



**Policies on Sibling Visits in Out of Home Care
Last Updated December 28, 2005**

States have a variety of policies regarding visiting between 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 32 states that address sibling visiting in their policy.

- Seven states require that visits be documented (GA, ID, IL, ME, MI, MN and OK).
- Six states require monthly visits (DE, ID, KY, OK, TN and TX).
- Five states require biweekly visits (AR, IL, IN, KS, and NY).
- Two states require weekly visits (MO and UT).

Excerpts from and links to individual state policies follow.

Alabama

Policy not available.

Alaska

Policy states, "When completing a plan of action for a child, the following areas need to be addressed: medical/dental/vision needs, mental health needs, educational needs, visitation with each parent and with siblings, and cultural continuity." (2.9.2.e.3.H.i). Complete policy can be accessed at:

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

Arizona

Policy not available.

Arkansas

The family service worker is charged with arranging for biweekly visits when siblings are placed separately (VI-B1). 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 states that "when placement of siblings together in the same home is not possible, diligent effort shall be made, and a case plan prepared, to provide for ongoing and frequent interaction among siblings until family reunification is achieved, or, if parental rights are terminated, as part of developing the permanent plan for the child." Complete legislation can be accessed at:

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

Policy requires "documentation of the appropriateness of sibling contact, including unsupervised contact, diligent efforts to overcome barriers of visitation between siblings not placed together, and, if appropriate, a schedule of planned sibling contacts and visits with the child." (31-075). Complete policy can be accessed at:
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/ord/CDSSManual_240.htm

Colorado

Regulations indicate that the child's contact with siblings must be provided for in the case plan. (7.306.64). 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

Policy requires that all children in the Department's custody must have visitation with siblings "unless a court orders otherwise." (34-10-7.1). Written visitation plans are required unless a mental health professional determines it is not in the best interest of a sibling needing special care. Complete policy can be accessed at:
<http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/Policy/Invest34/34-10-7.1.htm> and
<http://www.state.ct.us/dcf/Policy/Trmt36/36-55-7.htm>

Delaware

"Visitation between siblings must occur at least monthly unless such visits will be detrimental to the children. If that is the case, the caseworker must document...why sibling visitation is not occurring." (Case Decision #4, B-4). 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

"If children cannot be placed together, a plan must be developed for frequent visitation" (CFOP 175-34). Complete policy can be accessed at
<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/publications/policies.shtml>

Georgia

"If siblings must be placed in separate homes/facilities, frequent and regular contact between the children needs to be maintained." (1009.8). Complete policy can be accessed at:
http://www.odis.dhr.state.ga.us/3000_fam/3060_fostercare/MAN3060.doc

Hawaii

Sibling visits are not addressed in Administrative Rules. Complete rules can be accessed at:
<http://www.state.hi.us/dhs/rules-content.html>

Idaho

"Write sibling visitation into case and alternate care plans and provide transportation and other supports resource families need to make those visits happen regularly. The plan

should clearly state who would be responsible for making sure visits happen." Standard on Sibling Placement.

Illinois

Rules require that siblings placed apart must have biweekly visits unless certain conditions (court order, request of child, or risk of harm) exist. Complete rule can be accessed at: http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/rules/rules_301/homepage.phtml?page=16#P471_40133

Sibling policy must be in accord with the Aristotle P. consent decree; full policy can be accessed at: http://dcfswebresource.prairienet.org/policy_guides/2001.17.php

Indiana

Policy states that, when "circumstances may temporarily prevent placement of siblings in the same home,...regular visitation among siblings is essential." (404.2) Siblings are to visit biweekly unless one is placed in a residential facility; even then visits are required but may be reduced to monthly. Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.in.gov/dcs/pdf/policies/cwmanual4.pdf>

Iowa

"If siblings cannot be placed together, make arrangements to maintain contact between the siblings, unless there is a therapeutic reason for one or more of the siblings to avoid contact." (XIII-J-35). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/policyanalysis/PolicyManualPages/SocialServ.htm>

Kansas

"When siblings are not placed together, a visitation plan shall be in place which allows for frequent and regular contact between the siblings not placed together. Sibling visits shall occur at least twice monthly. At least one of these visits shall occur during a parent/child interaction to allow the parent(s) and all children to be together at least once per month.... At least one of these visits shall be with only the siblings-parent(s) not present. (5238). Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.srskansas.org/CFS/cfp_manuals/ppm_manual/ppminternet.htm

Kentucky

Visits with siblings are to be scheduled no less than once every four weeks. If visiting is believed to be "detrimental to the child's health, welfare, or physical or emotional condition," the caseworker must obtain prior written approval from the SRA to suspend visits. (SOP 7E.1.14). Complete policy on visiting can be accessed at http://manuals.chfs.ky.gov/dCBS_manuals/dpp/chapters/7/7E%20CPS%20Ongoing%20OOHC.doc#SOP7E114

Louisiana

"Visits between siblings in custody, including those available for adoption, are required unless they are placed in the same foster home. The only exception for visitation between siblings in custody is for youth 16 years of age and older who do not want sibling visitation, or for a sibling for whom visitation has been curtailed or discontinued based upon

documentation that sibling visitation is harmful." (6-915 B). Complete policy on visiting can be accessed at
<http://stellent.dss.state.la.us/LADSS/getContent?id=18234&rendition=Web&mimeType=application/pdf&noSaveAs=true>

Maine

Maine policy was written with youth in care who are members of the Youth Leadership Advisory Team. It requires the Department to strengthen and encourage contact, give siblings an opportunity to voice their views, document visits in the case plan, hold frequent visits in a comfortable setting, and advocate for a court-ordered visitation plan at the custody hearing. Siblings are also to be provided information when one of them moves. 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

"When separated, the relationship between siblings must be established or maintained. A detailed plan of visits, phone calls, and letters must be recorded." (CFF 722-3). Complete policy can be accessed at: <http://www.mfia.state.mi.us/olmweb/ex/html/>

Minnesota

While sibling visits are not addressed in policy, a DHS Bulletin issued in 2003 provides in-depth policy guidance and clarification which discusses best practices in sibling visiting. Complete policy can be accessed at:
http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_016961.hcsp

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

The Children's Service Worker is expected to arrange visits between siblings at least weekly. (6.1) Complete policy can be accessed at:
<http://dss.missouri.gov/cd/info/cwmanual/index.html>

Montana

Policy not available.

Nebraska

Once children are placed, workers are responsible to "create opportunities for family involvement and contact (this includes sibling contact)" (7-001.02A). Complete policy can be accessed at <http://www.hhs.state.ne.us/reg/t390.htm> Chapter 7.

Nevada

Policy not available.

New Hampshire

Statute requires that the "court shall, whenever reasonable and practical, and based on a determination of the best interests of the child, ensure that children who have an existing relationship with a sibling and who are separated from their siblings as a result of a court decree, court order, consent order, or court-recommended placement, including but not limited to, placement in foster homes, or in the homes of parents or extended family members, have access to and visitation rights with such siblings throughout the duration of such placement, and subsequent to such placement if the children or their siblings are separated by long-term or short-term foster care placement. (Section 169-C:19-d). <http://gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/xii/169-c/169-c-mrg.htm>

Policy does not address sibling visitation.

New Jersey

Policy not available.

New Mexico

Policy not available.

New York

Regulations require agencies to make "diligent efforts...to facilitate regular biweekly visitation or communication between minor siblings or half-siblings who have been placed apart, unless such contact could be contrary to the health, safety, or welfare of one or more of the children, or unless lack of geographic proximity precludes visitation." (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

"Within one week of placement, a visitation plan for siblings to visit each other shall be developed and placed in the record. A signed sibling visitation plan shall be current at all times. Whenever circumstances warrant a change in visitation, a new visitation plan will be developed within 7 days." (Required Services for Children). 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 make arrangements for siblings" in the area of visiting. (5101:2-42-92). Complete policy can be accessed at:
<http://emanuals.odjfs.state.oh.us/emanuals/family/FCA>

Oklahoma

Policy requires that "if siblings are separated, contact and visitation is required." (OAC 340:75-6-85.3) and "all efforts are made to place sibling groups together in both temporary and permanent placements, per OAC 340:75-6-85.3. When this is not possible, face-to-face, phone, letter, or e-mail contact between all siblings is arranged a minimum of once every four weeks until the siblings are reunited in out-of-home placement or the permanency plan is achieved. The CW worker verifies this contact with the placement provider at each monthly contact. Sibling contacts approved by the CW worker may be arranged by placement providers." (OAC 340:75-6-30). Instructions to staff address the need to document the status of sibling visits and, if contact is detrimental to one or more of the children, to arrange services to correct the situation. Complete policy can be accessed at: http://www.policy.okdhs.org/ch75/Chapter_75-6/

Oregon

"If siblings are not placed together in substitute care, efforts will be made to ensure that the children have the opportunity for continuing contact through visitation plans, phone calls, letters, etc." (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

Policy requires a plan for regular contact between separated siblings, indicates that sibling visits should be seen as a standard part of the case plan, and that initiation of termination of parental rights proceedings should not affect ongoing sibling visits.

South Carolina

Policy not available.

South Dakota

Policy not available.

Tennessee

Policy on sibling visits is established under the Brian A. consent decree. "Siblings groups in the legal custody of the Department of Children's Services shall be provided with opportunities to visit with one another if they are not placed in the same foster home, group home, or other residential facility unless there is a court order prohibiting such visitation." (16.43 - BA). Complete policy can be accessed at:
<http://www.state.tn.us/youth/policies/index.htm>

Texas

"At a minimum, siblings placed with separate caregivers, whether these are parents, relatives, or substitute caregivers, should have at least monthly contact with each other unless there are documented reasons not to do so. The contact should be face-to-face, unless there are documented reasons this cannot occur. Less than monthly face-to-face sibling contact must have documented supervisory approval. During times when face-to-face contact cannot occur, contact by telephone or letter should occur." (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 state that the child and family plan must include a "visitation plan for the child, parents, and siblings." (302.1) Complete policy can be accessed at:

<http://www.hspolicy.utah.gov/dcfcs/>

Vermont

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

Virginia

"When a child is separated from siblings, the agency must arrange for regular visitation among the siblings." (5.7.7). Complete policy can be accessed at

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/manual.cgi>

Washington

Permanency Planning Family Placements (resource families) are expected to "facilitate on-going contact between the child and the child's siblings... as appropriate for the child before and after adoption." (45352). Complete policy can be accessed at:

http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/CA/pubs/manuals_pp.asp

West Virginia

"When siblings are placed separately, the Multidisciplinary Treatment Team must develop a visitation plan to maintain the sibling relationship. This plan must be contained in the Child, Youth and Family Case Plan. The child's worker is responsible for ensuring that the visitation plan is followed. The child's worker will provide a copy of the visitation plan to the child's foster parent. The child's foster parent should provide routine transportation for visitation, if possible. If transportation is a hardship for the foster parent, the child's worker will provide the transportation to enable the visit to occur." (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.