



B. J. Walker, Commissioner

Georgia Department of Human Resources • Division of Family and Children Services • Mark Washington, Assistant Commissioner
Two Peachtree Street, Suite 19-490 • Atlanta, Georgia 30303-3142 • 404-657-5112 • 404-657-5105

September 11th, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: RBWO Child Caring Institutions
RBWO Child Placing Agencies

FROM: Kathy Herren 
DFCS Deputy Director

RE: Every Child, Every Month (ECEM) Initiative

As you are aware, Georgia is working to meet the new federal mandate requiring more frequent visits to children in care through its "Every Child, Every Month" (ECEM) Initiative. This initiative promotes placement stability and permanency through caseworker/child visits. By October 2011, 90% of children in foster care must be visited by their caseworkers on a monthly basis, with the majority of those visits occurring in the home. Georgia is well on its way in meeting this mandate through new and revised policy, timely data collection and reporting, and training and technical assistance.

Effective October 1, 2009, Private Providers who support us in supplying out-of-home placement for children in care and the associated case support responsibilities will share an equal role in meeting this initiative. **Purposeful Visits will be conducted by contracted agents who are Congregate Care Facilities (CCI) or Child Placing Agencies (CPA).** Each CCI or CPA must conduct at least one purposeful visit each calendar month with each child placed with their agency. These visits must conform to the purposeful visit policy and practice. Overall, this in-home visitation requirement is in line with your current oversight and expertise.

Documentation of the Visits

Please ensure that the completed purposeful visit documentation form is completed and received by the child's SSCM via email **within 48 hours of a visit completion, as well as added to the child's file each month.** The documentation must be input into the DFCS SHINES system within 72 hours of the actual visit's completion by the SSCM. It is recommended that an agency set a target to complete a purposeful visit no later than the 15th calendar day of each month. This effort will support us all in meeting our visitation and documentation goals each month.

Training

There are five two-day sessions around the state, open to designated trainers from each agency, who will receive preparation and materials necessary to train staff to perform and document purposeful visits. The trainings are limited to one person per agency. These trainings will ensure that all of Georgia's private providers obtain targeted support in the completion of these monthly purposeful visits. There is no cost for the training. Each participant will be given a train-the-trainer manual and a master copy of all the presentation and resource files, and CEUs will be available at no cost. ***A registration form with details is attached and needs to be returned by September 16.***


Attachments

The following supportive documentation has been attached to this communication for your guidance and use:

- The current Social Service policy addressing Purposeful Visitation Requirements and supportive references. See <http://www.odis.dhr.state.ga.us> for this and all policies for the Division of Family and Children Services.
- Case Manager/Child Visit Documentation Form (with embedded practice guidance and requirements notes).
- Completed Example of a Case Manager/Child Visit Documentation Form.
- A summary of DFCS Policy, Practice and Responsibilities for the Every Child Every Month Initiative.
- Revised Provider Monthly Summary report to be completed by each CCI & CPA and returned to each child's SSCM by the 10th of the following month.

Additional Tools can be located at <http://www.pssfnet.com>. Click on Every Child Every Month (ECEM) Updates and Resources. This initiative will be included as a deliverable in the FY 2010 Room, Board and Watchful Oversight (RBWO) contract, effective October 1, 2009. The report templates and supportive documentation referenced in this communication will also be added to the DFCS RBWO Provider website at <https://www.kidstarga.com/>.

In the meantime, should you have immediate questions or require guidance, please contact your Provider Relations Regional Specialist or call the main number at (404) 657-3572.

	Division of Family and Children Services Child Welfare Manual	Chapter 5: Effective Date: 08-14-09
		Previous Policy #:

**POLICY TITLE: PURPOSEFUL VISITATION REQUIREMENTS
(SOCIAL SERVICES CASE MANAGER AND CHILD)**

POLICY NUMBER: 5.X

CODES

Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006: P.L. 109-288

REQUIREMENT

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) assigned Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) must ensure a face-to-face purposeful visit is made every calendar month with:

1. Children in foster care.¹
2. Children in a pre-adoptive placement.

Note: The local DFCS county director may grant a waiver to allow a designee to conduct the monthly purposeful visit.² It is strongly recommended that these case management or visitation responsibilities be designated to a DFCS SSCM or supervisor. All waiver requests should be evaluated on a case by case basis and should only be granted when exigent circumstances prevent the assigned SSCM from completing the required visit. Conditions which may necessitate a designee waiver include, but are not limited to, emergency or medical leaves, suspensions or reassignments necessary to ensure the timely completion of full case management and visiting responsibilities for all children in care.

The DFCS SSCM or their designee must conduct a face to face purposeful visit every calendar month with children in DFCS custody placed outside of Georgia via an approved Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC).

¹ In foster care as defined by 45 CFR 1355.20. This includes, but is not limited to, placements out of county, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, unpaid relative placements, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

² Any caseworker/ private provider or other party, whether in-state or out-of-state, which DFCS has assigned/contracted case management or visitation responsibilities. A contractual agreement, rather than a waiver, is required to designate a private provider to make visits to children in care.

DFCS must ensure that at least fifty percent (50%) of all purposeful visits occur in the child's residence.³ The DFCS SSCM or designee may alternate the visit location, between the child's residence and an alternative location. When not visiting in the child's residence consider having the visit in a child friendly setting (e.g. visitation center, recreational areas, restaurants, parks, etc.)

NOTE: For school age children, If at all possible, visits should not take place at school. The SSCM presence at school may be socially awkward and embarrassing to the child and can interfere with the educational process.

Each purposeful visit will focus on safety, permanency and/or well-being to facilitate:

1. Service coordination and delivery; or
2. One or more case planning goals.

PROCEDURE

The DFCS SSCM or designee will follow the four-step process when conducting a purposeful visit with children in care.

1. Preparation

- a. Schedule the monthly visits with the child and their resource provider in advance, unless an unannounced visit is more appropriate. Make specific arrangements and confirm the date, time and place
- b. Choose a setting that affords the child an opportunity to speak freely. Ensure that some portion of every purposeful visit with a child age three and older occur in private, and away from the presence of the foster parent, relative, facility staff or siblings.
- c. In preparation for the visit the SSCM **should** complete the following:
 - i. Review the case; including the case plan and any documentation from previous visits.
 - ii. Review the child's most recent assessments/evaluations.
 - iii. Identify priorities, areas of concerns or barriers to progress.
 - iv. Prepare a visit agenda.⁴

2. Engagement

- a. Be genuine, empathetic and respectful at all times.
- b. Review the agenda with the child/youth and establish the purpose of the visit. Request feedback from the child on the agenda, adding or amending topics based on the child's or youth's feedback.
- c. Confirm the time frame for the visit (duration).
- d. Engage the child during the visit by asking developmentally appropriate questions with the focus on assessing safety, permanency and well-being (See Reference Section/Tool: Age Appropriate Interview Questions to Assess Safety, Permanency and Well-Being).

³ In foster care as defined by 45 CFR 1355.20. This includes, but is not limited to, placements out of county, placements in foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, unpaid relative placements, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, child care institutions, and pre-adoptive homes.

⁴ Private providers must provide advance notice of the purpose of their visits to the DFCS primary case manager.

- i. Document any concerns and develop a plan for follow up.
- e. If age appropriate⁵, review the permanency plan (linear or concurrent) and discuss progress toward achieving permanency (See Reference Section/Tool: Age Appropriate Interview Questions to Assess Safety, Permanency and Well-Being).
- f. Review case progress or challenges since the last visit.
- g. Address immediate needs and/or concerns
- h. Utilize the case plan as a basis for the discussion with the child. Engage the child in case planning by soliciting their input on their case plan goals, progress made or assessment of areas where a lack of progress is identified. Review, as appropriate, progress made by the child's parent/guardian/custodian in meeting case plan goals and the progress made toward permanence for the child.
- i. Discuss with the child;
 - i. Any issues or concerns the child has identified about the placement.
 - ii. Supports/services needed by the child to meet their physical, emotional, or developmental needs.

3. Assessment/Commitments

- a. Review with the child the information covered during the visit.
- b. If discussed during the visit, summarize the strengths and challenges faced in achieving the goals identified in the case plan and any new strategies discussed during the visit.
- c. Review any agreed upon commitments and confirm future visits (date, times, locations).
- d. Review with the resource provider:
 - i. Any concerns regarding the placement.
 - ii. Any additional supports/services needed to assist the resource provider in meeting the needs of the child.

4. Next Steps

- a. Make case planning decisions as needed to address information or concerns identified during the visit.
- b. Consult with a supervisor or other subject matter experts as needed.
- c. Implement any needed services.
- d. Follow up on commitments.
- e. Begin preparation for next visit.
- f. Document the visit in GA SHINES within 72 hours of visit completion.

For children placed outside of Georgia on an approved ICPC, the SSCM will:

1. Request monthly purposeful visits by submitting the 100B with a cover letter to the state office ICPC unit.
2. Maintain monthly contact with the child via phone or e-mail.
3. Review the monthly progress reports and consult with the caregiver via phone or e-mail.

⁵ The SSCM should consider the child's chronological age (at least age 5) and the child's mental, developmental and emotional status. This is a critical decision that should be made by the SSCM and, if needed, may be staffed with the supervisor.

4. Review the quarterly progress report to ensure that the child is being visited monthly.
5. Within 3 business days of learning that the receiving state is **not** conducting the minimum purposeful visits; contact the Georgia State ICPC office to resolve the visitation issue.

The SSCM will document the monthly visits in Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of visit completion. All visits must be documented in the narrative section of the contact tab and must include, at a minimum:

1. The contact type.
2. The date the contact occurred.
3. The name and title of who conducted the visit:
 - a. If a non-DFCS designee conducts the visit choose the assigned SSCM's name from the drop down as the person conducting the visit. The SSCM **MUST** document in the narrative section the name of the non-DFCS person who was designated to conduct the visit. This information should be documented at the beginning of the narrative.
 - b. If an alternative DFCS SSCM or supervisor has been designated to conduct the visit their name should be chosen from the "contacted by" drop down box.
4. Person(s) present at the visit
5. Purpose of the visit
6. What was discussed
7. Where the visit occurred
8. Whether the child was interviewed privately. If the child was not interviewed privately document the reasons why this did not occur.
9. Summary of information- What happened at the visit.
 - a. Safety, permanency and well-being issues discussed.
 - b. Child's involvement in case planning.
 - c. Child's developmental progress.
10. Any concerns or red flags identified.
11. Next steps, the plan for addressing identified issues or concerns and documentation of issue resolution.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

By 2011 policy will no longer allow purposeful visits to be conducted by a designee. Therefore, counties must begin planning for this change. This may include ensuring that children are placed in close proximity (within 50 miles) of their legal county.

All contacts between the SSCM and child provide an opportunity to build a trusting and supportive relationship. However, contacts are more than friendly visits. There must be a clear purpose in mind that is reflected in the contact narrative such as:

1. Assessing the child's adjustment to placement.
2. Discussing the child's feeling around loss and separation and the reasons for removal.
3. Engaging the child in service planning.