to listen, to better understand how parents feel and gather information from this group. To conduct several separate sessions so that we can identify trends and patterns.

The PIP Task - 1.6.1 states: that the Division will, utilizing focus group sessions with staff and parents, review existing policy, identify barriers to visitation and develop strategies, including policy revisions, if appropriate, for improving the frequency and quality of visits between the child in foster care and their parent and/ or siblings. Recommendations from these sessions were to be pulled together by 12/01/03. The Planning Unit developed a plan action identifying who would be participating in the sessions, suggested facilitators of the parent sessions and the field staff sessions, secured locations for the sessions, materials provided for the session and compiled focus questions.

Participants in this study:

- Parents of children placed in foster care.
- Family Service Workers and supervisors in three (3) of the DCFS service areas that serve these parents and their children.

Process:

Prior to the sessions, a conference call was conducted with the Family Resource Center directors, Shirlee Flanigan-Isbell, Debbie Shiell, Varnaria Vickers-Smith, Area Managers – Kim Alexander, Rosemary White and Sue Bruner – to discuss the process and to make arrangements for the attendance of families and staff at the sessions.

Family service workers and parents met together for an introduction of the sessions, then split into two groups one with parents and one with the workers.

Location of sessions:

Sessions were conducted at Family Resource Centers

1. Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - Toyce Newton, Director, McGehee (Desha County), Arkansas
October 27, 2003 – 9 parents and 9 field staff
2. Our Children First Coalition - Debbie Lashford, Director, – Texarkana (Miller County), Arkansas
November 4th – 6 parents and 8 field staff
3. Lee County Family Resource Center – Lois Boyd Director, Marianna, Arkansas
November 5th – 7 parents and 12 field staff
4. Watershed Human & Community Development Agency Family Resource Center, Rev. Hezekiah Stewart, Director, Little Rock (Pulaski County), Arkansas –
November 6th – 2 parents and 3 field staff

Facilitators of the sessions:

Executive Directors and staff of the Family Resource Centers conducted sessions with the parents.

Georganne Lewis assisted with the parents session in Pulaski County.

Debbie Shiell, Varnaria Vickers-Smith and Jo Thompson, conducted the sessions with the family service workers.

Highlights of the information shared by parents include:

- Transportation is a major concern; parents lack transportation, parents' lack of money to buy gas to visit child.
- Visits are held in the DHS County office and parents would like these to be held in their home, other relatives' home or another home like setting.
- Visitation schedule needs to allow for flexibility when parents work schedule conflicts; would like to schedule visits at night. Schedules need to include weekend and holiday visits and allow more time to visit with the child.
- Allow all siblings visitation in placement facilities as some do not allow younger siblings to visit older sibling in a placement facility. Allow other relatives to visit child.
- Allow parents to visit with their child(ren) in private.
- When siblings were placed in different homes or facilities, it was difficult for the parent to visit both. Parents request the visit to include all children at the same time.
- Visits to be scheduled or help parents to plan the visit around an activity; park, fishing or birthday.

- Parents would like to have a schedule of the visits. Parents would like to have more input in developing the schedule rather than rely on what the foster parent or facility allowed.
- Lastly, parents want better communication between parent and family service worker; provision of a schedule of the visits, information about the child's health, information about follow-through with parents requests, an understanding of agency policies and procedures, monthly staffings with parents (several indicated that staffings are only held after court hearing). One parent wanted to see the agency conduct more focus group sessions with parents.

Highlights of the information shared by family service workers include:

- Staff coordinate schedules with foster parents and parents on the visit times and base it on the workers caseload.
- Frequency of visitation depends on if child earned points at a facility (i.e. behavioral hospitals) facilities have rules - if child has been disciplined, consequences may effect visits; children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit; kids do not want to visit and separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.
- Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a month. Where teens are involved, visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.
- Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances.
- Visitation may occur but it isn't always documented (i.e. when parent goes to visit child at Vera Lloyd and the Baptist Home). Hard to document when siblings and parents live in different locations.
- Transportation, placement of children outside of parent's county.
- Some workers just don't schedule the visits.
- Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents show up late or staff show up late with good reasons such as case related.
- Parents do not show up for the visits or parents arrive late for the visits. Workers will work with parent even reschedule and stay late with parents. Can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit. Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent.
- Need more resources in the area/county; foster homes, counseling services, IFS services, transportation services or staff to transport children and or families, and supervised visitation contracts were missed

Recommendations:

1. Give parents an opportunity to share input or ideas in developing the visitation schedule. Provide parents a copy of the visitation plan/schedule.
2. Using the publication, *Visiting Between Children in Care and Their Families: A Look at Current Policy*, review DCFS current policy, procedures and training to determine the instruction provided to workers regarding visits between parents and their children. The publication includes a checklist to assist in analyzing content of the agency's policies and procedures. Through a cursory review of the current policy and procedure there are areas in which content was lacking and some enhancements could be made to current policy. For

example, our policy states, “Families and children shall have reasonable opportunities . . . ” clarify and further define who can visit, what family members are eligible.

3. Review all contracts policies and procedures specifically those that describe how a child can lose visitation privileges and regarding visits between children in placement their parents and siblings. Determine if this is in line with DCFS policies and procedures.
4. Utilize information from this report in local CQI meetings to address parents concerns, review local practice and identify any supports or training needs of staff, foster parents and or providers.
5. Analyze the resource issues noted by staff; the transportation concerns, lack of placement resources to locate children close to parent, counseling service needs.
6. Review existing training(s) presented to workers and supervisors regarding the purposes of visiting and assess whether it adequately cover that visits are to maintain parent-child relationships and reduce the sense of abandonment that children experience in placement.
7. Create a consumer advisory group made up of parents, age appropriate youth, field staff, training staff and policy makers in the Division to assist in reviewing and revising policies and procedures that affect consumers.
8. The local DCFS County office to identify other “family friendly” visitation space to accommodate and encourage visits between a parent and their child(ren).
9. For families in which the court order does not require supervised visits, allow privacy during the visits between child and parent.
10. Issues related to lack of transportation, flexibility in scheduling visits, and cooperation between counties accommodating families. While many of the workers indicated great flexibility in accommodating families in their area, it is clear that there needs to be more coordination with other areas.
11. To work closely with DCO to acquire use of DHS vehicles for worker use. It is my understanding that vehicles are assigned to a specific division may sit on parking lots in counties and not be used when if they were allowed to be shared this could help to facilitate visits.
12. Conduct focus group session in all of the DCFS designated areas to insure a representative sample of parents are given an opportunity to participate in formulating improvement in the Division’s service delivery system. .

This report will be disseminated and shared with program staff, field staff participating in this effort, the Family Resource Centers, the DCFS Advisory boards, central office CQI and local CQI teams for implementation of key recommendations.

A total of 24 parents participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked parents the following questions.

1. *How often do you visit your child(ren)?*

Responses varied from

- weekly visits,
- every weekend,
- every Tuesday and Thursday,
- twice a month, and;
- monthly.

2. *If you have more than one child in different placements, how often do you visit with them?*

- Two of the four sessions, parents indicated that all of their children were placed together.
- Parents may live in another county from where child(ren) are placed.
- One facility does not allow sibling visitation for younger siblings as this facility feels that they are too young to visit.
- 2 in 2 different placements,
- 2 in 2 different counties with parent in another city; moved son 4 different locations and parent couldn't keep up with him. 3 indicated that their children were placed together, 1 in same city as mother.

3. *What kind of things would make it more likely for you to participate in regular visitation?*

- At all sites parents identified that transportation was a problem either they did not have their own or did not have the money to purchase gas to travel. Money and transportation was an issue because they were living on a "fixed income" and did not always have the money to go to the visit or to purchase items for their child. For example, child was placed in another county and mom had to get transportation to go see her. Mom did not own car – no extra money to buy gas to get there if you could get someone to drive you.
- Parents suggested that different sites, other than the county office, for visitation be used, sites that are more homey and comfortable.
- Flexible work schedule/visitation schedule. There is no night visitation for parents that do shift work. For example, a stepfather goes to work at 5 am and off at 5 pm and would need to visit at night.
- Must work schedule around the "foster home or facility" schedule.
- Parents requested a schedule – "let me know when and how often – give me a schedule."
- Parents suggested to plan visits around some kind of activity such as fishing.
- A residential facility allows for 2 hour passes away from the facility. Kids are taken to parents home.
- Request to take 2 year old out to eat but they won't let me.
- Request that visits be conducted in the home so that child can also visit with siblings.
- Need to be allowed to make weekend and holiday visits.

4. *Where do visits take place?*

- 7 parents indicated in the DHS office
- 4 indicated at the residential facility where child is placed
- 1 indicated with family members
- 4 parents indicated that they take place in their home
- 2 parents indicated that they take place in either the DHS offices or their home.
- 1 parent indicated that visits take place to other locations such as park, McDonalds

5. *Where would you like visits to take place?*

All parents indicated they would prefer that visits take place “in the home.”

- Some places that are not so uninviting as the DHS county office.
- Allow parents to bring clothes, toys, etc not just to DHS office during their visit.
- McDonalds except that parents can't afford to buy their children food.
- Caseworkers walk in when visits are unsupervised – kids won't talk to parents when caseworkers are present. Parents stated that this is not an issue when there are other kids and families visiting.
- Possible places to conduct visits include the park, relatives home, Wal-Mart – game area or snack area or the library – reception room

6. *Where would be most suitable for you and your child to visit?*

- Would like more relaxed environment, to eat-out, or at shops, parks, or take children to movies or church.
- That visits be private without someone sitting there and listening to everything you say. Sometimes other children or people who are unrelated are in the same room.
- Facilities often don't have a private meeting place – this should be required. Confidentiality is compromised.
- Allow other family members to go on visitation, siblings, cousins and/or adult relatives
- Home, relative or other family members homes.
- Church, park, restaurant, Wal-Mart, Fish Pond, movies, museum, other family members houses, library, mall any relaxed atmosphere.

7. *What suggestions do you have on how to make the visits better for you and your children?*

- More time with child(ren), increase the list of visitors allowed to come (aunt, cousins, grandparents etc), change locations, flexible visitation hours even weekends.
- Visitation schedule should be more considerate of work and schools hours, often penalized for work schedule caused missed meetings and bad report for court. Prepare a schedule with the parent. Schedule visits around paydays. Evening hour visits for parents that work during the day
- Have all the children together for the visit – including those in different placements
- Make some kind of arrangements so parents are not embarrassed if they cannot afford to buy their child(ren) something if visits take place at fast food restaurants such as McDonald's.
- DHS visitation spaces are not kid friendly – look like conference rooms – need toys suitable for different aged kids – need inviting atmosphere
- Parents have to bring their own snacks for kids to DHS visits or use DHS coke/vending machines – could set out nutritional snacks for kids.
- Child sent home – you asked!
- Unsupervised visits – don't like being watched. Do not think something bad is going to happen. Make sure both parties are comfortable. Take child off of the premises.

8. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's services to you?*

- Some DHS rules are not understandable. Some rules we may not agree with but “needs to understand rules even if you don’t agree.” Information not explained clearly.
- Some workers often don’t do their part even when you do your part.
- One parent stated that it was good to have meetings like this (the focus session) so that parents can have a say. Good to give suggestions on what would make things better.
- Need to provide information; health of children, what a doctor say, parents want current status information about condition of children and feel that this should be provided at staffing.
- Staffings should not be scheduled just around court dates. If parents meet with DHS staff more often, they feel that better progress would be made on case plans and improvement with reunification at least. Suggest that regular staffings be conducted at least once a month.
- Parents want to know how their children are doing, if and when child is taken to the doctor and not after the appointment.
- Listen to parents – at least listen.
- Could we check on the McDonald’s coupons for the parents because parents feel embarrassed if they do not have the money to treat their child(ren).
- Foster parent should have a different family service worker than the biological parent, as it is a conflict with both the parent and foster parent – loyalty issues.
- Problem with workers attitudes, get the facts – do not rely on hearsay information.
- Would like to meet with the foster parents and talk together about their child(ren). One parent noted that there are problems with one particular caseworker not doing her job. For example, when parent asked to have child for a weekend visit the worker says she will arrange but it doesn’t happen – need to follow through.
- Parent felt that they were guilty before proven innocent, and that they can’t ask questions of the foster parents.
- The agency moves children too much. Make excuses about child. Do bad stuff to children,

A total of 32 family service workers and supervisors participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked workers the following questions.

1. *How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents?*

- Weekly, bi-weekly depending on the circumstances
- Caseworker supervises and transport the child (usually)
- Coordinate with the foster parents and parent on the time and base on the workers caseload
- Sometimes visits are irregular or limited, as parents don't show up for them.
- Weekends
- Depending on earned points at a facility (behavioral hospitals)
- Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a month. Where teens are involved visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.
- Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances. Every weekend, as can be arranged – try at least once month. In a facility we follow the policy of the facility. Waivers are followed, may be a barrier for example at psychiatric facilities. Will allow children to visit w/ relatives if parents are incarcerated and they write letters.

2. *How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents, siblings are not placed together?*

- Visitation may occur but it isn't always documented (i.e. when parent goes to visit child at Vera Lloyd and the Baptist Home). Hard to document when siblings and parents live in different locations.
- Foster homes specializing in certain placements affects placement of siblings.
- Once a month for children placed in distant counties. Other county coordination is required. The possibility of a frequent visit (i.e. weekly) is affected by biological parents not following through. Same county and surrounding counties placements have more frequent visits.
- Child placed out of the county/area because there are not enough foster homes and facilities.
- For facilities visitation will vary – bi-weekly or based on earned visits – weekly.
- Some facilities have different level or designation either a child is in level one or in the red gold or silver group. Some teenagers and children refuse visitation with parents. Some parents don't want to visit with their children.
- One facility will not allow visits for the 1st 30 days – this is called “stabilization period.”
- Some children have parents in a rehabilitation facility and that can affect visits. Court orders influence the frequency of visits. Sickness will effect visits “safety of the children is 1st.” Don't want children to get sick with lice, colds or viruses.
- In one area, usually weekly, bringing children together to visit w/ mom – usually weekly. Sometimes waivers are done and you will get dinged in CHRIS if you don't visit accordingly, exactly as the waiver; example (a) biweekly - visit done – weekly + dinged (b) even when case requires more frequent visits your are dinged - CHRIS may need to be altered.
- Work toward the goal listed in policy – every 2 weeks. Worker had a sibling that wishes not to visit – other siblings are placed together. Weekly, workers have to coordinate transportation.

4. What are some reasons that visits do not occur between parents and their children as specified in the case plan? Explain

- Facility has rules (i.e. if child has been disciplined consequences may effect visits).
- Placement of children outside of parent's county.
- Parents do not show up for the visits or parents arrive late for the visits. Workers will work with parent even reschedule and stay late with parents.
- Some workers just don't schedule the visits.
- Children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit. Kids do not want to visit. Separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.
- Foster parents aren't adequately trained to handle teen disruptions.
- Transportation.
- Can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit.
- Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents' show up late or staff show up late with good reasons such as case related.
- Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent.
- Mom or dad may be in the hospital and the visits have to be arranged to work with the situation. HIPPA precludes visits in the hospital in Hope, AR.,
- Children get sick, school activities and extra curricular activities. Child does not want to visit, the court order, child's behavior, facilities have behavior visitation policy, incarceration of parent.
- No state vehicles for transportation and visits do occur but need state vehicles.
- Parents who live or are out of state.
- Parents will avoid being seen for fear of being arrested for other charges. Mother has a newborn and avoids DCFS for fear of losing newborn. Parents show up "under the influence" drugs, alcohol.

5. Where do visits occur?

- All sites indicated that visits occur mostly in DHS County office (staff felt that this was not family friendly). Client's home
- Foster parents home or facility (TFP etc) At court, before or after a hearing. County offices do not have visitation room – need a neutral setting. Park, when the weather permits. .
- Would like an Advocacy Center in Area 10 – there is one in Pine Bluff
- One site stated that visits had been arranged by a contractor that was no longer available.
- Staff are accommodating if a request is appropriate to hold visits in a bowling alley or at Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut, birthday parties and grocery store.
- One county stated that visits take place in the home of parents, park, foster home and at the placement facility.
- Beauty shops because parent want to get child's hair done, mental health day treatment center, church on Mothers Day, possibly use the Family Resource center, day care centers.

6. What are some safe and comfortable locations to schedule visits?

- Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora, at an Advocacy Center, may consider the Migrant Center in Hope, Hope in Action as it has conference rooms

- DHS County Office with a visitation room
- Clients home if it is unsupervised or relatives home
- Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available) – good for sexually abused children because it was a neutral place
- May explore Faith, Love, and Hope which is a summer program opened by a foster parent in Miller County
- Lack of resources in rural areas for other settings
- Park, possibly the family resource centers.
- Parents place of employment if allowed

7. *What would make visitation more manageable for you from a caseload perspective?*

- Separate units i.e. PS, FC etc
- Staff person to assist in visitation when worker cannot schedule or coordinate.
- Transportation or a staff position to transport child or family to the visits.
- Less cases, more workers (Drew County – 21 cases)
- Location, child placed closer to parent's town or in the same county
- More foster home or facility placements in the parents county. In Miller County there are 59 children in foster care but only 6 are placed in the county
- If we had a supervised visitation contract like the Kids' Exchange – they would also have age appropriate visits at the boys Club for teen boys_
- Transportation contract
- Use faith-based volunteers, resources for transportation (The Refuge worked with children in Miller County)
- Possibly the Parent Center in Ashdown
- Encourage foster parents during training to provide transportation.
- More social service aides, state car or van – need more state cars.
- Recruitment and retention plan for foster homes is needed.
- If parents had a mode of transportation or if there was more public transportation available. DCO helps w/ bus tokens for TEA participants. Not enough workers to address the need.
- If policy allowed more placements of children in one home, more homes to accommodate large sibling groups.
- If foster parents were more willing to work w/ families after hours. Placements need to be closer to child which effects transportation and availability of transportation.
- Cooperation from other DCFS offices – big issues – Meet me a part of the way. Staff person strictly just to transportation and set up visits.
- If DHS could fill vacancies so that casework could be completed, smaller caseloads. Workers have a “cutoff” for cases example CWLA requires 15 as a maximum. A type of “floater – type of position to help with cases if needed. Would do several duties i.e. supervising visitation. Supervised visitation contract. Interns (social work students – Philander Smith College – with the assurances that advisors say that they are qualified or being trained. Shorter visits – more visitation rooms in the county office.

8. *How flexible are you if the parent needs to change a visitation time?*

- Too flexible because parents don't always show up.
- Coordinate with other workers; share their visits if they are out with a family located near other workers family.
- If foster parent is willing – facility
- Monday – Friday unless circumstances are different.
- Need notice parents at least 24 hours if they need to change the visit.

- Staff will work with parents when given ample time
- Transporting on Sundays – occasionally
- Problems with foster parents who refuse to accept a child until they receive the \$100.00 paid from a short board payment – want the money up front 1st.
- Very flexible, unless changes are made too frequent and at the last minute.
- Parents set the schedules based on their work schedules. Advanced notification. Can be as flexible as needed.

9. *What kinds of assistance do you need to ensure visits between parents, and their children take place?*

- Transportation.
- Staff to assist with visits. Additional staff or volunteers for transportation, supervising visits, etc (they would need to be trained).
- Safe and comfortable environment.
- More foster homes
- Child's placement to be closer to parents.
- More staff for visits – supervised visits.
- A group home, shelter, A CEO or possibly Wal-Mart to market foster parenting.
- Cooperation from foster parents, cooperation from the court in understanding that children are in school, cooperation from the parents (timely, be there when they say they will be there and cooperation from other county offices.
- Transportation resources, availability of space and better utilization of space, scheduling visits at non-peak times, consistency from parents – responsible parents.
- Assistance of co-workers and other staff resources – students etc. Worker safety and security while visiting off site.

10. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's supports to you?*

- More money – higher pay to keep the qualified workers. Hazardous pay when confronted with drug and meth. Lab, homes, comp pay/flex time and the time to take it.
- Lower caseloads
- More foster homes – recruitment issues
- More clerical staff to key – DCFS does not have clerical support.
- More resources, counseling, IFS or in home counseling, drug and alcohol facility for teens, DDS services and Mental health after hours counseling, counseling in school no appropriate for all children. Need Day treatment would be helpful to keep from placing child in TFP in Little Rock, TFP a problem in this area. Qualifications for subcontractors are needed.
- Transportation contract/transportation, cars (one county office did not have one car).
- DCFS need their own trainers
- More staff meetings – more meetings from central office to meet with field staff.
- Working computers – computers slow.
- More office space
- More resources for our children, we are limited to making purchases either at Wal-Mart or Target
- Home study contracts end and staff will now have to take this one
- Insurance – the state could pay this.
- Work support to help maintain the offices
- Education of our Division with our stakeholders such as the PA, law enforcement, attorneys, schools because of all the unnecessary resistance.

- Truants do not need to be in Foster care or for violating curfew. Delinquents are placed in foster care. Foster care is being used as a form of punishment.
- On call, more staff, more money, more assistance with hard to place children, teenagers, sexual offenders, more supervisory – supervisors who are willing to assist and help the workers, supervisors who have people skills and know how to mediate, supervisors that know how to encourage others, know how to discipline and they need more training to develop their skills as supervisors. Suggestions could include worker appreciation day, training, door prizes, good meals.
- Contracted staff to help supervise visits. Invite central offices staff to help supervise visits. Positive letters, positive feedback from administration. Hiring staff more timely.

Appendix I

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in McGehee, Arkansas included nine (9) parents and (9) family service staff

Our Children First Coalition – in Texarkana, Arkansas included eight (8) workers and six (6) parents

Lee County Family Resource Center in Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna, Arkansas included seven (7) parents and 12 workers.

Watershed - Little Rock, Arkansas included 2 parents and 3 workers.

1. How often do you visit your child(ren)?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center - McGehee

Visits are monthly, twice a month, weekly, or Saturday or Sunday – each week

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Every weekend, sees daughter, visits 3 x week; by phone the rest of the week, every Thursday 3:30 – 4:30; every other weekend; 1 child only; not handicapped daughter, stepfather in home only just seeing son on weekends – has seen stepdaughter in courtroom – there is a problem with the work schedule; every weekend + every Tuesday for 1 hour – daughter is almost 2 years old.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

2 x month – this time; generally 1 x month; 1 hr every week on Thursdays (2 yr. Old)
See on Fridays and Saturdays – child spends the time; “every time I can” will not see child until December – last seen October 18. 1 x week – on Wednesdays (6 month old); 1 x week on Tuesdays – on Saturdays. Sometimes work schedule is a problem.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Weekly – once a week

Suggestions

2 x a week, every day

Ways to bridge the gap – better communication, assist in making arrangements for visitation, longer time for visitation 5 – 7 hours, honesty

2. If you have more than one child in different placements, how often do you visit with them?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Children are placed together. None of the participants had children placed in separate placements.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana – Never see older children in foster care as court-ordered not to see them at first, went back to court, got supervised visitation and visitation is now every other weekend because of work schedule – parent lives in another county from where children live. 2 children live in Ashdown, one child in McNeil and mother lives in Texarkana – DCFS brings kids to Texarkana on Tuesdays for 1 hour or so visit. Sees daughter still in system (Living Hope) 3 x week but the facility says siblings are too young to visit – 2 at home.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

2 in 2 different placements, 2 in 2 different counties with parent in another city; moved son 4 different locations and parent couldn't keep up with him. 3 indicated that their children were placed together; 1 in same city as mother.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

All at the same time.

3. *What kind of things would make it more likely for you to participate in regular visitation?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee -

Before the opening of the session, one parent shared that money and transportation was an issue because they were living on a "fixed income" and did not always have the money to go to the visit or to get something for their child.

Transportation or worker transport child and cannot go until staff's schedule allows.

Lack of funds

Different sites for visitation, more homey and more comfortable.

Flexible work schedule/visitation schedule. Must work schedule around the "foster home or facility" schedule.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Daughter placed in Hot Springs – mom had to bet transportation to go see her. Mom did not own car – no extra money to buy gas to get there if you could get someone to drive you as Mom lives in Texarkana. Step father goes to work at 5 am and off at 5 pm. Or later and there is no night visitation. Mom was put in jail and then kids put in system (foster care); once for 2 days and another time for 5 days and mom couldn't see kids or talk on the phone.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Let me know when and how often – give me a schedule

Plan some kind of activity such as fishing

2 hour passes away from the facility.

Kids are taken to parents home

Want to take 2 year old out to eat but they won't let me.

Want to have the visit at home so that child can also visit with siblings.

Parent has purchased clothes, school items and shoes but couldn't get them to their kids – this has now changed because mother got a new worker and this has been resolved.

Need to be allowed to make weekend and holiday visits.

Another parent indicated that she has purchased things for her child and they got them.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Be a better person, convenience for all parties, transportation, interesting activities – a variety, get away from the offices, overcoming departure – counseling.

4. *Where do visits take place?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

2 indicated in the DHS office

3 indicated at the group home

2 indicated at a facility such as Millcreek, Vera Lloyd or SAYS

Pizza Pro, Wal-Mart and the park were other places where visits take place.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

W/family members

At facility (Living Hope)

DeQueen – DHS Office or McDonalds

Texarkana –DHS Office

Magnolia - McDonalds

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

4 indicated they take place in the home

2 indicated in the office

1 indicated both places; DHS office and home

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

DHS offices, parents house, church, park, restaurant, would like it to be relaxed, studio , mall , overcome departure. Bill payments \$500.00, child separation,

5. *Where would you like visits to take place?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

All parents indicated they would prefer “in the home.”

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

All parents – home

Some places that are not so boring – DHS office

Can bring clothes, toys, etc but can only bring them to DHS office

McDonalds – parents can’t afford to buy their children food

Caseworkers work in when visits are unsupervised – kids won’t talk to parents when caseworkers are present. Not an issue when there are other kids and families visiting

Possible places

Park

Relatives House

Wal-Mart – game area or snack area

Library – reception room

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

7 – Home

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Mall, church, park, parents home, any relaxed atmosphere.

6. *Where would be most suitable for you and your child to visit?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Would like more relaxed environment. Would like to eat-out, or at shops, parks, take children to movies or church.

Privacy without someone sitting there and listening to everything you say.

Sometimes other children or people who are unrelated are in the same room.

Homes (facilities) often don’t have a private meeting place – this should be required.

Confidentiality is compromised.

Allow other family members to go on visitation, siblings, cousins and/or adult relatives

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Home, Relative or other family members home

The kids want to come home

Some families believe they are complying with what DHS is asking them to do but feel the harder they try the more they have to do.

What DHS tells may be different than what happens in court.

Court said to allow home visit, but DHS did not follow judges order – didn't want to do what the judge ordered because didn't agree w/him. No home study had been ordered or is on file

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Church, park, restaurant, Wal-Mart, Fish Pond, movies, museum, other family members houses, library

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Mall, church, park, parents' home, any relaxed atmosphere.

7. *What suggestions do you have on how to make the visits better for you and your children?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

More time with child(ren), increase the list of visitors allowed to come (aunt, cousins, grandparents etc), change locations, flexible visitation hours even weekends.

Visitation schedule should be more considerate of work and schools hours

Often penalized for work schedule caused missed meetings and bad report for court.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Have all the children together for the visit

Make some kind of arrangements so parents are not embarrassed at McDonald's

Schedule visits around paydays. Evening hour visits for parents that work during the day

DHS visitation spaces are not kid friendly – look like conference rooms – need toys suitable for different aged kids – need inviting atmosphere

Parents have to bring their own snacks for kids to DHS visits or use DHS coke/vending machines – could set out nutritional snacks for kids.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Need to know the exact time child is coming so we can plan something – call or send a letter. More communication by the worker, return family's phone calls, release child in parents' custody, They don't bring them, they missed the appointment or visit.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Child sent home – you asked!

Unsupervised visits – don't like being watched. Do not think something bad is going to happen. Make sure both parties are comfortable. Take child off of the premises. Visit once a day. Removal from office to better atmosphere and staying longer.

8. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's services to you?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Some DHS rules you don't understand or agree with “needs to understand rules even if you don't agree.”

Some workers often don't do their part even when you do your part.

Good to have meetings like this (the focus session) so that parents can have a say.

Good to give suggestions on what would make things better.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

One parent asked - what services?

Need to provide information; health of children, what a doctor say, parents want current status information about condition of children and feel that this should be provided at staffing.

Staffings should not be scheduled just around court dates. If parents meet with DHS staff more often, better progress would be made on case plans and improvement reunification at least.

Suggest that regular staffings be conducted at least once a month.

Parents want to know how their children are doing, if and when child is taken to the doctor and not after the appointment.

Listen to parents – at least listen.

Could we check on the McDonald's coupons for the parents?

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

One parent stated that she has a good worker who seems very concerned.

Foster parent should have a different family service worker than the biological parent, as it is a conflict with both the parent and foster parent – loyalty issues.

Problem with workers attitudes, get the facts – do not rely on hearsay information. Wold like to meet with the foster parents and talk together about their child(ren). One parent noted that there are problems with one particular caseworker not doing her job. For example, when parent asked to have child for a weekend visit the worker says she will arrange but it doesn't happen – need to follow through.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Didn't approve of foster home, they hit you. Parent felt that they were guilty before proven innocent, and that they can't ask questions of the foster parents. The agency moves children too much. Make excuses about child. Do bad stuff to children, Information not explained clearly. They let me visit.

Enjoyed services. They try to help you do the right things. They protect some children. Assist in arrangements. They let you get out of bad homes. They evaluate the homes.

A total of 32 family service workers and supervisors participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked workers the following questions.

1. How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Weekly, bi-weekly depending on the circumstances

Caseworker supervises and transport the child (usually)

Coordinate with the foster parents and parent on the time and base on the workers caseload

Sometimes visits are irregular or limited, as parents don't show up for them.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Weekly

Bi-weekly (for siblings or if parents have children placed far away)

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Weekends

Weekly

Depending on earned points at a facility (behavioral hospitals)

Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a months. Where teens are involved visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances. Every weekend, as can be arranged – try at least once month. In a facility we follow the policy of the facility. Waivers are followed, may be a barrier example psycho facilities. Will allow children to visit w/ relatives if parents are incarcerated and they write letters.

2. How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents, siblings are not placed together?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Visitation occur that isn't always documented (i.e. when parent goes to visit child at Vera Lloyd and the Baptist Home). Hard to document when siblings and parents live in different locations. Foster homes specializing in certain placements affects placement of siblings. Once a month for children placed in distant counties. Other county coordination is required. The possibility of a frequent visit (i.e. weekly) is affected by biological parents not following through. Same county and surrounding counties placements have more frequent visits. Child placed out of the county/area because there are not enough foster homes and facilities.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

For facilities visitation will vary – bi-weekly or based on earned visits – weekly. Some facilities have different level or designation either a child is in level one or in the red gold or silver group. Some teenagers and children refuse visitation with parents, A facility in Area 3 (TFP) will not allow visits for the 1st 30 days – this is called “stabilization period

Some parents don't want to visit with their children. Some children have parents in a rehabilitation facility and that can affect visits. Some court orders influence the frequency of visits. Sickness will effect visits “safety of the children is 1st.” Don't want children to get sick with lice, colds or viruses

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Depends on the case, usually weekly, bringing children together to visit w/ mom – usually weekly. Sometimes waivers are done and you will get dinged in CHRIS if you don't visit accordingly, exactly as the waiver; example (a) biweekly - visit done – weekly + dinged (b) even when case requires more frequent visits you are dinged - CHRIS may need to be altered.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Work toward the goal listed in policy – every 2 weeks. Worker had a sibling that wishes not to visit – are other siblings are placed together. Weekly, workers have to coordinate transportation.

3. *What are some reasons that visits do not occur between parents and their children as specified in the case plan? Explain*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Placement of children outside of parent's county. Facility has rules (i.e. if child has been disciplined consequences may effect visits). Parents do not show up for the visits. Parents arrive late for the visits. Workers will work with parent even reschedule and stay late with parents. Some workers just don't schedule the visits.

Children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit. Kids do not want to visit. Separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.

Foster parents aren't adequately trained to handle teen disruptions. Transportation.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

No shows, transportation problems, can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit. Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents show up late or staff show up late with a good reasons such as case related. Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent. Mom or dad may be in the hospital and the visits have to be arranged to work with the situation. HIPPA precludes visits in the hospital in Hope, AR.,

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Parents cancel (don't show up) children get sick, school activities and extra curricular activities. Child does not want to visit, the court order, child's behavior, facilities have behavior visitation policy, incarceration of parent. Financial reasons of parent; i.e. gas money, baby sitters, parent failed drug screening. Parent on the verge of losing job based on court and absences. Weather is bad or car has no air conditioner. No state vehicles for transportation. Visits do occur but need state vehicles.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

If the child chooses not to visit, parents are incarcerated, no show of parents due to work schedules or parents dodging drug screens. Due to sibling sexual assault not appropriate to visit. Can't find parents (abandoned) court orders not visitation, parents are out of state. Parents will avoid being seen for fear of being arrested for other charges. Mother has a newborn and avoids DCFS for fear of losing newborn. Parents show up "under the influence" drugs, alcohol.

4. *Where do visits occur?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Mostly in DHS County office (staff felt that this was not family friendly). Client's home Foster parents home or facility (TFP etc) At court, before or after a hearing. County offices do not have visitation room – need a neutral setting. Park, when the weather permits. Phoenix Youth and Family

Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora – however Toyce Newton Executive Director suggested that the workers could use her location in McGehee also.
Would like an Advocacy Center in Area 10 – closes one is in Pine Bluff

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

DHS Office, McDonalds, park – if it is pretty outside. Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available). In the parent's home or In the facility. Bowling alley. Staff are accommodating if a request is appropriate. Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut, birthday parties and grocery store.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

DHS office, home of parents, park, foster home and at the facility.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

DHS office – 80%, fast food restaurants, park, zoo, shopping malls, doctors office, court in the visiting area, in the parents home – if appropriate, small %, parents aren't always stable, beauty shops because parent want to get child's hair done, mental health day treatment center, church on Mothers Day, possibly use the Family Resource center, day care centers.

5. *What are some safe and comfortable locations to schedule visits?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora

Advocacy Center – wish

DHS County Office with a visitation room

Clients home if it is unsupervised

Relatives home

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available) – good for sexually abused children because it was a neutral place

May explore Faith, Love, and Hope which is a summer program opened by a foster parent in Miller County

Lack of resources in rural areas

Maybe the Migrant Center in Hope

Hope in Action – conference rooms

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

DHS office, park, possibly the family resource centers. Social service aids could to “hands-on” training.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Parents place of employment if allowed

Family resource centers, fast food restaurants, park, zoo, shopping malls, doctors office, court in the visiting area, in the parents home

6. *What would make visitation more manageable for you from a caseload perspective?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Separate units i.e. PS, FC etc

Staff person so assist in visitation

Transportation, or an aid to transport child or family.

Less cases, more workers (Drew County – 21 cases)

Location, child placed closer to parents town/county
More foster home or facility placements in parents county.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

If we had a supervised visitation contract like the Kids' Exchange – they would also have age appropriate visits at the boys Club for teen boys_

Transportation contract

Use faith-based volunteers, resources for transportation (The Refuge worked with children in Miller County

Possibly the Parent Center in Ashdown

If we encouraged foster parents during training to provide transportation.

More social service aides, state car or van – need more state cars.

Recruitment and retention plan for foster homes is needed. In Miller County there are 59 children in foster care but only 6 are placed in the county.

If parents had a mode of transportation or if there was more public transportation available. DCO helps w/ bus tokens for TEA participants. No enough workers to address the need.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

If policy allowed more placements of children in one home, more homes to accommodate large sibling groups.

If foster parents were more willing to work w/ families after hours. Closer placements, which effects transportation and availability of transportation.

Cooperation from other DCFS offices – big issues – Meet me a part of the way. Staff person strictly just to transportation and set up visits.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

If DHS could fill vacancies so that casework could be completed, smaller caseloads. Workers have a “cutoff” for cases example CWLA requires 15 as a maximum. A type of “floater – type of position to help with cases if needed. Would do several duties i.e. supervising visitation. Supervised visitation contract. Interns (social work students – Philander Smith College – with the assurances that advisors say that they are qualified or being trained. Shorter visits – more visitation rooms in the county office.

7. How flexible are you if the parent needs to change a visitation time?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Too flexible because parents don't always show up.

Coordinate with other workers; share their visits if they are out with a family located near other workers family.

If foster parent is willing – facility

Monday – Friday unless circumstances are different.

Need notice parents at least 24 hours if they need to change the visit.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Staff will work with parents when given ample time

Transporting on Sundays – occasionally

Problems with foster parents who refuse to accept a child until they receive the \$100.00 paid from a short board payment – want the money up front 1st.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Very flexible, unless changes are made too frequent and at the last minute.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Parents set the schedules based on their work schedules. Advanced notification. Can be as flexible as needed.

8. What kinds of assistance do you need to ensure visits between parents, and their children take place?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Transportation.

Staff to assist with visits.

Safe and comfortable environment.

More foster homes

Child's placement to be closer to parents.

More staff for visits – supervised visits.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Transportation

More foster homes

A group home, shelter, A CEO or possibly Wal-Mart to market foster parenting.

Additional staff or volunteers for transportation, supervising visits, etc (they would need to be trained).

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Cooperation from foster parents, cooperation from the court in understanding that children are in school, cooperation from the parents (timely, be there when they say they will be there).

Cooperation from other cos.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Transportation resources, availability of space and better utilization of space, scheduling visits at non-peak times, consistency from parents – responsible parents. Assistance of co-workers and other staff resources – students etc. Worker safety and security while visiting off site.

9. What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's supports to you?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

More money – salary

Lower caseloads

More foster homes – recruitment issues

More clerical staff to key – DCFS does not have clerical support.

More resources, Delta counseling

Transportation contract/transportation, cars (one county office did not have one car).

DCFS need their own trainers

More staff meetings – more meetings from central office to meet with field staff.

Working computers – computers slow.

More office space

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

More money – higher pay to keep the qualified workers.

Sourcebook: Focus Groups – An Effective Marketing Research Tool for Social Service Agencies.

Guidelines of this plan are outlined in this textbook.

More resources for our children, we are limited to making purchases either at Wal-Mart or Target
Limited IFS/In home counseling

Qualifications for subcontractors

Home study contracts end and staff will now have to take this one

Insurance – the state could pay this.

Work support to help maintain the offices

Hazardous pay when confronted with drug and meth. lab homes

Comp pay/flex time and the time to take it.

Education of our Division with our stakeholders such as the PA, law enforcement, attorneys, schools because of all the unnecessary resistance.

Mental health after hours counseling, counseling in school not appropriate for all children. Day treatment would be helpful to keep from placing child in TFP in Little Rock, TFP a problem in this area

Need drug and alcohol facility for teens. Need DDS services. Truants do not need to be in Foster care or for violating curfew. Delinquents are placed in foster care. Foster care is being used as a form of punishment.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

On call, more staff, more money, more assistance with hard to place children, teenagers, sexual offenders, more supervisory – supervisors who are willing to assist and help the workers, supervisors who have people skills and know how to mediate, supervisors that know how to encourage others, know how to discipline and they need more training to develop their skills as supervisors. Worker appreciation day, training, door prizes, good meals.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Contracted staff to help supervise visits. Invite central offices staff to help supervise visits. Positive letters, positive feedback from administration. Hiring staff more timely.

References

Webster, S. (1992). *Focus Groups – An Effective Marketing Research Tool for Social Service Agencies*.

Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M.A. (2000). *Focus Groups – A Practical Guide For Applied Research*



IMPROVING PRACTICE IN VISITATION

Participant Manual

U·A·L·R

School of Social Work

AGENDA

- I. Introductions and Housekeeping
- II. Agenda, Competencies, and COA Standards
- III. Family Visitation Definition, Purpose, and Policy
- IV. Attachment Development
- V. Dealing with Grief and Loss in Family Visitations
- VI. Roles of Visit Supervisors
- VII. Developing the Visitation Plan
- VIII. Educating the Team
- IX. The Last Visit
- X. Play time

Competencies and COA Standards

- 101-3 The worker understands the dual roles of the family service worker to protect children from maltreatment, empower families, and provide services that preserve and for safe and stable families.
- 104-1 The worker understands the process and dynamics of normal, reciprocal attachments of children with their families and other significant caregivers.
- 104-2 The worker understands the potentially traumatic outcomes of the separation and placement experience for children and their families, including precipitation of psychological crisis, serious disruption of family relationships, and disturbance in the child's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.
- 104-7 The worker understands how properly structuring a placement can help prevent crisis and its consequences; and knows how to involve agency team members, and design placement activities, including pre-placement preparation and visits, that minimize stress and provide emotional support to the child and family.
- 104-10 The worker can identify ways that agency foster care policies and practices can contribute to successful out-of-home placements.
- 104-13 The worker knows the necessity of regular and frequent visits to maintain family members' relationships with the child in out-of-home placement, and can use casework strategies that enable families to participate in planning and attending visits.
- 206-8 The worker can give direct supportive, educational, and treatment interventions to promote family growth and change, including crisis intervention, skill modeling, emotional support, resource linkage, problem solving, and personal and system advocacy.
- 301-1 The worker understands principles of learning theory and behavior modification, including positive reinforcement, differential reinforcement, extinction, time out, shaping of behavior, and modeling strategies.
- 301-2 The worker can use principles of behavior modification to assess children's behaviors and to develop and implement behavior management programs.
- G7.3.07 The organization also trains personnel in topics related to service interventions including:
a. permissible service interventions;
b. family dynamics, including human growth and development; and
c. using the family's values and strengths to choose interventions and guide service delivery.
- G7.3.01 Training is provided through a mixture of knowledge-based and skill-based instruction and skill building exercises.

Definition and Purposes of Family Visits

Definition: “Parent visitation is the scheduled, face to face contacts between parents and their children in foster care. The visit is the primary child welfare intervention for maintaining and supporting parent-child relationships necessary for successful reunification.”

Children and Family Research Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Purposes:

- Lessen the impact of separation on child and family
- Promote active parental involvement
- Make progress toward goal of reunification
- Provide an opportunity to practice different interactive behaviors in areas of discipline, family activities, positive reinforcement, and tuning in to wants and needs of child
- Improve quality of parent-child interaction
- Improve role functioning of parent
- Enhance development of both child and parent
- Enable visit supervisor to get to know family as they interact together
- Increased family contact during placement means the children are more likely to return home
- Maintain relationships within the birth family
- Help family members face reality
- Others?

Attachment

Attachment - the social and emotional relationship children develop with significant people in their lives.

- Reciprocal process
- Adult recognizes and responds to the infant's signals and meets the physical and emotional needs of the child
- Adult regularly engages the child in social interactions

Attachment influences development in the following areas:

- Development of Language/Communication
- Development of Trust/Positive World View
- Development of Self-Esteem
- Sense of Security
- Learning through Social Interactions
- Self-Reliance

Adapted from information provided at the 19th Annual Association for Play Therapy International Conference.

STAGES OF GRIEF AND LOSS RELATED TO FOSTER CARE AND VISITATION

Shock:

Parent: reluctance to accept situation, may not be interested in visiting.

Child: reluctance to talk about parents or past.

Denial:

Parent: deny any problems, blame the agency and others, and refuse to take responsibility for situation "it's not my fault."

Child: act as if nothing has happened, appear happy and unaffected.

Anger:

Parent: may say angry things about foster parents, hostile to staff during visits, unable to focus on child during visit.

Child: may become aggressive toward foster parents, siblings and others, may say things about parents they do not mean.

Depression:

Parent: not show up for visits, may show up under the influence of drugs or alcohol, may lose hope.

Child: disturbance in eating or sleeping patterns, isolating and not interacting with others.

Acceptance:

Parent: willing to work with agency and foster parents, ready to deal with problems and work toward case goals.

Child: more involved with family of origin during visits, may become more interactive with foster family.

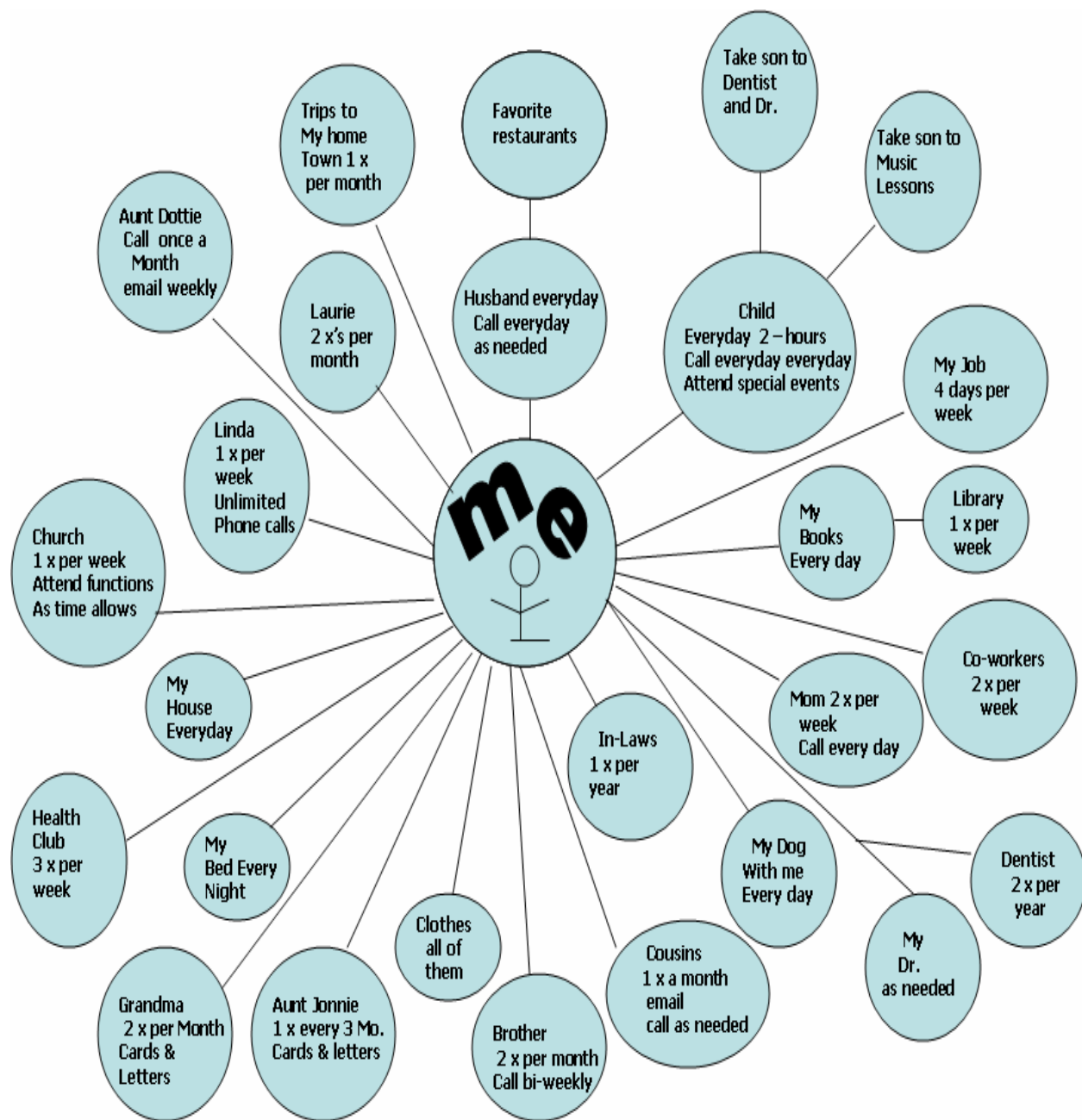
Each person needs to move through these stages to begin to progress and heal. Often, people move back and forth through the stages until reaching acceptance and resolution. The time it takes to move through these stages is different for each person. If a person becomes stuck in a stage, development and progress toward case goals and family reunification can be delayed indefinitely.

Adapted from: 1988 Center for Development of Human Services; New York State Child Welfare Training Institute; Buffalo State College.

ROLES OF VISIT SUPERVISORS

- Educate parents and foster parents about family visitation
- Schedule visits
- Assist parents with visit planning
- Ensure child safety
- Make sure rules of visitation are followed
- Monitor parent-child interaction
- Model appropriate interaction with child
- Limit setting
- Educate parents on parenting techniques
- Learn more about the family
- Assess levels of attachment and bonding
- Point out family strengths and give positive feedback
- Develop relationships and build trust with parents
- Facilitate age-appropriate activities
- Process visit with parents, child, and foster parents, deal with emotional fall out after the visit
- Update visit plan as needs of family change
- Encourage creativity when planning visits
- Document interaction or the lack of during the visit
- Clean up service after the visit, or sometimes before
- Visit police keeping children and parents in the visit area
- Others?

It's all about ME, ME, ME!



This Matters To Me

<h2>People</h2>	<h2>Places</h2>
<div> <div>Spouse</div> <div>Parents</div> <div>Siblings</div> <div>Grandparents</div> <div>Girl / Boy Friend</div> <div>Aunts / Uncles</div> <div>Friends</div> <div>Cousins</div> <div>Heath care providers</div> </div> <div> <div>Nieces</div> <div>Nephews</div> <div>Pets</div> <div>Neighbors</div> <div>Clergy</div> <div>Co-workers</div> <div>Teachers</div> <div>Coaches</div> </div> <div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> </div>	<div> <div>Home</div> <div>School</div> <div>Home of relative</div> <div>Neighborhood</div> <div>Medical offices</div> <div>Library</div> <div>Theater</div> <div>Health Club</div> <div>Home of Friends</div> </div> <div> <div>Office</div> <div>Church</div> <div>Restaurants</div> <div>Yard</div> <div>Garden</div> <div>Park</div> <div>Lake</div> </div> <div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> </div>
<h2>Events</h2>	<h2>Things</h2>
<div> <div>School events</div> <div>Funerals</div> <div>Birthdays</div> <div>Hospital visits</div> <div>Club meetings</div> <div>Family reunions</div> <div>Recreation activities</div> <div>Caring for someone ill</div> <div>Visiting family and friends</div> </div> <div> <div>Weddings</div> <div>B-Day party</div> <div>Births</div> <div>Sports</div> <div>Concerts</div> </div> <div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> </div>	<div> <div>Food</div> <div>Bed</div> <div>Toiletries</div> <div>Tools</div> <div>Videos</div> <div>Automobile</div> <div>Telephone</div> <div>Kitchen equipment</div> <div>Equipment for hobbies & sports</div> </div> <div> <div>Photos</div> <div>Clothes</div> <div>Books</div> <div>Music</div> <div>Computer</div> <div>Appliances</div> <div>Mail</div> </div> <div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> <div>_____</div> </div>

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Observation of Parent-Child Visit

Parent's Behavior:

- ☐ Demonstrates affection toward child
- ☐ Praises and recognizes accomplishments of child
- ☐ Attends to the safety of the child; is protective, responsive to the child being in danger or risk
- ☐ Plays and interacts with the child
- ☐ Reinforces positive and age-appropriate behavior with the child
- ☐ Uses effective discipline and controls for the child's age and development
- ☐ Comforts and helps the child when needed
- ☐ Fulfills promises made to child
- ☐ Have ideas and recommendations for next visit

Child's Behavior:

- ☐ Responds to parent; looks forward to seeing the parent
- ☐ Accepts the direction of the parent
- ☐ Looks to the parent for help and comfort
- ☐ Liked the activity the parent used in the visit

Children and Family Research Center, Conducting Parent-Child Visits, 2001, p.21

PARENT EDUCATION

- Don't assume parents have already received important visit information.
- Clearly explain importance and purpose of visits. Parents need to plan for and fully participate in the visits. Let them know what is expected.
- Explain your role as visit supervisor.
- Develop rules and guidelines **specifically for each family** with parent participation.
- Rules may include: advance notification of visit cancellation, timeliness, who will be allowed to attend visits.
- Specify for all visitors the subjects which shall not be discussed when children are present (such as sexual abuse allegations, negative comments about foster parents, pressing child for location information, or any other information that may be upsetting or harmful for the child).
- Discuss child safety measures such as remaining in sight of visit supervisor.
- Seek alternate visit supervisors including trustworthy relatives or other supportive people in their social network.
- Provide schedule information: time, frequency, length, location and transportation options. Provide a monthly calendar for all parties.
- Provide visit information in written form so that parents are able to refer to it as needed. May add other helpful information such as parenting tips.
- Let parents know what they may bring to visits such as food, clothing, favorite toys, games, a camera, etc.
- Discuss appropriate visit activities.
- Discuss emotional aspects of visits for parents and children.
- Ask parents to refrain from discussing case specifics or compliance during visits.
- Encourage creativity in maintaining contact with child such as mail, email, telephone, tapes, photographs, etc.
- When possible, include parents in child's activities including medical appointments and school activities.
- Ask parents to provide feedback to foster parents through notes and not the child.
- Remind them that the visit plan is always a work in progress.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESSFUL VISITS

- ❖ Appropriate discipline
- ❖ Age appropriate activities
- ❖ Stages of child development
- ❖ Healthy parent-child interaction
- ❖ Positive reinforcement
- ❖ Reframing and redirection skills
- ❖ Advocacy
- ❖ Identify the feelings of others
- ❖ Assessment skills.
- ❖ Others?

OPPORTUNITIES TO TEACH, COACH, AND MODEL

1. A single parent is visiting with his/her four children in you're the office. Two of the children have behavior problems and are hyperactive. One child appears to feel insecure and clings to the parent. The parent is overwhelmed and has difficulty controlling the children during visits.
2. The visitation room is over-scheduled and more than one family is forced to visit in the room. The environment is chaotic. The only location alternative is your cubicle or the lobby. The parents are complaining that they are "on display" and that they "have no privacy."
3. A couple is visiting their two children in the office. After they greet the children, they sit at the table and talk. The children play on the floor with toys. The parents seem to enjoy watching them play.
4. A parent is visiting with his/her four-year-old son each week. He has been very sad and anxious since being placed in care. He is exhibiting regressive behaviors such as bed-wetting and thumb sucking. His speech is regressing as well. The parent wants to play games and speaks in a loud cheerful voice to cheer him up during visits. The parent is very energetic. The child wants to sit in his parent's lap. He is very quiet and seems sad. The parent get annoyed that the child "hangs all over her" and tells him to "go play," "be a big boy," and "stop whining and talking baby talk." They seem out of tune with each other.
5. A parent is visiting his/her three children in the office. The children are hyperactive, destroying office property, and hitting each other. The parent is frustrated and keeps saying "ya'll are so bad, I'm gonna whip your butts if you don't stop." The children won't listen to her. You think she should know how to discipline them, after all, she had parenting classes a few months ago when the children were placed in foster care.
6. You are working with a parent who is very loving and appropriate with the children during visits. However, the parent is often late and has started to miss visits.

7. A parent is visiting with a teenage daughter. The parent is often critical, and today told the teen that she was “dressed like a tramp, and I hope I don’t find out your whoring around.” The teen was clearly hurt and stated that she “dresses like everyone else.”
8. A parent is trying hard to connect with his/her six-year-old child during visits, and brought a monopoly game to play. The child enjoyed helping the parent get the pieces set up, but then knocked them on the floor. The parent is upset because the child didn’t want to play.
9. A parent repeatedly engages you in conversation during visits while the children are playing. The parent discusses personal problems with you and clearly needs to talk to someone.
10. A parent is visiting with his/her teenage son in your cubicle. The parent is trying to maintain a relationship and shows interest in every aspect of the teen’s life. The parent asks questions about his friends, foster home, and school, yet the teen won’t talk and becomes irritated. At times the teen becomes hostile with the parent and has stated to miss visits.
11. A parent frequently becomes angry at his/her child’s foster parents and tells the child things like “tell them not to cut your hair,” or “they don’t know how to dress you, tell them you won’t wear those pants,” and “don’t call that woman Mama, I’m your Mama!” The child looks very anxious when this happens.
12. A parent visits his/her baby each week in the office. Although the parent holds the baby, feeds and changes her, the parent doesn’t seem to know how to nurture the baby. The baby is usually held facing outward. The parent attempts to sooth the baby by bouncing, tickling, and speaking in a loud voice. The baby often becomes fretful and the parent hands the baby to you and goes out to smoke.

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING FOSTER PARENTS

- Keep them informed.
- Seek their input on visitation schedule.
- Let them know what to pack for visits such as; diapers, bottles, snacks, medicine etc.
- Encourage them to send progress notes, school papers, and photographs for the parents.
- Involve foster parents with the child's therapist.
- When appropriate, encourage them to allow "least restrictive" contact between parents and children.
- Others?

Children and Family Visits

- Work with the child's therapist to plan for interventions that will help child deal with complex emotional issues.
- Children may act as if they do not care or they understand more than they really do about complex events.
- Children distort information about time and events.
- Many of the ill effects of living in an unstable family and a subsequent removal may not fully manifest until much later (teenage years or early adulthood).
- Even if it seems clear that family reunification is not possible, frequent meaningful visits will positively affect current and future adjustment to a new family living situation.
- Make a visit calendar with children.
- Encourage children to maintain contact with parent through telephone calls, cards, and emails.
- Help children to determine how they will let others know their situation and how much information they will tell peers.
- Provide honest and objective information to children regarding reasons for removal from family of origin so that children do not blame themselves. Age and maturity level of child will determine how much information they can understand.
- Let children know why visits are canceled. They worry about parents and may feel they are the reason visits were missed. Encourage parents to speak directly to children about missed visits.
- Help child communicate feelings to other adults.
- Children communicate through play and the use of non-verbal mediums of self expression. Make these tools available for children: crayons, paper, markers, art supplies, books, games, and toys.

THE LAST VISIT

- Involve the family therapist or the child's therapist to the greatest extent possible.
- Give as much advance warning as possible to parents and children that the last visit is imminent.
- If your relationship with the parents is adversarial, find a trusted co-worker or supervisor to facilitate the last contacts with the family.
- Pre-planning is crucial for this visit. Try to fulfill the wishes of the parents and children for the last visit.
- Parents need to have their pain acknowledged. This will reduce the likelihood of avoidant behaviors such as drinking or not being able to show up for the visit.
- Parents need to be educated about the harmful effects the termination and final visit have on their children.
- Parents need to know that there are things they can do to help their children heal and reach resolution.
- Parents need to be encouraged to put their emotions aside for this visit and focus on helping the children feel free to move forward in a new family living situation. Parents can do this by telling children it is not their fault. They can let children know that they will be okay and they want the child to have a happy life.
- Ask parents to write letters and provide meaningful objects for the children to take with them.
- Take photographs or video for the family.
- Assist parents in planning for self care before and after the visit (having a supportive friend or relative present, seeing their therapist immediately).
- Attempt to have the visit in a neutral, private setting.
- Ask someone to assist you with visit supervision.
- Work more closely with child's caregivers before and after the termination visit.
- Before, during, or after (whichever is the most appropriate for the situation) tell the family and child(ren), if age appropriate, about the Arkansas Mutual Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry. Families can register family information for the child(ren) to receive when they turn 18, and the child(ren) can register their information after they turn 18 so their family can find them if they would like.

Finally: Take care of yourself! Talk with supportive co-workers and plan activities after the visit that will provide emotional support. These visits are very difficult for agency staff members and can bring up personal grief and loss issues.

PLAY ACTIVITIES WE LEARNED TODAY

Crayons, Markers, Paper:

Art supplies:

Fun pads:

Chutes and Ladders, Candy Land, Go Fish:

Bubbles:

Tape Measure:

Nurf Ball:

Checkers, Playing Cards, Dice:

Music:

Fingernail Polish:

Lotion and Baby Powder:

Hand Mirror:

Cotton Balls:

Life Books:

Songs:

Follow My Claps:

Thumb Wars:

Cotton Ball Touch:

Newspaper Basketball:

Lotion:

Tower of hands:

All About Me

Name _____

Nickname _____

Grade _____ Social Security _____

Age _____

Height _____

Weight _____ Hair Color _____ Color of Eyes _____

**Paste
Photo
Here**

This is how I look.....

What I like.....

Favorite Color _____ Things I like to do _____

Favorite Food(s) _____

Favorite Games _____


Favorite People _____ Places I like to go _____

Date _____



Me and My Favorite Things

If I could describe myself in words and pictures, this is how I would look.



Cut and paste words and pictures from magazines and newspapers that best describe you.

The Book of Me and My Life...2001

My Birth Day

According to My Birth Certificate

My Birth name was

I was born on this date

In this place

My birth mother is _____

My birth father is _____

Other members of my birth family are _____

This is what I know about my birth day _____


**Paste Drawing,
Photo Here**

This is how I looked as a baby

**Paste Drawing,
Photo Here**

This is how my birth family looked

This is what I know about my birth family _____

[illegible]

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**Paste Drawing or
Photo Here**

The Name of My School(s)

My Teacher(s)

My Caseworker

My Judge

My Friends

My Pets

**Paste Drawing, or Photo
Here**



How I Got to Where I Am Today

Draw a map of the places you have lived to get to the place you are now living.

People I Can Talk To About My Problems

Relatives

At School

Friends

At Church

Families I've Lived With

Others



Special Days



Vacations & Camp



My Medical History

Immunization Records

Dates of D.T.P. Shots

Dates of Mumps

Date of Hard Measles Shot

Allergies _____

Poliomyelitis Vaccine/Oral

Dates of Rubella Shot

T.B. Tests Dates & Results

Serious Illness or Operations/Dates of Hospital Stays

Doctor's Names _____


Ask Someone to Help You With This




Awards

This space is for certificates, awards, or honors you've earned.

The Book of Me and My Life...2001

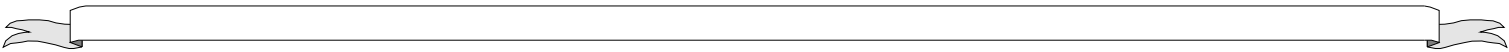




I have all kinds of feelings and sometimes my feelings get all mixed-up. Sometimes I get real mad at my family, my friends and myself. Sometimes I am happy and I smile a lot. Sometimes I get really scared and need to talk to someone and sometimes I'm just all mixed-up.

This is how I am when I'm all mixed-up:

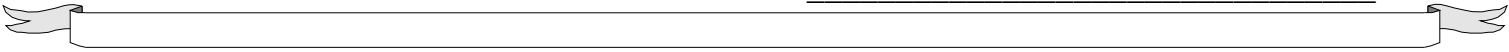
One of my saddest days was when _____



This is how I look when I am sad

These are people I can talk to when I am sad

One of the times I was most mad was when _____





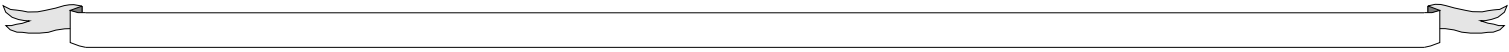
When I'm mad, this is what I do _____

This is my mad picture

Ask others what they do when mad.

The Book of Me and My Life...2001

The time I remember being most scared was when _____

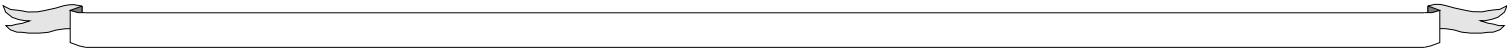


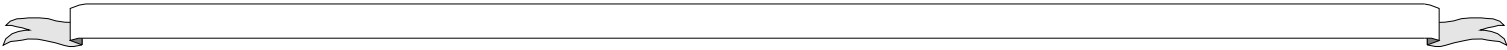


This is my scary picture.

People I can go to when I am scared are:

I am happiest when _____

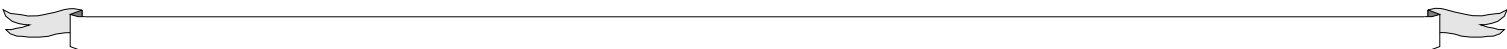


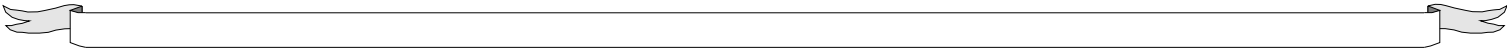


My happiest memory was when _____

This is when I was happy

If I could have three wishes come true, I would wish:








Notes

Thoughts.....Feelings.....Stories.....Poems

The Book of Me and My Life...2001





My Personal History

Turn to the pages where you have listed people. Look up and write down their names, addresses and phone numbers. Then add any other people you can think of.

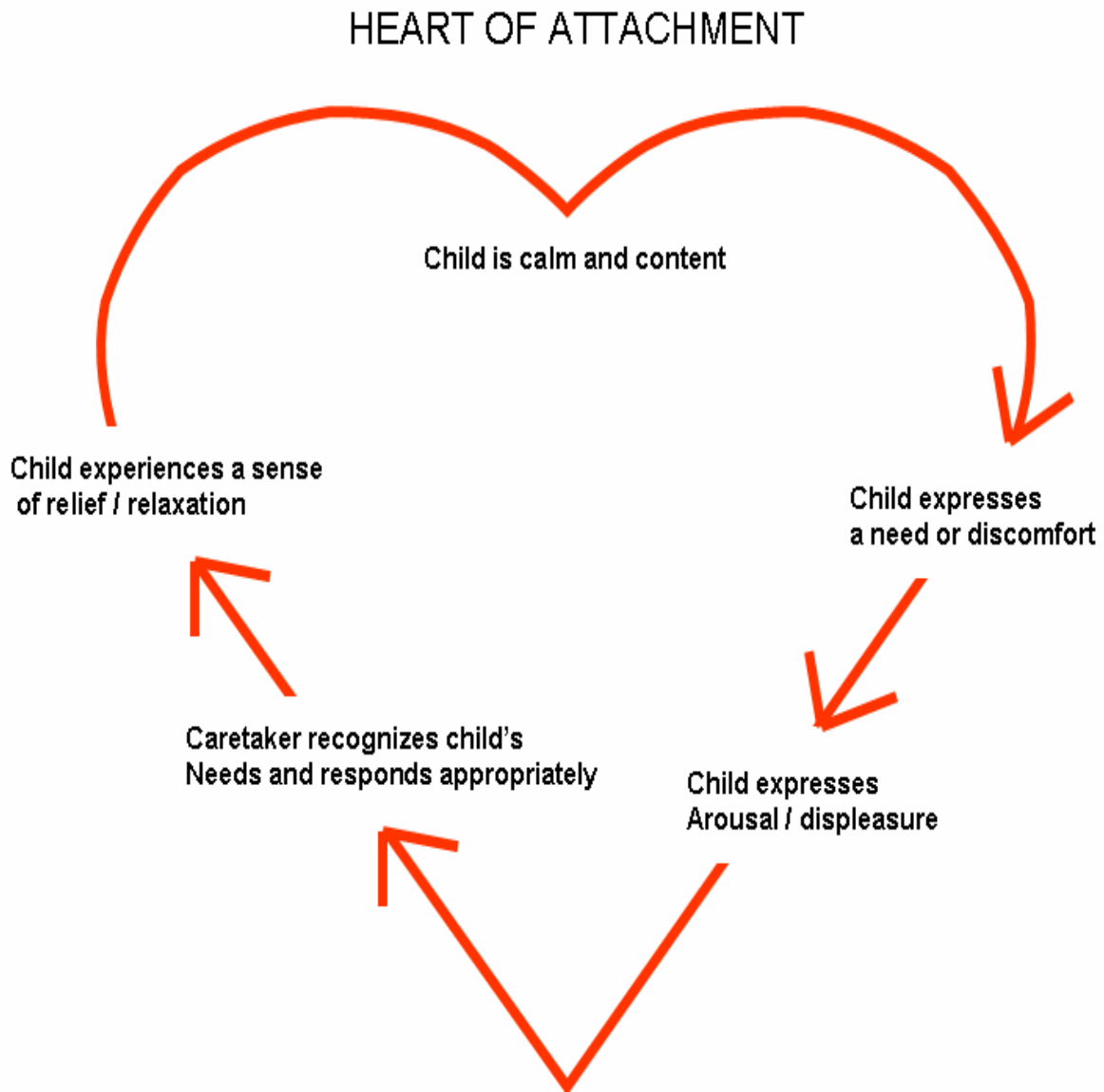
Name	Address	Phone

HANDOUT 1

DCFS Policy and Procedure On

Family Visitation

HANDOUT 2



Adapted from information provided at the 19th Annual Association for Play Therapy International Conference.

HANDOUT 3

MONTH: _____

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

HANDOUT 4

Family Visit Observation Form

Date of Visit: _____ Case Name: _____

Visit Location _____

Children Involved in Visit: _____

Visiting Adult: _____ Relationship: _____

_____ Relationship: _____

_____ Relationship: _____

_____ Relationship: _____

Visiting Adult on Time? _____ Time Visit Started: _____ Ended: _____ Visit Cancelled? _____

Explanation: _____

Describe Child's Behavior Prior to Visit: _____

Describe Initial Greeting Between Adult and Child: _____

Activities Observed During Visit: _____

Strengths Observed During Visit: _____

Transition Activities to End Visit: _____

Reactions to End of Visit and Separation by:

Visiting Adult: _____

Children: _____

Comments regarding Visitation: _____

Concerns Noted During Visit: _____

Next Scheduled Visit: _____

Visit Supervisor Signature: _____ Visit Supervisor Signature: _____

HANDOUT 5

**Results
Of
Focus Group Sessions
Specific to Family Visitation**

The Division of Children and Family Services



**Legislative Analysis Research and Planning
Planning Unit
January 2004**

Focus Group Sessions
Input Regarding Visitation Between Child in Placement and their Parent
January 2004

Family life is too intimate to be preserved by the spirit of justice. It can be sustained by a spirit of love, which goes beyond justice.

--Rienhold Niebuhr

The family is one of nature's masterpieces.

--George Santayana

How pleasant it is for a father to sit at his child's board. It is like an aged man reclining under the shadow of an oak, which he has planted.

-- Walter Scott

The true measure of any society is not what it knows but what it does with what it knows

--Warren Bennis

Introduction:

The primary purposes of visiting are to maintain parent-child relationships and reduce the sense of abandonment that children experience in placement. Our agency policy states: "Families and children shall have reasonable opportunities for personal visits, communication by telephone, and involvement in life events such as teacher conferences, school and community events. A plan for visitation shall be developed between a child in out-of-home placement and the family and siblings, whether or not the siblings are in out-of-home placement. The preferred location for the visits is the parents' home or, if that is not possible, in the most homelike setting possible. Office visits are a last resort."

The publication entitled *Visiting Between Children in Care and their Families: A Look at Current Policy* notes that researchers have found a relationship between parent-child visiting and children's well being while in care. Furthermore, children in care who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to have high well-being ratings and to adjust well to placement than are children less frequently or never visited.

Purpose and Methodology:

In developing the Arkansas Program Improvement Plan based on findings from the Child and Family Service review, staff wanted to explore with parents and siblings how to improve connections and ascertain appropriate visitation with their children placed in foster care. The purpose of a focus group is to listen, to better understand how parents feel and gather information from this group. To conduct several separate sessions so that we can identify trends and patterns.

The PIP Task - 1.6.1 states: that the Division will, utilizing focus group sessions with staff and parents, review existing policy, identify barriers to visitation and develop strategies, including policy revisions, if appropriate, for improving the frequency and quality of visits between the child in foster care and their parent and/ or siblings. Recommendations from these sessions were to be pulled together by 12/01/03. The Planning Unit developed a plan action identifying who would be participating in the sessions, suggested facilitators of the parent sessions and the field staff sessions, secured locations for the sessions, materials provided for the session and compiled focus questions.

Participants in this study:

- Parents of children placed in foster care.
- Family Service Workers and supervisors in three (3) of the DCFS service areas that serve these parents and their children.

Process:

Prior to the sessions, a conference call was conducted with the Family Resource Center directors, Shirlee Flanigan-Isbell, Debbie Shiell, Varnaria Vickers-Smith, Area Managers – Kim Alexander, Rosemary White and Sue Bruner – to discuss the process and to make arrangements for the attendance of families and staff at the sessions.

Family service workers and parents met together for an introduction of the sessions, then split into two groups one with parents and one with the workers.

Location of sessions:

Sessions were conducted at Family Resource Centers

1. Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - Toyce Newton, Director, McGehee (Desha County), Arkansas
October 27, 2003 – 9 parents and 9 field staff
2. Our Children First Coalition - Debbie Lashford, Director, – Texarkana (Miller County), Arkansas
November 4th – 6 parents and 8 field staff
3. Lee County Family Resource Center – Lois Boyd Director, Marianna, Arkansas
November 5th – 7 parents and 12 field staff
4. Watershed Human & Community Development Agency Family Resource Center, Rev. Hezekiah Stewart, Director, Little Rock (Pulaski County), Arkansas –
November 6th – 2 parents and 3 field staff

Facilitators of the sessions:

Executive Directors and staff of the Family Resource Centers conducted sessions with the parents.

Georganne Lewis assisted with the parents session in Pulaski County.

Debbie Shiell, Varnaria Vickers-Smith and Jo Thompson, conducted the sessions with the family service workers.

Highlights of the information shared by parents include:

- Transportation is a major concern; parents lack transportation, parents' lack of money to buy gas to visit child.
- Visits are held in the DHS County office and parents would like these to be held in their home, other relatives' home or another home like setting.
- Visitation schedule needs to allow for flexibility when parents work schedule conflicts; would like to schedule visits at night. Schedules need to include weekend and holiday visits and allow more time to visit with the child.
- Allow all siblings visitation in placement facilities as some do not allow younger siblings to visit older sibling in a placement facility. Allow other relatives to visit child.
- Allow parents to visit with their child(ren) in private.
- When siblings were placed in different homes or facilities, it was difficult for the parent to visit both. Parents request the visit to include all children at the same time.
- Visits to be scheduled or help parents to plan the visit around an activity; park, fishing or birthday.

- Parents would like to have a schedule of the visits. Parents would like to have more input in developing the schedule rather than rely on what the foster parent or facility allowed.
- Lastly, parents want better communication between parent and family service worker; provision of a schedule of the visits, information about the child's health, information about follow-through with parents requests, an understanding of agency policies and procedures, monthly staffings with parents (several indicated that staffings are only held after court hearing). One parent wanted to see the agency conduct more focus group sessions with parents.

Highlights of the information shared by family service workers include:

- Staff coordinate schedules with foster parents and parents on the visit times and base it on the workers caseload.
- Frequency of visitation depends on if child earned points at a facility (i.e. behavioral hospitals) facilities have rules - if child has been disciplined, consequences may effect visits; children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit; kids do not want to visit and separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.
- Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a month. Where teens are involved, visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.
- Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances.
- Visitation may occur but it isn't always documented (i.e. when parent goes to visit child at Vera Lloyd and the Baptist Home). Hard to document when siblings and parents live in different locations.
- Transportation, placement of children outside of parent's county.
- Some workers just don't schedule the visits.
- Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents show up late or staff show up late with good reasons such as case related.
- Parents do not show up for the visits or parents arrive late for the visits. Workers will work with parent even reschedule and stay late with parents. Can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit. Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent.
- Need more resources in the area/county; foster homes, counseling services, IFS services, transportation services or staff to transport children and or families, and supervised visitation contracts were missed

Recommendations:

1. Give parents an opportunity to share input or ideas in developing the visitation schedule. Provide parents a copy of the visitation plan/schedule.
2. Using the publication, *Visiting Between Children in Care and Their Families: A Look at Current Policy*, review DCFS current policy, procedures and training to determine the instruction provided to workers regarding visits between parents and their children. The publication includes a checklist to assist in analyzing content of the agency's policies and procedures. Through a cursory review of the current policy and procedure there are areas in which content was lacking and some enhancements could be made to current policy. For

example, our policy states, “Families and children shall have reasonable opportunities . . . ” clarify and further define who can visit, what family members are eligible.

3. Review all contracts policies and procedures specifically those that describe how a child can lose visitation privileges and regarding visits between children in placement their parents and siblings. Determine if this is in line with DCFS policies and procedures.
4. Utilize information from this report in local CQI meetings to address parents concerns, review local practice and identify any supports or training needs of staff, foster parents and or providers.
5. Analyze the resource issues noted by staff; the transportation concerns, lack of placement resources to locate children close to parent, counseling service needs.
6. Review existing training(s) presented to workers and supervisors regarding the purposes of visiting and assess whether it adequately cover that visits are to maintain parent-child relationships and reduce the sense of abandonment that children experience in placement.
7. Create a consumer advisory group made up of parents, age appropriate youth, field staff, training staff and policy makers in the Division to assist in reviewing and revising policies and procedures that affect consumers.
8. The local DCFS County office to identify other “family friendly” visitation space to accommodate and encourage visits between a parent and their child(ren).
9. For families in which the court order does not require supervised visits, allow privacy during the visits between child and parent.
10. Issues related to lack of transportation, flexibility in scheduling visits, and cooperation between counties accommodating families. While many of the workers indicated great flexibility in accommodating families in their area, it is clear that there needs to be more coordination with other areas.
11. To work closely with DCO to acquire use of DHS vehicles for worker use. It is my understanding that vehicles are assigned to a specific division may sit on parking lots in counties and not be used when if they were allowed to be shared this could help to facilitate visits.
12. Conduct focus group session in all of the DCFS designated areas to insure a representative sample of parents are given an opportunity to participate in formulating improvement in the Division’s service delivery system. .

This report will be disseminated and shared with program staff, field staff participating in this effort, the Family Resource Centers, the DCFS Advisory boards, central office CQI and local CQI teams for implementation of key recommendations.

A total of 24 parents participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked parents the following questions.

1. *How often do you visit your child(ren)?*

Responses varied from

- weekly visits,
- every weekend,
- every Tuesday and Thursday,
- twice a month, and;
- monthly.

2. *If you have more than one child in different placements, how often do you visit with them?*

- Two of the four sessions, parents indicated that all of their children were placed together.
- Parents may live in another county from where child(ren) are placed.
- One facility does not allow sibling visitation for younger siblings as this facility feels that they are too young to visit.
- 2 in 2 different placements,
- 2 in 2 different counties with parent in another city; moved son 4 different locations and parent couldn't keep up with him. 3 indicated that their children were placed together, 1 in same city as mother.

3. *What kind of things would make it more likely for you to participate in regular visitation?*

- At all sites parents identified that transportation was a problem either they did not have their own or did not have the money to purchase gas to travel. Money and transportation was an issue because they were living on a "fixed income" and did not always have the money to go to the visit or to purchase items for their child. For example, child was placed in another county and mom had to get transportation to go see her. Mom did not own car – no extra money to buy gas to get there if you could get someone to drive you.
- Parents suggested that different sites, other than the county office, for visitation be used, sites that are more homey and comfortable.
- Flexible work schedule/visitation schedule. There is no night visitation for parents that do shift work. For example, a stepfather goes to work at 5 am and off at 5 pm and would need to visit at night.
- Must work schedule around the "foster home or facility" schedule.
- Parents requested a schedule – "let me know when and how often – give me a schedule."
- Parents suggested to plan visits around some kind of activity such as fishing.
- A residential facility allows for 2 hour passes away from the facility. Kids are taken to parents home.
- Request to take 2 year old out to eat but they won't let me.
- Request that visits be conducted in the home so that child can also visit with siblings.
- Need to be allowed to make weekend and holiday visits.

4. *Where do visits take place?*

- 7 parents indicated in the DHS office
- 4 indicated at the residential facility where child is placed
- 1 indicated with family members
- 4 parents indicated that they take place in their home
- 2 parents indicated that they take place in either the DHS offices or their home.
- 1 parent indicated that visits take place to other locations such as park, McDonalds

5. *Where would you like visits to take place?*

All parents indicated they would prefer that visits take place “in the home.”

- Some places that are not so uninviting as the DHS county office.
- Allow parents to bring clothes, toys, etc not just to DHS office during their visit.
- McDonalds except that parents can't afford to buy their children food.
- Caseworkers walk in when visits are unsupervised – kids won't talk to parents when caseworkers are present. Parents stated that this is not an issue when there are other kids and families visiting.
- Possible places to conduct visits include the park, relatives home, Wal-Mart – game area or snack area or the library – reception room

6. *Where would be most suitable for you and your child to visit?*

- Would like more relaxed environment, to eat-out, or at shops, parks, or take children to movies or church.
- That visits be private without someone sitting there and listening to everything you say. Sometimes other children or people who are unrelated are in the same room.
- Facilities often don't have a private meeting place – this should be required. Confidentiality is compromised.
- Allow other family members to go on visitation, siblings, cousins and/or adult relatives
- Home, relative or other family members homes.
- Church, park, restaurant, Wal-Mart, Fish Pond, movies, museum, other family members houses, library, mall any relaxed atmosphere.

7. *What suggestions do you have on how to make the visits better for you and your children?*

- More time with child(ren), increase the list of visitors allowed to come (aunt, cousins, grandparents etc), change locations, flexible visitation hours even weekends.
- Visitation schedule should be more considerate of work and schools hours, often penalized for work schedule caused missed meetings and bad report for court. Prepare a schedule with the parent. Schedule visits around paydays. Evening hour visits for parents that work during the day
- Have all the children together for the visit – including those in different placements
- Make some kind of arrangements so parents are not embarrassed if they cannot afford to buy their child(ren) something if visits take place at fast food restaurants such as McDonald's.
- DHS visitation spaces are not kid friendly – look like conference rooms – need toys suitable for different aged kids – need inviting atmosphere
- Parents have to bring their own snacks for kids to DHS visits or use DHS coke/vending machines – could set out nutritional snacks for kids.
- Child sent home – you asked!
- Unsupervised visits – don't like being watched. Do not think something bad is going to happen. Make sure both parties are comfortable. Take child off of the premises.

8. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's services to you?*

- Some DHS rules are not understandable. Some rules we may not agree with but “needs to understand rules even if you don’t agree.” Information not explained clearly.
- Some workers often don’t do their part even when you do your part.
- One parent stated that it was good to have meetings like this (the focus session) so that parents can have a say. Good to give suggestions on what would make things better.
- Need to provide information; health of children, what a doctor say, parents want current status information about condition of children and feel that this should be provided at staffing.
- Staffings should not be scheduled just around court dates. If parents meet with DHS staff more often, they feel that better progress would be made on case plans and improvement with reunification at least. Suggest that regular staffings be conducted at least once a month.
- Parents want to know how their children are doing, if and when child is taken to the doctor and not after the appointment.
- Listen to parents – at least listen.
- Could we check on the McDonald’s coupons for the parents because parents feel embarrassed if they do not have the money to treat their child(ren).
- Foster parent should have a different family service worker than the biological parent, as it is a conflict with both the parent and foster parent – loyalty issues.
- Problem with workers attitudes, get the facts – do not rely on hearsay information.
- Would like to meet with the foster parents and talk together about their child(ren). One parent noted that there are problems with one particular caseworker not doing her job. For example, when parent asked to have child for a weekend visit the worker says she will arrange but it doesn’t happen – need to follow through.
- Parent felt that they were guilty before proven innocent, and that they can’t ask questions of the foster parents.
- The agency moves children too much. Make excuses about child. Do bad stuff to children,

A total of 32 family service workers and supervisors participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked workers the following questions.

1. *How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents?*

- Weekly, bi-weekly depending on the circumstances
- Caseworker supervises and transport the child (usually)
- Coordinate with the foster parents and parent on the time and base on the workers caseload
- Sometimes visits are irregular or limited, as parents don't show up for them.
- Weekends
- Depending on earned points at a facility (behavioral hospitals)
- Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a month. Where teens are involved visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.
- Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances. Every weekend, as can be arranged – try at least once month. In a facility we follow the policy of the facility. Waivers are followed, may be a barrier for example at psychiatric facilities. Will allow children to visit w/ relatives if parents are incarcerated and they write letters.

2. *How often do the children on your caseload have regular visitation with parents, siblings are not placed together?*

- Visitation may occur but it isn't always documented (i.e. when parent goes to visit child at Vera Lloyd and the Baptist Home). Hard to document when siblings and parents live in different locations.
- Foster homes specializing in certain placements affects placement of siblings.
- Once a month for children placed in distant counties. Other county coordination is required. The possibility of a frequent visit (i.e. weekly) is affected by biological parents not following through. Same county and surrounding counties placements have more frequent visits.
- Child placed out of the county/area because there are not enough foster homes and facilities.
- For facilities visitation will vary – bi-weekly or based on earned visits – weekly.
- Some facilities have different level or designation either a child is in level one or in the red gold or silver group. Some teenagers and children refuse visitation with parents. Some parents don't want to visit with their children.
- One facility will not allow visits for the 1st 30 days – this is called “stabilization period.”
- Some children have parents in a rehabilitation facility and that can affect visits. Court orders influence the frequency of visits. Sickness will effect visits “safety of the children is 1st.” Don't want children to get sick with lice, colds or viruses.
- In one area, usually weekly, bringing children together to visit w/ mom – usually weekly. Sometimes waivers are done and you will get dinged in CHRIS if you don't visit accordingly, exactly as the waiver; example (a) biweekly - visit done – weekly + dinged (b) even when case requires more frequent visits your are dinged - CHRIS may need to be altered.
- Work toward the goal listed in policy – every 2 weeks. Worker had a sibling that wishes not to visit – other siblings are placed together. Weekly, workers have to coordinate transportation.

4. What are some reasons that visits do not occur between parents and their children as specified in the case plan? Explain

- Facility has rules (i.e. if child has been disciplined consequences may effect visits).
- Placement of children outside of parent's county.
- Parents do not show up for the visits or parents arrive late for the visits. Workers will work with parent even reschedule and stay late with parents.
- Some workers just don't schedule the visits.
- Children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit. Kids do not want to visit. Separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.
- Foster parents aren't adequately trained to handle teen disruptions.
- Transportation.
- Can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit.
- Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents' show up late or staff show up late with good reasons such as case related.
- Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent.
- Mom or dad may be in the hospital and the visits have to be arranged to work with the situation. HIPPA precludes visits in the hospital in Hope, AR.,
- Children get sick, school activities and extra curricular activities. Child does not want to visit, the court order, child's behavior, facilities have behavior visitation policy, incarceration of parent.
- No state vehicles for transportation and visits do occur but need state vehicles.
- Parents who live or are out of state.
- Parents will avoid being seen for fear of being arrested for other charges. Mother has a newborn and avoids DCFS for fear of loosing newborn. Parents show up "under the influence" drugs, alcohol.

5. Where do visits occur?

- All sites indicated that visits occur mostly in DHS County office (staff felt that this was not family friendly). Client's home
- Foster parents home or facility (TFP etc) At court, before or after a hearing. County offices do not have visitation room – need a neutral setting. Park, when the weather permits. .
- Would like an Advocacy Center in Area 10 – there is one in Pine Bluff
- One site stated that visits had been arranged by a contractor that was no longer available.
- Staff are accommodating if a request is appropriate to hold visits in a bowling alley or at Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut, birthday parties and grocery store.
- One county stated that visits take place in the home of parents, park, foster home and at the placement facility.
- Beauty shops because parent want to get child's hair done, mental health day treatment center, church on Mothers Day, possibly use the Family Resource center, day care centers.

6. What are some safe and comfortable locations to schedule visits?

- Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora, at an Advocacy Center, may consider the Migrant Center in Hope, Hope in Action as it has conference rooms

- DHS County Office with a visitation room
- Clients home if it is unsupervised or relatives home
- Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available) – good for sexually abused children because it was a neutral place
- May explore Faith, Love, and Hope which is a summer program opened by a foster parent in Miller County
- Lack of resources in rural areas for other settings
- Park, possibly the family resource centers.
- Parents place of employment if allowed

7. *What would make visitation more manageable for you from a caseload perspective?*

- Separate units i.e. PS, FC etc
- Staff person to assist in visitation when worker cannot schedule or coordinate.
- Transportation or a staff position to transport child or family to the visits.
- Less cases, more workers (Drew County – 21 cases)
- Location, child placed closer to parent's town or in the same county
- More foster home or facility placements in the parents county. In Miller County there are 59 children in foster care but only 6 are placed in the county
- If we had a supervised visitation contract like the Kids' Exchange – they would also have age appropriate visits at the boys Club for teen boys_
- Transportation contract
- Use faith-based volunteers, resources for transportation (The Refuge worked with children in Miller County)
- Possibly the Parent Center in Ashdown
- Encourage foster parents during training to provide transportation.
- More social service aides, state car or van – need more state cars.
- Recruitment and retention plan for foster homes is needed.
- If parents had a mode of transportation or if there was more public transportation available. DCO helps w/ bus tokens for TEA participants. Not enough workers to address the need.
- If policy allowed more placements of children in one home, more homes to accommodate large sibling groups.
- If foster parents were more willing to work w/ families after hours. Placements need to be closer to child which effects transportation and availability of transportation.
- Cooperation from other DCFS offices – big issues – Meet me a part of the way. Staff person strictly just to transportation and set up visits.
- If DHS could fill vacancies so that casework could be completed, smaller caseloads. Workers have a “cutoff” for cases example CWLA requires 15 as a maximum. A type of “floater – type of position to help with cases if needed. Would do several duties i.e. supervising visitation. Supervised visitation contract. Interns (social work students – Philander Smith College – with the assurances that advisors say that they are qualified or being trained. Shorter visits – more visitation rooms in the county office.

8. *How flexible are you if the parent needs to change a visitation time?*

- Too flexible because parents don't always show up.
- Coordinate with other workers; share their visits if they are out with a family located near other workers family.
- If foster parent is willing – facility
- Monday – Friday unless circumstances are different.
- Need notice parents at least 24 hours if they need to change the visit.

- Staff will work with parents when given ample time
- Transporting on Sundays – occasionally
- Problems with foster parents who refuse to accept a child until they receive the \$100.00 paid from a short board payment – want the money up front 1st.
- Very flexible, unless changes are made too frequent and at the last minute.
- Parents set the schedules based on their work schedules. Advanced notification. Can be as flexible as needed.

9. *What kinds of assistance do you need to ensure visits between parents, and their children take place?*

- Transportation.
- Staff to assist with visits. Additional staff or volunteers for transportation, supervising visits, etc (they would need to be trained).
- Safe and comfortable environment.
- More foster homes
- Child's placement to be closer to parents.
- More staff for visits – supervised visits.
- A group home, shelter, A CEO or possibly Wal-Mart to market foster parenting.
- Cooperation from foster parents, cooperation from the court in understanding that children are in school, cooperation from the parents (timely, be there when they say they will be there and cooperation from other county offices.
- Transportation resources, availability of space and better utilization of space, scheduling visits at non-peak times, consistency from parents – responsible parents.
- Assistance of co-workers and other staff resources – students etc. Worker safety and security while visiting off site.

10. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's supports to you?*

- More money – higher pay to keep the qualified workers. Hazardous pay when confronted with drug and meth. Lab, homes, comp pay/flex time and the time to take it.
- Lower caseloads
- More foster homes – recruitment issues
- More clerical staff to key – DCFS does not have clerical support.
- More resources, counseling, IFS or in home counseling, drug and alcohol facility for teens, DDS services and Mental health after hours counseling, counseling in school no appropriate for all children. Need Day treatment would be helpful to keep from placing child in TFP in Little Rock, TFP a problem in this area. Qualifications for subcontractors are needed.
- Transportation contract/transportation, cars (one county office did not have one car).
- DCFS need their own trainers
- More staff meetings – more meetings from central office to meet with field staff.
- Working computers – computers slow.
- More office space
- More resources for our children, we are limited to making purchases either at Wal-Mart or Target
- Home study contracts end and staff will now have to take this one
- Insurance – the state could pay this.
- Work support to help maintain the offices
- Education of our Division with our stakeholders such as the PA, law enforcement, attorneys, schools because of all the unnecessary resistance.

- Truants do not need to be in Foster care or for violating curfew. Delinquents are placed in foster care. Foster care is being used as a form of punishment.
- On call, more staff, more money, more assistance with hard to place children, teenagers, sexual offenders, more supervisory – supervisors who are willing to assist and help the workers, supervisors who have people skills and know how to mediate, supervisors that know how to encourage others, know how to discipline and they need more training to develop their skills as supervisors. Suggestions could include worker appreciation day, training, door prizes, good meals.
- Contracted staff to help supervise visits. Invite central offices staff to help supervise visits. Positive letters, positive feedback from administration. Hiring staff more timely.

Appendix I

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in McGehee, Arkansas included nine (9) parents and (9) family service staff

Our Children First Coalition – in Texarkana, Arkansas included eight (8) workers and six (6) parents

Lee County Family Resource Center in Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna, Arkansas included seven (7) parents and 12 workers.

Watershed - Little Rock, Arkansas included 2 parents and 3 workers.

1. How often do you visit your child(ren)?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center - McGehee

Visits are monthly, twice a month, weekly, or Saturday or Sunday – each week

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Every weekend, sees daughter, visits 3 x week; by phone the rest of the week, every Thursday 3:30 – 4:30; every other weekend; 1 child only; not handicapped daughter, stepfather in home only just seeing son on weekends – has seen stepdaughter in courtroom – there is a problem with the work schedule; every weekend + every Tuesday for 1 hour – daughter is almost 2 years old.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

2 x month – this time; generally 1 x month; 1 hr every week on Thursdays (2 yr. Old)
See on Fridays and Saturdays – child spends the time; “every time I can” will not see child until December – last seen October 18. 1 x week – on Wednesdays (6 month old); 1 x week on Tuesdays – on Saturdays. Sometimes work schedule is a problem.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Weekly – once a week

Suggestions

2 x a week, every day

Ways to bridge the gap – better communication, assist in making arrangements for visitation, longer time for visitation 5 – 7 hours, honesty

2. If you have more than one child in different placements, how often do you visit with them?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Children are placed together. None of the participants had children placed in separate placements.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana – Never see older children in foster care as court-ordered not to see them at first, went back to court, got supervised visitation and visitation is now every other weekend because of work schedule – parent lives in another county from where children live. 2 children live in Ashdown, one child in McNeil and mother lives in Texarkana – DCFS brings kids to Texarkana on Tuesdays for 1 hour or so visit. Sees daughter still in system (Living Hope) 3 x week but the facility says siblings are too young to visit – 2 at home.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

2 in 2 different placements, 2 in 2 different counties with parent in another city; moved son 4 different locations and parent couldn't keep up with him. 3 indicated that their children were placed together; 1 in same city as mother.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

All at the same time.

3. *What kind of things would make it more likely for you to participate in regular visitation?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee -

Before the opening of the session, one parent shared that money and transportation was an issue because they were living on a "fixed income" and did not always have the money to go to the visit or to get something for their child.

Transportation or worker transport child and cannot go until staff's schedule allows.

Lack of funds

Different sites for visitation, more homey and more comfortable.

Flexible work schedule/visitation schedule. Must work schedule around the "foster home or facility" schedule.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Daughter placed in Hot Springs – mom had to bet transportation to go see her. Mom did not own car – no extra money to buy gas to get there if you could get someone to drive you as Mom lives in Texarkana. Step father goes to work at 5 am and off at 5 pm. Or later and there is no night visitation. Mom was put in jail and then kids put in system (foster care); once for 2 days and another time for 5 days and mom couldn't see kids or talk on the phone.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Let me know when and how often – give me a schedule

Plan some kind of activity such as fishing

2 hour passes away from the facility.

Kids are taken to parents home

Want to take 2 year old out to eat but they won't let me.

Want to have the visit at home so that child can also visit with siblings.

Parent has purchased clothes, school items and shoes but couldn't get them to their kids – this has now changed because mother got a new worker and this has been resolved.

Need to be allowed to make weekend and holiday visits.

Another parent indicated that she has purchased things for her child and they got them.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Be a better person, convenience for all parties, transportation, interesting activities – a variety, get away from the offices, overcoming departure – counseling.

4. *Where do visits take place?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

2 indicated in the DHS office

3 indicated at the group home

2 indicated at a facility such as Millcreek, Vera Lloyd or SAYS

Pizza Pro, Wal-Mart and the park were other places where visits take place.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

W/family members

At facility (Living Hope)

DeQueen – DHS Office or McDonalds

Texarkana –DHS Office

Magnolia - McDonalds

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

4 indicated they take place in the home

2 indicated in the office

1 indicated both places; DHS office and home

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

DHS offices, parents house, church, park, restaurant, would like it to be relaxed, studio , mall , overcome departure. Bill payments \$500.00, child separation,

5. *Where would you like visits to take place?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

All parents indicated they would prefer “in the home.”

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

All parents – home

Some places that are not so boring – DHS office

Can bring clothes, toys, etc but can only bring them to DHS office

McDonalds – parents can’t afford to buy their children food

Caseworkers work in when visits are unsupervised – kids won’t talk to parents when caseworkers are present. Not an issue when there are other kids and families visiting

Possible places

Park

Relatives House

Wal-Mart – game area or snack area

Library – reception room

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

7 – Home

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Mall, church, park, parents home, any relaxed atmosphere.

6. *Where would be most suitable for you and your child to visit?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Would like more relaxed environment. Would like to eat-out, or at shops, parks, take children to movies or church.

Privacy without someone sitting there and listening to everything you say.

Sometimes other children or people who are unrelated are in the same room.

Homes (facilities) often don’t have a private meeting place – this should be required.

Confidentiality is compromised.

Allow other family members to go on visitation, siblings, cousins and/or adult relatives

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Home, Relative or other family members home

The kids want to come home

Some families believe they are complying with what DHS is asking them to do but feel the harder they try the more they have to do.

What DHS tells may be different than what happens in court.

Court said to allow home visit, but DHS did not follow judges order – didn't want to do what the judge ordered because didn't agree w/him. No home study had been ordered or is on file

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Church, park, restaurant, Wal-Mart, Fish Pond, movies, museum, other family members houses, library

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Mall, church, park, parents' home, any relaxed atmosphere.

7. *What suggestions do you have on how to make the visits better for you and your children?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

More time with child(ren), increase the list of visitors allowed to come (aunt, cousins, grandparents etc), change locations, flexible visitation hours even weekends.

Visitation schedule should be more considerate of work and schools hours

Often penalized for work schedule caused missed meetings and bad report for court.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Have all the children together for the visit

Make some kind of arrangements so parents are not embarrassed at McDonald's

Schedule visits around paydays. Evening hour visits for parents that work during the day

DHS visitation spaces are not kid friendly – look like conference rooms – need toys suitable for different aged kids – need inviting atmosphere

Parents have to bring their own snacks for kids to DHS visits or use DHS coke/vending machines – could set out nutritional snacks for kids.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Need to know the exact time child is coming so we can plan something – call or send a letter. More communication by the worker, return family's phone calls, release child in parents' custody, They don't bring them, they missed the appointment or visit.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Child sent home – you asked!

Unsupervised visits – don't like being watched. Do not think something bad is going to happen. Make sure both parties are comfortable. Take child off of the premises. Visit once a day. Removal from office to better atmosphere and staying longer.

8. *What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's services to you?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Some DHS rules you don't understand or agree with “needs to understand rules even if you don't agree.”

Some workers often don't do their part even when you do your part.

Good to have meetings like this (the focus session) so that parents can have a say.

Good to give suggestions on what would make things better.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

One parent asked - what services?

Need to provide information; health of children, what a doctor say, parents want current status information about condition of children and feel that this should be provided at staffing.

Staffings should not be scheduled just around court dates. If parents meet with DHS staff more often, better progress would be made on case plans and improvement reunification at least.

Suggest that regular staffings be conducted at least once a month.

Parents want to know how their children are doing, if and when child is taken to the doctor and not after the appointment.

Listen to parents – at least listen.

Could we check on the McDonald's coupons for the parents?

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

One parent stated that she has a good worker who seems very concerned.

Foster parent should have a different family service worker than the biological parent, as it is a conflict with both the parent and foster parent – loyalty issues.

Problem with workers attitudes, get the facts – do not rely on hearsay information. Wold like to meet with the foster parents and talk together about their child(ren). One parent noted that there are problems with one particular caseworker not doing her job. For example, when parent asked to have child for a weekend visit the worker says she will arrange but it doesn't happen – need to follow through.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Didn't approve of foster home, they hit you. Parent felt that they were guilty before proven innocent, and that they can't ask questions of the foster parents. The agency moves children too much. Make excuses about child. Do bad stuff to children, Information not explained clearly. They let me visit.

Enjoyed services. They try to help you do the right things. They protect some children. Assist in arrangements. They let you get out of bad homes. They evaluate the homes.

A total of 32 family service workers and supervisors participated in the four (4) sessions. We asked workers the following questions.

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Weekly, bi-weekly depending on the circumstances

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Coordinate with the foster parents and parent on the time and base on the workers caseload

Sometimes visits are irregular or limited, as parents don't show up for them.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Weekly

Bi-weekly (for siblings or if parents have children placed far away)

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Weekends

Weekly

Depending on earned points at a facility (behavioral hospitals)

Court orders – may cause visits to occur once or twice a months. Where teens are involved visits may be less frequent - and at the teens discretion.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Once a week – depends on the goal of the case. Sometimes more frequently depending on the special circumstances. Every weekend, as can be arranged – try at least once month. In a facility we follow the policy of the facility. Waivers are followed, may be a barrier example psycho facilities. Will allow children to visit w/ relatives if parents are incarcerated and they write letters.

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Some parents don't want to visit with their children . Some children have parents in a rehabilitation facility and that can affect visits. Some court orders influence the frequency of visits. Sickness will effect visits “safety of the children is 1st.” Don't want children to get sick with lice, colds or viruses

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Depends on the case, usually weekly, bringing children together to visit w/ mom – usually weekly. Sometimes waivers are done and you will get dinged in CHRIS if you don't visit accordingly, exactly as the waiver; example (a) biweekly - visit done – weekly + dinged (b) even when case requires more frequent visits your are dinged - CHRIS may need to be altered.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

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Children acting out (behavior problems) as a result of the visit. Kids do not want to visit. Separation issues in children no being with or living with their parents.

Foster parents aren't adequately trained to handle teen disruptions. Transportation.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

No shows, transportation problems, can't locate parents because they have not a phone to call to say they can't make it to the visit. Job schedules – work expectations, last minutes appointments such as Dr.'s, parents show up late or staff show up late with a good reasons such as case related. Parent will state that "other business to take care of with no explanations, kids refuse the visits, parent states that he just does not want to see his kids in foster care – he cries during the visit, parent may request a time that isn't good for the foster parent. Mom or dad may be in the hospital and the visits have to be arranged to work with the situation. HIPPA precludes visits in the hospital in Hope, AR.,

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Parents cancel (don't show up) children get sick, school activities and extra curricular activities. Child does not want to visit, the court order, child's behavior, facilities have behavior visitation policy, incarceration of parent. Financial reasons of parent; i.e. gas money, baby sitters, parent failed drug screening. Parent on the verge of losing job based on court and absences. Weather is bad or car has no air conditioner. No state vehicles for transportation. Visits do occur but need state vehicles.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

If the child chooses not to visit, parents are incarcerated, no show of parents due to work schedules or parents dodging drug screens. Due to sibling sexual assault not appropriate to visit. Can't find parents (abandoned) court orders not visitation, parents are out of state. Parents will avoid being seen for fear of being arrested for other charges. Mother has a newborn and avoids DCFS for fear of losing newborn. Parents show up "under the influence" drugs, alcohol.

4. *Where do visits occur?*

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Mostly in DHS County office (staff felt that this was not family friendly). Client's home Foster parents home or facility (TFP etc) At court, before or after a hearing. County offices do not have visitation room – need a neutral setting. Park, when the weather permits. Phoenix Youth and Family

Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora – however Toyce Newton Executive Director suggested that the workers could use her location in McGehee also.
Would like an Advocacy Center in Area 10 – closes one is in Pine Bluff

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

DHS Office, McDonalds, park – if it is pretty outside. Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available). In the parent's home or In the facility. Bowling alley. Staff are accommodating if a request is appropriate. Wal-Mart, Pizza Hut, birthday parties and grocery store.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

DHS office, home of parents, park, foster home and at the facility.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

DHS office – 80%, fast food restaurants, park, zoo, shopping malls, doctors office, court in the visiting area, in the parents home – if appropriate, small %, parents aren't always stable, beauty shops because parent want to get child's hair done, mental health day treatment center, church on Mothers Day, possibly use the Family Resource center, day care centers.

5. What are some safe and comfortable locations to schedule visits?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee Family Resource Center in Eudora

Advocacy Center – wish

DHS County Office with a visitation room

Clients home if it is unsupervised

Relatives home

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Kids Exchange (previously a supervised visitation contract – YWCA – no longer available) – good for sexually abused children because it was a neutral place

May explore Faith, Love, and Hope which is a summer program opened by a foster parent in Miller County

Lack of resources in rural areas

Maybe the Migrant Center in Hope

Hope in Action – conference rooms

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

DHS office, park, possibly the family resource centers. Social service aids could to “hands-on” training.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Parents place of employment if allowed

Family resource centers, fast food restaurants, park, zoo, shopping malls, doctors office, court in the visiting area, in the parents home

6. What would make visitation more manageable for you from a caseload perspective?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Separate units i.e. PS, FC etc

Staff person so assist in visitation

Transportation, or an aid to transport child or family.

Less cases, more workers (Drew County – 21 cases)

Location, child placed closer to parents town/county
More foster home or facility placements in parents county.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

If we had a supervised visitation contract like the Kids' Exchange – they would also have age appropriate visits at the boys Club for teen boys_

Transportation contract

Use faith-based volunteers, resources for transportation (The Refuge worked with children in Miller County

Possibly the Parent Center in Ashdown

If we encouraged foster parents during training to provide transportation.

More social service aides, state car or van – need more state cars.

Recruitment and retention plan for foster homes is needed. In Miller County there are 59 children in foster care but only 6 are placed in the county.

If parents had a mode of transportation or if there was more public transportation available. DCO helps w/ bus tokens for TEA participants. No enough workers to address the need.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

If policy allowed more placements of children in one home, more homes to accommodate large sibling groups.

If foster parents were more willing to work w/ families after hours. Closer placements, which effects transportation and availability of transportation.

Cooperation from other DCFS offices – big issues – Meet me a part of the way. Staff person strictly just to transportation and set up visits.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

If DHS could fill vacancies so that casework could be completed, smaller caseloads. Workers have a “cutoff” for cases example CWLA requires 15 as a maximum. A type of “floater – type of position to help with cases if needed. Would do several duties i.e. supervising visitation. Supervised visitation contract. Interns (social work students – Philander Smith College – with the assurances that advisors say that they are qualified or being trained. Shorter visits – more visitation rooms in the county office.

7. How flexible are you if the parent needs to change a visitation time?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Too flexible because parents don't always show up.

Coordinate with other workers; share their visits if they are out with a family located near other workers family.

If foster parent is willing – facility

Monday – Friday unless circumstances are different.

Need notice parents at least 24 hours if they need to change the visit.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Staff will work with parents when given ample time

Transporting on Sundays – occasionally

Problems with foster parents who refuse to accept a child until they receive the \$100.00 paid from a short board payment – want the money up front 1st.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Very flexible, unless changes are made too frequent and at the last minute.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Parents set the schedules based on their work schedules. Advanced notification. Can be as flexible as needed.

8. What kinds of assistance do you need to ensure visits between parents, and their children take place?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

Transportation.

Staff to assist with visits.

Safe and comfortable environment.

More foster homes

Child's placement to be closer to parents.

More staff for visits – supervised visits.

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

Transportation

More foster homes

A group home, shelter, A CEO or possibly Wal-Mart to market foster parenting.

Additional staff or volunteers for transportation, supervising visits, etc (they would need to be trained).

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

Cooperation from foster parents, cooperation from the court in understanding that children are in school, cooperation from the parents (timely, be there when they say they will be there).

Cooperation from other cos.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Transportation resources, availability of space and better utilization of space, scheduling visits at non-peak times, consistency from parents – responsible parents. Assistance of co-workers and other staff resources – students etc. Worker safety and security while visiting off site.

9. What suggestions or comments would you like to share regarding the Division's supports to you?

Phoenix Youth and Family Service Center - McGehee

More money – salary

Lower caseloads

More foster homes – recruitment issues

More clerical staff to key – DCFS does not have clerical support.

More resources, Delta counseling

Transportation contract/transportation, cars (one county office did not have one car).

DCFS need their own trainers

More staff meetings – more meetings from central office to meet with field staff.

Working computers – computers slow.

More office space

Our Children First Coalition - Texarkana

More money – higher pay to keep the qualified workers.

Sourcebook: Focus Groups – An Effective Marketing Research Tool for Social Service Agencies.

Guidelines of this plan are outlined in this textbook.

More resources for our children, we are limited to making purchases either at Wal-Mart or Target
Limited IFS/In home counseling

Qualifications for subcontractors

Home study contracts end and staff will now have to take this one

Insurance – the state could pay this.

Work support to help maintain the offices

Hazardous pay when confronted with drug and meth. lab homes

Comp pay/flex time and the time to take it.

Education of our Division with our stakeholders such as the PA, law enforcement, attorneys, schools because of all the unnecessary resistance.

Mental health after hours counseling, counseling in school not appropriate for all children. Day treatment would be helpful to keep from placing child in TFP in Little Rock, TFP a problem in this area

Need drug and alcohol facility for teens. Need DDS services. Truants do not need to be in Foster care or for violating curfew. Delinquents are placed in foster care. Foster care is being used as a form of punishment.

Lee County Family Resource Center - Marianna

On call, more staff, more money, more assistance with hard to place children, teenagers, sexual offenders, more supervisory – supervisors who are willing to assist and help the workers, supervisors who have people skills and know how to mediate, supervisors that know how to encourage others, know how to discipline and they need more training to develop their skills as supervisors. Worker appreciation day, training, door prizes, good meals.

Watershed Human & Community Development Agency FRC

Contracted staff to help supervise visits. Invite central offices staff to help supervise visits. Positive letters, positive feedback from administration. Hiring staff more timely.

References

Webster, S. (1992). *Focus Groups – An Effective Marketing Research Tool for Social Service Agencies*.

Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M.A. (2000). *Focus Groups – A Practical Guide For Applied Research*

HANDOUT 6

VISIT IN A BOX



HANDOUT 7

Life Book