



**Policies on Placing Siblings in Out of Home Care
Last Updated December 28, 2005**

States have a variety of policies regarding the placement of siblings in temporary out-of-home care. We have assembled those we were able to locate here. Note that this is not a comprehensive list of all policies.

We were able to locate 28 states that address sibling placement in their policy. Of these, 13 provide specific acceptable reasons for separating siblings.

- Eight states list the individual needs or special needs of one of the children as an acceptable reason, and in three states (CT, NC and RI) it is the only reason given;
- Two states (GA and KY) list prior disrupted placement;
- Sibling violence, sexual abuse, or incest is listed by 7 states (ID, IO, KY, LA, ME, MN and WV);
- Six states (GA, ID, IL, KY, ME, and WV) accept the inability to find a placement able to take all the siblings;
- Other reasons cited are court order (IL); separation requested by the child (KY); to prevent removal from adult caregiver with whom the child has significant attachment (KY); sibling unknown or not located (KY); adoptive parent/relative unable to care for sibling (IL and KY); need to establish permanence for one or more children (ID); half-sibling placed with biological parent/relative (MN, TX); large sibling group is placed with two relatives and contact is maintained (MN);

Three states (AR, KY, and NY) require that a qualified professional make the determination that separation is in the children's best interest.

Only two states (MN and OK) list reasons considered not acceptable in the continued separation of siblings.

- For OK these are: children have been separated and no effort has been made to place them together; infant is not placed with older siblings and is determined to not have a relationship with them; and no effort has been made to facilitate contact between siblings in separate placements and therefore the children do not know one another.
- MN suggests that failure to find a placement, sibling aggression, parentification, inability of a family to meet the needs of a large group, and previous disruptions are insufficient reasons to separate siblings.

Excerpts from and links to individual state policies follow.

Alabama

Policy not available.

Alaska

Policy states "When placing a child in out-of-home care,...every effort will be made to place sibling groups together, provided it is in the best interests of the children." (2.7.a.) Complete policy can be accessed at:

<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Publications/CPSManual/CPS-MANUAL.htm>

Arizona

Policy not available.

Arkansas

"Siblings shall live together in the same foster home. Siblings may be placed separately only upon a written determination by the Administrator designated by the Director that placement of the siblings together would be detrimental to their best interests or is otherwise not possible at the time of initial placement. The Division shall ensure that the reasons for the separation of siblings into different foster homes are regularly reassessed and targeted recruitment efforts continue to reunite the siblings." (VI-B) Complete policy can be accessed at <http://www.arkansas.gov/dhhs/chilnfam/reference%20center.htm>

California

Section 16002 of the California Welfare and Institutions Code makes it clear that the legislature's intent is for siblings to be placed together unless it is not in the best interest of one or more siblings. Complete legislation can be accessed at:

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/calaw.html>

Child Welfare Services policy only states that "if siblings are not placed together, the social worker shall document the diligent efforts to place siblings together and reasons why they were not placed together, if applicable." (31-206). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/ord/CDSSManual_240.htm

Colorado

Regulations indicate that "When the child is part of a sibling group and the sibling group is being placed out of the home, if the county department locates an appropriate, capable, willing, and available joint placement for all of the children in the sibling group, it shall be presumed that placement of the entire sibling group in the joint placement is in the best interests of the children. Such presumption may be rebutted by the county by a preponderance of evidence that placement of the entire sibling group in the joint placement is not in the best interests of a child or of the children. If the child is a part of a sibling group, the county shall make thorough efforts to locate a joint placement for all of the children in the sibling group unless it is not in the best interests of the children to be placed as a group and these efforts do not unreasonably delay permanency for any child. Efforts to place siblings as a group shall be documented in the child's case record.

(7.304.61). Complete regulations can be accessed at:

[http://www.cdhs.state.co.us:8008/CDHS/rule_display\\$.DisplayVolume?p_vol_num=7300](http://www.cdhs.state.co.us:8008/CDHS/rule_display$.DisplayVolume?p_vol_num=7300)

Connecticut

"Siblings shall be placed in the same foster care setting unless the documented special needs of one or more siblings preclude placing the siblings in the same foster care setting." Siblings who are initially placed separately must be reunified "unless exceptional reasons exist that preclude reunification." (36-55-6). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/Policy/Trmt36/36-55-6.htm>

Delaware

Policy states that the "Division will make every effort to keep siblings together." (Case Decision #3, G-6). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.state.de.us/kids/pdfs/pol_fs_policymanual_2002.pdf

District of Columbia

Policy not available.

Florida

"Children should be placed with siblings when possible, unless it is determined inappropriate." (CFOP 175-34). Complete policy can be accessed at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/publications/policies.shtml>

Georgia

"Whenever possible, efforts should be made to place siblings together in care to preserve their connections to family." (1009.7). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.odis.dhr.state.ga.us/3000_fam/3060_fostercare/MAN3060.doc

Hawaii

Administrative Rules require the agency to "attempt, where appropriate, to place siblings together." (17-945-10). Complete rules can be accessed at: <http://www.state.hi.us/dhs/rules-content.html>

Idaho

"Siblings are to be placed together in foster care and adoption at the earliest possible time unless it is determined not to be in the best interests of a sibling or unless it is not possible after appropriate documented efforts by the Department. It is the responsibility of the Department to develop resource family options sufficient to meeting the needs of sibling groups." Any decision to separate siblings initially, during, or after placement must be handled as an exception to policy and must be clearly documented." Standard on Sibling Placement.

Illinois

Specific conditions under which it is permissible to separate siblings are listed in Rules (Section 310.70), which is then referenced in policy. For complete Rules on sibling placement see http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/rules/rules_301/homepage.phtml?page=6#P231_17876

In Cook County, special procedures must be followed in the placement of siblings; these can be accessed at http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/policy_guides/2001.18.php

Indiana

Policy states that "sibling groups are not to be separated if at all possible," "children who are not initially placed together have contact within 48 hours (excluding weekends and holidays) of placement," and "children are to be placed together within 10 business days." Discussion of separate placements indicates that this is an exception to policy, but does not provide specific circumstances under which separation should be considered. (404.33). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.in.gov/dcs/pdf/policies/cwmanual4.pdf>

Iowa

Policy states "Try to place siblings together unless to do so would be detrimental to one of the children's physical, emotional, or mental well being." (XIII-J-34). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/policyanalysis/PolicyManualPages/SocialServ.htm>

Kansas

Policy states that "siblings shall be placed with the same resource family whenever possible. If siblings are not placed together when they enter out of home placement, a plan shall be made to move them into the same placement as soon as possible.... If after 90 days the siblings are still not in the same placement, a staffing which includes the children, parents, kin and other significant people, shall be held to review the actions taken to reunite siblings and plan further actions needed to accomplish this goal.... The Regional CFS Program Administrator... shall receive a written recommendation with documentation why it is in the best interests of the children to be permanently not placed in the same family and provide the team with a written decisions within 10 working days of receiving the request." (5238). Complete policy can be accessed at:
http://www.srskansas.org/CFS/cfp_manuals/ppm_manual/ppminternet.htm

Kentucky

Policy states "when placing a child in foster care, the initial placement plan should be to place siblings together, unless circumstances exist that would not be in the child's best interest. The sibling bond is irreplaceable. Connections between siblings and significant others should be maintained to preserve the child's emotional well-being and self-esteem." (SOP 7E.1). Policy is linked to a Placement with Siblings Tip Sheet, which lists possible reasons for separating siblings, and with a Placement Decision-Making Matrix, which lists ten issues; one of the conditions listed must be met to justify separating siblings. Complete policy can be accessed at:
http://manuals.chfs.ky.gov/dCBS_manuals/dpp/chapters/7/7E%20CPS%20Ongoing%20OHC.doc

Louisiana

"Siblings should be placed in the same foster home if at all possible unless contraindicated by an assessment of the sibling relationship. However, sexual aggression between siblings may contraindicate placement together." (6-300 F.)
<http://stellent.dss.state.la.us/LADSS/getContent?mimeType=application%2Fpdf&docName=017805&rendition=web&noSaveAs=true&id=18166>

Maine

Maine policy was written with youth in care who are members of the Youth Leadership Advisory Team. It states that "placement of siblings together should be made a priority in case planning and implementation of the case plan. Valid reasons must be identified and documented for not placing siblings together." It recognizes the need to separate siblings in some situations, but requires that these cases "be assessed on a case-by-case basis with the intent to strengthen the relationship and possibly reunite the children in the future." Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/bcfs/policy/policy.htm> Section V, E-1

Maryland

Policy not available.

Massachusetts

Policy not available.

Michigan

"Efforts to place sibling groups in the same out-of-home placement must be given priority. If this proves impossible or is not in the children's best interest, the reasons for such are to be recorded....Written second line supervisory approval is required for a placement which separates or maintains separation of siblings."(CFF 722-3). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.mfia.state.mi.us/olmweb/ex/html/>

Minnesota

"Whenever possible, siblings should be placed together unless it is determined not to be in the best interests of a sibling, or unless it is not possible after appropriate efforts." (XV-6230). Complete policy can be accessed at:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_016961.hcsp

Expanding on this policy, a DHS Bulletin issued in 2003 provides in-depth policy guidance and clarification which discusses best practices in sibling placement. It includes a detailed decision-making matrix. The Bulletin can be accessed at:

http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/publications/documents/pub/DHS_id_004861.pdf

Mississippi

Policy not available.

Missouri

"Siblings...should be placed together whenever possible." (4.2) Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://dss.missouri.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/index.html>

Montana

Policy not available.

Nebraska

Separation of siblings in temporary care is not addressed in policy except for the requirement to employ case consultation teams in cases in which sibling separation is recommended (5-001.03). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/reg/t390.htm> Chapter 5.

Nevada

Policy not available.

New Hampshire

While siblings are mentioned in several places in policy (assessing service needs of the family, contents of the DCYF court report, and services to families of children in placement), the state does not have specific guidelines for placement of siblings.

New Jersey

Policy not available.

New Mexico

Policy not available.

New York

Siblings are not to be "unnecessarily separated" and should be separated "only if placement together is determined to be contrary to the health, safety or welfare of one or more of the children after consultation with, or an evaluation by, other professional staff, such as a licensed psychologist, psychiatrist, other physician, or certified social worker." Factors leading to separation must be documented. (431.10). Complete Regulations concerning siblings can be accessed at: <http://www.nysccc.org/> (select "Separated Siblings," then "New York State's Laws & Regulations Regarding Siblings.")

North Carolina

"Siblings shall be placed together, whenever possible, unless contrary to the child's developmental, treatment or safety needs.... Social workers shall document the basis for the decision not to place siblings together." (Choosing the Best Placement Resource). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-10/man/index.htm>

North Dakota

Policy not available.

Ohio

Policy states that the worker "shall attempt to place siblings in the same home unless it is not in the child's or his siblings' best interest." (5101:2-42-05). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://emanuals.odjfs.state.oh.us/emanuals/family/FCA>

Oklahoma

Policy requires that "every reasonable attempt to place siblings together is made, unless there is documented evidence that such a placement is not in the children's best interest;" "if siblings are separated, contact and visitation is required; and "ongoing efforts are made to locate a suitable resource that enables all siblings to be together." (OAC 340:75-6-85.3). Instructions to staff regarding this policy not only lists examples of when separation might be in the children's best interest, but also gives inappropriate reasons for separation.

Complete policy can be accessed at:

http://www.policy.okdhs.org/ch75/Chapter_75-6/

Oregon

"Efforts will be made to place siblings in the same substitute care placement when it is in the best interest of the children and whenever possible." (I-E.3 Transmittal). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.dhs.state.or.us/policy/childwelfare/cross_index.htm

Pennsylvania

Policy not available.

Rhode Island

Siblings shall be placed together in foster care unless one or more of the children has a serious need that justifies separation. The policy also says that, where siblings can't be placed together initially, the situation will be "continuously assessed" and siblings subsequently moved together whenever possible.

South Carolina

Policy not available.

South Dakota

Policy not available.

Tennessee

No discussion of sibling placement could be located in policy. Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.state.tn.us/youth/policies/index.htm>

Texas

"Siblings should be placed together whenever possible, unless it is not in the best interest of the child and the sibling group.... DFPS must first consider placement options where siblings can remain together, recognizing that sibling connections are vital for the well-being of a child. If siblings are initially placed separately, it is critical to reunite them as soon as possible. Diligent efforts to reunite the siblings should occur within 60 days and these efforts must be documented. In the event siblings cannot be reunited within 60 days, continued documentation of all efforts to reunite the siblings must be kept in the record and addressed at the initial and subsequent Permanent Planning Team meetings." (CPS Handbook, Section 6513). Complete policy can be accessed at:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Handbooks/CPS_Handbook/CPS_Handbook.htm

Utah

Practice Guidelines list placement with siblings as a priority in selecting out-of-home placement (301.3). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.hspolicy.utah.gov/dcfs/>

Vermont

No discussion of sibling placement could be located in policy. Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.state.vt.us/srs/manual/casework/castoc.htm>

Virginia

Placement of siblings is not addressed in policy. Complete policy can be accessed at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/manual.cgi>

Washington

Legislation passed in 2003 creates a presumption in favor of sibling placement, contact or visits (SB 5779, Chap. 227)

No discussion of sibling placement could be located in policy. Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/CA/pubs/manuals_pp.asp

West Virginia

"State Statute, 49-2-14(d) requires the Department to place siblings together when placing a child in foster care who also has siblings in care....If the child's case plan includes placement of a child in a placement separate from his or her sibling, the worker must secure a court order which finds that it is in the child's best interest not to be placed in the same home as his or her sibling. "(Section 4.5). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.wvdhhr.org/bcf/children_adult/foster/policy.asp

Wisconsin

Policy not available.

Wyoming

Policy not available.