

## DCF Policy #86-011

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## ONGOING CASEWORK AND DOCUMENTATION POLICY

Ongoing casework is a direct service provided by a Social Worker and is a key component in the delivery of services by the Department. Although the exact role of the Social Worker varies from case to case, and from Social Worker to Social Worker, the essential aspects of ongoing casework are identified in the following policy and procedures as: client and collateral contacts; service provision; participation in supervision; and documentation. In addition, ongoing casework also includes service planning and case review, which are addressed in separate policies. (See [Policy #97-003, Service Planning and Referral Policy](#); [Policy #86-009, Foster Care Review Policy](#)) Ongoing casework may also include the provision of treatment services by the Department Social Worker.

### **Policy**

It is the policy of the Department that ongoing casework services be offered to all individuals and families who, at the conclusion of assessment, have been determined to be in need of Department services. The purpose of ongoing casework is to strengthen the capacity of families to function independent of agency intervention, to protect children at risk of abuse or neglect, and to support permanency for children, by enabling children to remain with their families, to return to their families or to move as swiftly as possible to an alternative permanent placement.

### **CLIENT AND COLLATERAL CONTACTS**

Client and collateral contacts are the basis for service delivery by the Department. Each client and collateral contact is an opportunity to identify or clarify client needs and progress, to reassess the level of risk to the child(ren), to facilitate the provision of services, and to enable and motivate change. This is accomplished through the establishment of a relationship with the client and with collaterals.

#### **Policy/Client and Collateral Contacts**

It is the policy of the Department that the ongoing worker maintain regular contact with the family and with collaterals, as indicated in the family's Service Plan.

#### **Procedures/Client and Collateral Contacts**

1. **Contact With Family and Collaterals.** The Social Worker, in discussion with the family and in consultation with the Supervisor, determines which family members and collaterals should be contacted on an ongoing basis.
2. The Social Worker, in discussion with the family and in consultation with the Supervisor, determines the frequency, location and method (i.e., visit, meeting, telephone call, letter) of client and collateral contacts, to best meet the family's assessed needs.
3. **Inability to Contact Family.** If, despite reasonable casework efforts, a family refuses Department services or cannot be located, the Social Worker consults with the Supervisor regarding seeking court intervention or closing the case.

### **SOCIAL WORKER-CLIENT CONTACT AND CHILD-FAMILY VISITATION FOR CASES WITH CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT**

During the time that a child is in placement, the Social Worker's efforts are directed toward achieving permanency for the child, preferably by facilitating the reunification of the child with her/his family. Client contacts with the Social Worker and the child's visitation with her/his family are vital to the process of identifying and implementing a permanent plan for the child.

The following policy establishes a minimum standard for frequency of contacts and visitation. The actual schedule of contacts and visitation will vary from case to case and, in many cases, may be more frequent than the required minimum standard. For example, the Social Worker and Supervisor should consider more frequent Social Worker-client contacts if the child has recently been placed or if the child has recently moved to a new placement. The Social Worker and Supervisor should consider more frequent child-family visitation taking into account the age of the child and the projected date for the child's return home (or other permanent placement).

### **Policy/Social Worker-Client Contact and Child-Family Visitation for Cases with Children in Placement**

It is the policy of the Department that the Social Worker arranges and documents in the family's Service Plan a schedule of Social Worker-client contacts and a child-family visitation schedule for all cases with children in placement, in accordance with the child(ren)'s needs and permanent plan.

The schedule of contacts should include at least monthly visits by a Social Worker with the child(ren), the child(ren)'s placement resource and the child(ren)'s parents.

The schedule of child-family visitation should, in most cases, provide the opportunity for contact between the child and the parents to occur as frequently as once a week or once every other week. In no case should child-family contact be less frequent than once a month. The visitation schedule also should include contact with the child's sibling(s), if possible and appropriate. If the parents are separated or divorced, both parents should be offered the opportunity for at least monthly contact with the child unless a court has entered orders to the contrary.

### **Procedures/Social Worker-Client Contact and Child-Family Visitation for Cases with Children in Placement**

1. **Social Worker Contacts.** The Social Worker, in discussion with the family and placement resource and in consultation with the Supervisor, determines the frequency, location and method of her/his contacts with the child(ren) in placement, the placement resource and the parent(s).
2. **Child-Family Visitation.** The Social Worker, in discussion with the family and placement resource and in consultation with the Supervisor, determines a child-family visitation schedule and determines where visits should take place, who should participate and whether supervision of visits is necessary. To the extent possible, the Social Worker encourages the parent(s) to assume responsibility for preparing for visits and for arranging their own transportation to and from visits.
3. **Approval of Less Than Monthly Contact or Visitation.** If, on a particular case, monthly Social Worker-client contact or monthly child-family visitation are not appropriate to the child's needs or permanent plan, or are not possible to arrange, the Social Worker consults with the Supervisor. If the Supervisor approves a less than monthly contact or visitation schedule, the Social Worker documents the reason for this decision in the ongoing dictation.
4. **Suspension of Child-Family Visitation.** If, on a particular case, child-family visitation should be temporarily suspended (i.e., for a period not exceeding 6 weeks) to protect the child or another family member, the Social Worker consults with the Supervisor. If the Supervisor approves a temporary suspension of visitation, the Social Worker or Supervisor documents the reason for this decision in the ongoing dictation and, if the case is court involved, notifies the DSS Attorney.

If visitation is to be suspended for a period exceeding 6 weeks, the following procedures regarding termination of visitation apply.

5. **Termination of Child-Family Visitation.** If, on a particular case, child-family visitation should be terminated, the Social Worker consults with the Supervisor. If the Supervisor approves, the Social Worker and/or Supervisor take the necessary steps to obtain approval for the termination of visitation.

If the child is in custody pursuant to a court order, any decision to terminate visitation must be discussed with the Supervisor and Department Attorney and must then be approved by the court.

If the child is in care pursuant to a voluntary agreement, any decision to terminate visitation must be discussed with the Area Director or designee to obtain her/his approval to terminate visitation and to

determine whether it is appropriate to continue the voluntary placement or to petition for custody in court.

The decision to terminate visitation should be documented by the Social Worker in ongoing dictation.

6. **Court-Ordered Visitation.** If, on a particular case, a court has ordered a specific child-family visitation schedule, the court order must be followed. If this is impossible or inappropriate to the child's needs, the Social Worker consults with the Supervisor and Department Attorney regarding obtaining a change in the court order.

## **SERVICE PROVISION**

Service provision includes direct service by the Social Worker and the delivery of both Department and community services to the family. Service provision is dependent upon the family's willingness to accept services, the availability of services in the area/community and the Social Worker's knowledge of resources (e.g., eligibility requirements, contact people and referral procedures), as well as the Social Worker's relationship with the family and providers. The review of service provision is an ongoing process that occurs in response to each client's needs, as well as during Foster Care and other case reviews.

### **Policy/Service Provision**

It is the policy of the Department that the Social Worker assists clients, on an ongoing basis, in identifying and obtaining available services to meet assessed needs, and that she/he specifies the services to be provided in the family's Service Plan.

### **Procedures/Service Provision**

1. **Identifying Services.** The Social Worker, in discussion with the family and in consultation with the Supervisor, determines what services are appropriate and available for the family and how these services can be obtained.
2. **Referrals for Services.** The Social Worker provides assistance to the client in obtaining services, either by making a referral or by providing information as to how the client can obtain the service directly.
3. **Authorizations for Services.** When a service referral for Department purchased service is made and approved, the Social Worker completes required service referrals and submits for approval.

The Social Worker documents nonwritten referrals and authorizations in dictation.

The Social Worker documents in dictation any decision to change or terminate services requested or approved and the reasons for the decision.

## **SUPERVISION**

Supervision is a dynamic process which supports ongoing casework through discussion of family dynamics, treatment planning, service delivery, agency mandate, and caseload priorities. It provides the opportunity for information sharing and joint decision-making, and for updating the supervisor on the status of the case so that she/he can coordinate responses to client emergencies in the Social Worker's absence. Supervision includes both regularly scheduled discussion of each case and consultation regarding each case on an as needed basis.

### **Policy/Supervision**

It is the policy of the Department that supervisory sessions (either individual or group) should be scheduled on a weekly basis. The Supervisor is responsible for the work of her/his supervisee. The ongoing Social Worker and Supervisor share responsibility for service provision to the family and for significant casework decisions. The Supervisor should be familiar with the contents of the case record and should ensure that the case record is complete and up to date.

### **Procedures/Supervision**

1. **Scheduling.** The Social Worker and Supervisor determine a schedule of supervision which will permit discussion of each family's case on a regular and as needed basis.

2. **Preparation.** The Social Worker and Supervisor prepare for supervision by prioritizing issues to be discussed and by reviewing pertinent case materials. If a case is newly assigned, the Social Worker and Supervisor prepare for supervision by reading the entire case record.
3. **Documentation.** The Supervisor maintains a record of supervision, indicating when supervision was held and which cases were discussed. However, any major decision made during supervision (e.g., a decision to place a child, to return a child home or to move her/him to a different out-of-home placement, to arrange less than monthly child-family visitation) is documented by the Social Worker in dictation.

The Social Worker and Supervisor may decide to utilize other Department staff and/or consultants, as needed, to assist in planning service provision and/or resolving differences of opinion. Any major decision made during these consultations is documented by the Social Worker or Supervisor in dictation.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

Documentation consists of entering into the family's case record information and materials pertaining to the Department's and providers' activities on behalf of the family and the family's interaction with the Department and providers. Certain information is entered and maintained as part of the electronic case record, and related materials are retained in the associated physical case record. Documentation of client and collateral contacts facilitates review of Department activity and family progress, provides information that may be essential for court intervention, and also may serve as a resource for a current or former client who is seeking historical information regarding her/his childhood.

Maintenance of automated case record information additionally supports enhanced accessibility to individual client and family information, as well as the aggregation of information regarding all clients served by the Department.

### **Policy/Documentation**

It is the policy of the Department that the Social Worker documents casework activity for each family, in the family's case record in FamilyNet. Each client and collateral contact is documented in dictation and entered into FamilyNet as soon as possible. It is expected that dictation will be entered into FamilyNet no later than one month following the contact.

### **Procedures/Documentation**

1. **Frequency.** Each contact with the family or collaterals is documented as soon as possible, and the Social Worker ensures that dictation is entered into FamilyNet within one month following the contact. If this is not possible, the Social Worker and Supervisor jointly agree regarding how and when the dictation shall be entered  
  
Workers will also be required to record "no contact" reasons monthly.
2. **Format.** The Social Worker identifies entries by including her/his name either at the top of each screen of dictation or at the beginning of each entry.

The Social Worker includes in each entry: the date of the contact; the location and method of contact; names of all persons present; and a summary of the content and outcome of the contact. Dictation should be factual and objective. If, in a particular case, the Social Worker wishes to include a statement of her/his "impressions," this must be clearly identified as "impressions."

Each client and collateral contact should be documented as a separate entry in dictation. On a case by case basis, the Social Worker, with supervisory approval, may utilize a summary dictation format (in which contacts for a period of time not exceeding one month are summarized rather than entered separately). However, the summary must include the dates, participants, method, and outcome of each contact.

3. **Documentation by Other Department Employee.** Whenever any Department employee (e.g., Supervisor or Area Program Manager) other than the assigned Social Worker has contact with the family or collaterals, the individual documents the contact in dictation, in accordance with procedure 2 above, identifies each entry with her/his name and title, and provides the dictation to the Social Worker for entry into FamilyNet.

4. **Correspondence.** The Social Worker ensures that copies of all case-related correspondence and reports that are sent and received by the Department are maintained in the physical case record and are recorded in FamilyNet.