



**National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning**
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

Information Packet

Caseworker Visits with Families

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning

A Service of Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS

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Summary

Caseworkers and their interactions with children, youth, and families in the agency's care have central importance in child welfare practice (NCSL, 2006). Through face-to-face visits, caseworkers are able to engage families in assessment, case planning, service design, and decision-making, while monitoring ongoing safety of children/youth and providing services to promote the well-being of the whole family.

As evidenced by the Federal Children and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) completed in 2004, caseworker visits are linked to other positive outcomes for children, youth, and families engaged in child welfare systems. The reviews concluded that the "quality and frequency of caseworker visits with children were strongly associated with adequately assessing risk of harm to children, identifying needs and provision of services for children, parents, and foster parents, and effectively involving children and parents in their case planning" (ACF/DHHS, 2008).

Essentially, to promote and achieve positive outcomes for children, youth, and families, we must ensure the quality and frequency of caseworker visits with families (NCSL, 2006). The results from the 2004 CF SR showed the importance of setting requirements for the frequency of face-to-face visits, as well as standards for, and training on, how to conduct quality visits with families. A 2005 report from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG/DHHS) found that 43 states had written standards requiring at least monthly caseworker visits with children.

Since the 2004 CF SR, the federal government passed the Child and Family Services Improvement Act (CFSIA) in 2006 that, along with the Children's Bureau's Program Instructions and Technical Bulletins, provided further guidance on caseworker visits and data reporting requirements. Federal law requires that at least 90% of children in foster care are visited monthly by their caseworker and that most of these visits happen in the child's home (ACF/DHHS, 2006; 2008).

Fact Sheet

Lack of parent and child involvement in case planning, inadequate caseworker visits with children and parents, and failure to engage fathers were among the most commonly cited concerns regarding well-being in the initial CFSR in 52 states (ACF/DHHS, 2004). The reviews “found a strong correlation between frequent caseworker visits with children and positive outcomes for these children, such as timely adherence of permanency and other indicators of child well-being” (ACF/DHHS, 2007). As detailed in the compiled results, caseworker visits with children and parents were strongly associated with:

- Risk of harm to children
- Needs & Services for children, parents, foster parents
- Child and parent involvement in case planning
- Services to protect children at home
- Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect
- Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate
- Timely permanency goals and reunification
- Child’s visits with parents and siblings
- Relative placements
- Meeting educational, physical health and mental health needs

Drawing from the states’ Program Improvement Plans (PIP), the CFSR results also identified common strategies to address caseworker visits with children and parents, such as: establishing minimum visit requirements, providing supervisory oversight and monitoring performance through continuous quality improvement (CQI), training managers, staff and providers, focusing on quality of visits, recruiting and retaining staff, streamlining documentation of visits, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of multiple parties involved in a case (ACF/DHHS, 2004).

Manageable caseload size is closely tied to the frequency of caseworker visits. Important workforce development factors include training on effective and creative case management strategies and techniques, as well as providing sufficient resources to perform caseworker functions (NCSL, 2006; CWLA, 2003).

Policies & Legislation

Sections 424(e)(1) and (2) of the **Social Security Act** “require the state to provide data on monthly visits between a child in foster care and the caseworker handling the case of the child and to make progress toward 90 percent of children in foster care in the state being visited by their caseworkers.”

http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title04/0424.htm

The major provisions of the **Child and Family Services Improvement Act** of 2006 ([P.L. 109-288](#)) required that “each state plan for child welfare services to describe standards for the content and frequency of caseworker visits for children in foster care that, at a minimum, ensure that the children are visited on a monthly basis, and that the visits are well-planned and focused on issues pertinent to case planning and service delivery to ensure the children's safety, permanency, and well-being.”

http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.viewLegis&id=62

Administration for Children and Families (DHHS) has provided additional direction for policy and practice:

- According to the guidance by the Children's Bureau (2007), the caseworker making monthly visits “could be any caseworker to whom the state or local title IV-B/IV-E agency has assigned or contracted case management of visitation responsibilities. Within these parameters, the state may determine which caseworkers are appropriate to conduct the visits in accordance with the provisions of the Act” (Child Welfare Policy Manual, Section 7.3).

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/j2ee/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/index.jsp

- The Children's Bureau provided further guidance for monthly caseworker visits and data and state plan requirements to be included in the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) in the Program Instruction ACYF-CB-PI-08-03 (2008).

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/policy/pi/2008/pi0803.htm

Best Practices and Model Programs

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) emphasized in its *Innovations in State Policy* bulletin in 2006 that the frequency and quality of caseworker visits are a “critical component of child welfare system procedures for ensuring the safety of children and the well-being of families.” The bulletin identifies some of the factors that comprise quality caseworker visits:

- Scheduled to meet suggested national or state standards and the needs of children and families
- Primarily held in the family home (biological and foster) and at times convenient for children and both biological and foster parents
- Planned in advance of the visit, with issues noted for exploration and goals established
- Open enough to offer opportunities for meaningful consultation with and by children and parents
- Individualized; for example, providing separate time for discussions with children and parents
- Focused on the child and family’s case plan and the completion of actions necessary to support children and families in achieving the goals established in their plans
- Exploratory in nature, examining changes in the child’s or family’s circumstances continuously
- Supportive and skill-generating

The Children’s Bureau (ACF/DHHS) suggests in the 2008 Technical Bulletin that the states answer the following five key questions about the activities of caseworkers in order to successfully report the required data elements (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/sacwis/bulletin2.htm>):

- 1) Who participated in the visit?
- 2) What was the purpose of the visit?
- 3) What type of contact occurred?
- 4) Where did the visit occur?
- 5) When did the visit occur?

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPPP) (2008) compiled a report summarizing the state efforts to comply with the provisions of the Child and Family

Services Improvement Act. The report is based on information provided by states, as well as research on state policy and legislation. The full report is available at:

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/policy-issues/Caseworker-Child_Visits.pdf.

The following examples from states and local agencies emphasize the importance of continuity, frequency, and quality of the caseworker visits with children, youth, and families.

- Solution-based casework, known in **Kentucky** as Family Solutions, uses an approach to assessment, case planning, and ongoing casework management that forms a partnership with the family. The practice model has been and continues to be evaluated with promising results, and is used in **Tennessee** and has recently been adopted by **Washington State**.

(Link to references for solution-based casework:

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/caseworker_engagement.htm)

- **New Jersey** has implemented a One Family/One Worker policy that emphasizes the importance of continuity with families and caseworkers, as well as fostering trust and engagement between the family and the caseworker.

(Link to the NJ model: <http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/about/case/DCFCasePracticeModelJan2007.pdf>)

- A tool to enhance monthly agency visits in **North Carolina** is used as a guide for conversation between the caseworker and family (not a checklist) during the monthly visits.

(Link to the guide: <http://www.fosteringperspectives.org/fpv12n2/visits.htm>)

- Child & Family Services Division in **Olmsted County, Minnesota** published the Visitation/Family Access Guidelines with a model for desirable social work practice.

(View the full guide at http://www.co.olmsted.mn.us/upload_dir/cs/cqiguideinesfamilyaccess.pdf)

Online Resources

Children's Bureau/ACF/DHHS (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/>) provides guidance and technical resources for state, local, and tribal child welfare agencies. The Bureau's 2008 Technical Bulletin #2 provides guidance related to the collection and reporting of information on caseworker visits with children in care (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/sacwis/bulletin2.htm>). Additionally, the Child Welfare Information Gateway provides a variety of resources for family-centered casework practice (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/casework/>), as well as casework practice in out-of-home care (<http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/casework/>).

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, CB/ACF/DHHS (http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/caseworker-visiting.html) provides training, technical assistance, and information services to state, local, tribal, and other publicly administered or supported child welfare agencies. The curricula for Promoting Placement Stability and Permanency through Caseworker/Child Visits and Caseworker/Parent Visits were updated in May 2008 and are fully available on the NRCFCPPP website. Additionally, the recently-published Family Engagement: A Web-based Practice Toolkit (2009) includes resources for caseworker engagement and provides information about sample state approaches (<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/index.htm>).

National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org/IssuesResearch/HumanServices/>) offers comprehensive information on human service policy issues, including child welfare. Its 2006 report on caseworker visits with children and families provides information about the role of visits, state policies, and potential positive outcomes (<http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/documents/cyf/caseworkervisits.pdf>). The report also suggests strategies for legislators who are interested in supporting child welfare agency administrators in enhancing the quality and frequency of caseworker visits.

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