 Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

I. STATEMENT OF POLICY

Visits shall be arranged for the foster child with his biological parents and siblings. When reunification is the permanency goal for the child, visitation between parent and child is critical to achieving this goal. The purposes of the parent/child/sibling visits are to:


- Maintain relationships regardless of the permanency goal;
- Provide opportunity for the parent to demonstrate willingness/ability to care for the child on an ongoing basis and/or help the child realize the parent cannot provide ongoing care;
- Prepare parent and child for reunification or for separation to achieve the alternative permanency goal (Refer to [6-802](#), Case Plan Goal Establishment and Concurrent Planning.); and,
- Focus on the foster parent role as that of a temporary substitute parent/caregiver until the permanency plan goal of reunification is changed or the alternative permanency goal is attained.

If the child has established, significant relationships with other relatives, such as grandparents, and it is in the child's best interest, these relationships should be preserved to the extent possible through continued contacts during foster care placement. These contacts should include visitation as well as other arrangements, such as email, telephone calls, letters and the exchange of personal information, cards or pictures. Detailed information, * including contact information and continued contact between the foster child and biological family should be included in the case plan visitation/continuing contact section and documented on the child's [Family Connection Form](#). It is critical for individuals with whom the child has a significant relationship with be included in case planning for the child and given the opportunity to provide care and support for the child, when physically possible to do so.

If a child is placed with a relative, the relative should be supported by the case worker in arranging the child's visitation with grandparents other relatives or significant individuals known to the caregiver. The parents may arrange for grandparents or other significant persons to visit during their scheduled visitation times. Parents shall be encouraged to include non-custody children in visits with the child in foster care. If visits with significant persons cannot be arranged during regular scheduled family visits with parents, the case worker is encouraged to make all efforts to arrange additional visits for the child to visit with those significant individuals.

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If the child has established, significant relationships with other individuals such as friends, teachers, church members, godparents, or others, every effort should be made to allow the child to have ongoing contact with these individuals as well. For Native American children

 <p>Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i></p>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

whose tribe is supporting placement by the Department, this includes assuring contact between the child and tribal members with whom the child has a relationship.


A. SIBLING VISITS

Visits between siblings in Department or Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) custody, including those available for adoption, are required at a minimum of monthly unless they are placed in the same foster home. When siblings are placed in separate settings, every effort shall be made to allow more frequent contact than the minimum and diligent, ongoing efforts shall be made to place the children together. Foster care staff is responsible for maintaining contacts between siblings placed in different placements. The only reason to discontinue visitation between siblings in custody is if a youth 16 years of age and older does not want sibling visitation, or based upon documentation that sibling visitation is harmful to any party involved. The case worker should assess and discuss the youth's concerns or reasons for not wanting to visit with their siblings. The case worker should discuss possible solutions that would validate the child's feelings and enable the youth to feel emotionally and physically safe during a visit. If the youth refuses to visit, it shall be reported to the court.

The biological parents shall be encouraged to bring any children residing in their home for visits with siblings in Department custody. If the parent is unable to bring the children to the visit, the department may provide transportation for the parent and their children. The custodian must also accompany the child who is not in Department custody during transportation.

Sibling visitation shall continue to be held even if parents do not visit, if the parent's whereabouts are unknown, or if one or all of the children are available for adoption and awaiting adoptive placements. Contacts between siblings should include email, telephone calls, and correspondence, in addition to monthly face-to-face contact.

When the sibling of a foster child is in custody of the Department and is freed for adoption, a Continuing Contact Agreement for the adopted child to continue to visit the sibling in foster care may be arranged; however, a Continuing Contact Agreement is dependent on the voluntary agreement of the adoptive parents. In addition, foster care staff will determine the appropriateness of the Department entering into a Continuing Contact Agreement if approached by the prospective and/or adoptive parents with a request to enter into such an agreement. A Continuing Contact Agreement should not be necessary between DCFS and the prospective and/or adoptive parents in order for siblings to be allowed contact and supported in maintaining contact. The need for the formal agreement should be assessed on a child specific basis to determine when a situation is unique and the legally binding agreement would serve the best interest of the sibling in foster care. As custodian of the sibling in custody, DCFS is responsible for ensuring that the best interest of the child in foster care is served by maintaining contact with the adopted child. Any legally binding agreement into which DCFS becomes a party should reflect only the level of contact that is agreed upon by the adoptive

 Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

parents, their legal counsel and Department. If the Department enters into a Continuing Contact Agreement, the Child Welfare Manager shall sign for the Department.

B. ONGOING VISITS WITH THE BIOLOGICAL FAMILY


The minimum requirements for visits between foster children and biological family are as follows, as long as such visitation is in the best interest of the child:

- In the first six months of placement and the two months preceding an anticipate reunification date, every effort shall be made to hold visits more often and/or increase the length of visits. Visits between parents and children shall occur at least every two weeks unless case circumstances prevent visiting or indicate otherwise. *** * When there is more than one child in the family, the visits should be scheduled even if the parents' whereabouts are unknown or the parents have not consistently visited, thereby supporting the sibling contact. In the case of absent parents or parents who do not attend regularly, and if there is only one child, diligent efforts must be made to schedule and notify parents of visits, however, the child should not be brought to the visit unless the parent confirms their plans to attend.
- When parents are incarcerated and the reason for incarceration is not related to the child's abuse or neglect, then the Department shall make exhaustive efforts to facilitate visitation between parents and their children in foster care. If it is determined visits are detrimental to the child, then the case worker will present the information to the Court to consider the best interest of the child. There must be a court order in place to discontinue visitation between an incarcerated parent and their child in foster care. When possible, additional contacts such as webcam, facetime, email, telephone, or other correspondence should also be established.
- Visits between siblings should be scheduled at least twice monthly, and preferably more often, if appropriate.

II. PROCEDURES

A. CASE WORKER RESPONSIBILITY

The foster care case worker shall observe a parent/child visit at least once every month, documenting the parent/child interactions and relationships, on all cases with reunification as the permanency goal. If the case worker is unable to supervise additional contacts each month, arrangements shall be made for another responsible party, such as a relative, foster parent or other Department staff member, to supervise the visitation. The Child Welfare Family Resource Center (CWFRC) staff may be able to supervise the visit if a referral has been made to the CWFRC for services and supervised visitation is a component of the Family Service Delivery Plan. The person chosen to supervise the family visit is expected to guide the parent in more effective interactions with the child(ren).

 Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

Purchased supervision can involve those situations in which the child's or family's therapist or other licensed professional has a specific need as documented in the treatment plan to observe the parent-child interaction as a separate part of parent education or therapeutic intervention session, or if requested to provide an expert opinion to the court concerning the viability and timing of the reunification plan. Purchased supervised visits are to be planned and focused on achieving certain goals related to the permanency plan for the child with written supporting documentation provided. The rate for purchased supervision in such cases is \$25 per hour. Payment is to be made using TIPS code 800 845 Incidental Expense Treatment using the SP TIPS number. If the plan is adoption but the child is not yet legally available, the case worker shall assure all visits are supervised by an appropriate party. Regular supervision of visits may be indicated in other circumstances where safety threats to the child are identified and caretaker protective capacities are diminished.

Supervision of family visitation through the CWFR's is strongly encouraged for all families immediately after a child enters foster care and for the duration of Department efforts at reunification to educate parents on more effective interactions with their children.

B. LOCATION OF VISITS


Visits should be held in the home of the parents or a biological family member whenever possible, or another location chosen by the family. Visits may be held in the foster home/other facility when that is the most appropriate location for visitation to occur. When there is concern for the child's safety or a need to control and/or structure the parent/child interaction during the visit, the office setting may be used. Public locations with limited privacy such as restaurants should only be used as a last resort. Supervisor concurrence shall be secured when the visits are held in the office or a public venue with limited privacy. If a parent is incarcerated, visitation shall be held within the guidelines of the facility. All details related to a foster child's visitation with biological family shall be documented in the family's case record.

C. LIMITATIONS ON VISITS

Visitation is a right of both the parent and the child.

If it is determined visits with the biological family are too damaging to the child and the visits should not be held, court approval is required. The foster care case worker shall submit a letter to the court providing justification for the suspension of visits and obtain written agreement by the court.

It should not be assumed visitation is traumatic and should be ended if a child acts out behaviorally after a visit with parents or biological family. Rather, this should be assessed in relation to the trauma caused to the child by separation from the family and additional family contacts considered.

 Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

Approval for cancellations of any visits at the request of the Department or foster caregiver should only be granted by the supervisor and may only be granted in exceptional circumstances.


D. VISITATION/CONTINUING CONTACT/ RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Visitation/Continuing Contact

Detailed Visitation Contracts are to be drawn up during case planning meetings and entered into FATS as part of the case plan. Provisions for changing scheduled visits by the biological or foster parents shall be included in the contract. A copy of the contract shall be provided to each person involved, including the child's caregiver. A completed contract shall be filed in the family's record. A child's visit shall not be canceled by the caregiver because a child has not attained an appropriate level of behavior to earn the privilege of a family visit.

Persons with whom it would be in the child's best interest to have continuing contact should be identified in the Assessment of Family Functioning (AFF). The assessment should include those individuals with whom the child has an established and significant relationship and the loss of those relationships would cause substantial harm to the child and preservation of the relationships would be in the child's best interest. The child's relationship and visiting arrangements with these persons prior to Department involvement should be documented in the AFF. Input from the parents, identified individuals, and the child should be considered when determining type and frequency of contact on an ongoing basis. The following are additional considerations when determining if continued contact with a particular individual is in the child's best interest:

- Who does the child talk about?
- Who is important to the child?
- Who does the child want to see, call, or write?
- What does the child say about the identified persons?
- How do the child and the identified persons get along with each other?
- How and when did the child come into contact with the identified persons?
- Does the child look forward to contact with the identified persons?
- Does the child's behavior change when he does or does not have continuing contact with the identified persons?
- Will continued contact facilitate or hinder the achievement of permanency for the child?
- Is the individual a possible permanent placement, connection, or supportive resource for the child?
- What are the benefits of maintaining contact with the individual?
- Can the individual assist the child in understanding and managing fears related to the current foster care situation?

 <p>Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i></p>	Division/Section	Child Welfare
	Chapter No./Name	6 – Foster Care (FC)
	Part No./Name	9 – Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Section No./Name	Ongoing Services to Foster Children
	Document No./Name	6-915 Visitation and Continuing Contact with Biological Family
	Effective Date	September 1, 2021

2. Transportation Responsibilities

The biological parents shall be encouraged to find their own means of transportation for family visits. The case worker can assist the biological parents in locating a transportation resource. In addition, if biological parents have the resources, they may be encouraged to provide transportation for their children in foster care. This is contingent upon individual case determination that the child’s safety is not compromised if the biological parents are allowed to transport the child who is in foster care. When biological parents are unable or it is inappropriate for them to provide transportation, foster parents or other caregivers shall be encouraged to provide transportation for foster children. Paraprofessional staff may also help with transportation.

If the permanency goal for the child is reunification and transportation is a problem, the case worker shall assist in locating/providing transportation to visits for the parent or child. When the permanency goal is not reunification, it is not mandatory that the Department provide transportation for biological parents to visit. Depending on the permanency goal, transportation can be provided at the discretion of the case worker and based on Department resources. It is mandatory for the Department to arrange or provide transportation for foster children to family visits.

Specific details of transportation arrangements must be stated in the Visitation/Continuing Contact Contract in the case plan.

III. FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS

There are no forms associated with this policy.

IV. REFERENCES

[LA R.S. 9:364.1](#)

Assessment of Family Functioning