

One Voice Texas

A Collaborative for Health & Human Services



Children & Youth Services: Visitation for Infants & Toddlers in Foster Care

Position Statement Approved by One Voice Texas: August 10, 2012

Issue/Concern:

Research and practice indicates that frequent and quality contact between children and their parents positively impacts infant and toddler brain development, promotes well-being in children and increases the possibility of reunification. However, visitation for children in the custody of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is set at a minimum of once a month.

In order to ensure appropriate attachment and bonding for those children where the permanency goal is to reunify them with their parents, frequent and quality visitation, initiated early after a child is removed, must take place. Policies that enforce this practice are associated with enhanced attachment and bonding, better adjustment for children while in foster care, and timelier family reunification which saves the state money.

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- Require that a visitation plan be developed within a week of removal. This should include a scheduled visit within 72 hours of the child's removal. The visitation plan should be reviewed by the court at the 14 day hearing versus being filed as part of the family plan of services at the 45 day hearing.
- The visitation plan should be leveled, including strict supervision, moderate and light, or no supervision. The degree of supervision should be downgraded based on resolution by the parent, DFPS, the court, and other stakeholders, of the specifically identified safety concerns as well as the length of time until the child is returned home.
- Visits between infants/toddlers and their parents/guardians should be scheduled at a minimum of two times a week. If these standards cannot be met, DFPS must indicate why that is the case and what specific steps will be taken to resolve these barriers.
- Developmentally appropriate toys should be available at all visits.
- Appropriate guidelines for visitation should be provided to parents before each visit occurs. These guidelines should include what to expect from their child's behavior, how they should answer questions such as "when can I come home," and how they should plan for the next visit.
- In order to assist in supervising visits between children and their parents, DFPS should employ the use of volunteers including those who are directly engaged with the department as well as those who work for organizations that serve children in state care. The standard criminal CPS and criminal background checks should be employed.

How Will This Impact State Funding? What can be Accomplished?

By increasing reunification rates and decreasing the amount of time children are in foster care, as well as the negative impact of poor bonding and attachment, the state can save on the cost of foster care and increase stability of placements and the emotional well-being of the infants and toddlers in custody.

Others That Support These Recommendations:

Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS); Texas CASA; Texans Care for Children

Supporting Facts/Research Resources:

1. Lawler, Michael, Shaver, P., Goodman, G. 2010. Toward relationship-based child welfare services. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 33(3): 473-480.
2. Wintraub, Amber. April, 2008. *Information Packet: Parent-Child Visiting*. National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. Available at: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/information_packets/Parent-Child_Visiting.pdf.

3. Judge Leonard Edwards. 2003. Judicial Oversight of Parental Visitation in Family Reunification Cases. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*. Summer: 1-24.

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