



Department of

**Children's Services**

# Quality Contacts: Sibling Visits

For Custodial FSWs

# Defining Sibling Relationships

## Legal connections:

- Full or half-siblings, including any children who were surrendered or rights were terminated
- Step-siblings
- Adopted siblings not biologically related

## Other important connections:

- Foster siblings
- Other close relatives or nonrelatives living in the same kinship home
- Children of the partner or former partner of the child's parent

— Child Welfare Information Gateway

# Importance of siblings



# Sibling Relationships in abusive or neglectful families

- Buffer against trauma
- Promote resilience
- Healthy attachments
- Sense of safety, permanency and well-being



# Assessing sibling relationships

## Questions to ask of each child, in an age-appropriate manner would be:

*Tell me about your relationship with (each of) your siblings?*

*What things do you do with your siblings?*

*How do you and your siblings help each other?*

*How do you and your siblings resolve conflict?*

*What are your hopes for you and your siblings?*

### *Observations:*

- *Feedback from others in the family/team*
- *Sibling interactions*







# “Parentification”

Sometimes we see siblings that take on a caregiver role.

What are some of the challenges you see when there is a “parentified” siblings?

Are there any benefits to a sibling that takes on a “parentified” role?



# Benefits of placing siblings together

- Reduces trauma
- Sense of stability
- Fewer disruptions
- Timely permanency
- Improved attachments
- Improved life satisfaction





# The Voice of Siblings



# Barriers to Placing Siblings together

- Size of sibling group—larger groups are more often split
- Age gap—wide age span leads to splitting
- Differences in the needs of siblings
- Type of placement—siblings placed with kin are more likely to be together and those in group care are less likely
- Adequacy of agency placement resources and supports



# When Siblings cannot live in the same placement

- Separate custody episodes/removals.
- One child is removed and another isn't.
- One child is placed with Kin while another isn't.
- It is not safe for children to be placed together.



# Placement Exceptions – Thinking Best Practice

In TN, we would do a Placement Exception Request to separate those siblings, but are we starting to discuss the plan to reunite them?

\*What services and/or resources would we want to utilize to work with this sibling group's dynamics?

\*Are we following up with that identified service provider with our intentions to eventually reunite?

\*Is that service provider a member of the team with regular feedback on prognosis?

\*If one sibling is in a kinship home, are we engaging with them about the importance of siblings being together and providing support/resources to assist?

# Maintaining ties between separated siblings

**Findings from the Child and Family Services Reviews conducted in all States found a significant association between visiting with parents and siblings and both permanency and well-being outcomes (USDHHS, 2011).**

***How are we currently maintaining those ties when siblings must be separated?***





# Strategies for Preserving Sibling Connections

- Place siblings with kinship caregivers who have an established personal relationship.
- Place nearby
- Arrange for regular visits.
- Arrange other forms of contact
- Involve families in planning
- Plan joint outings or camp experiences
- Arrange for joint respite care.
- Help children with emotions
- Encourage sustained contact



# Challenging Dynamics of Separated Siblings

**What are some challenges you experience in cases where siblings are separated?**



# Practices for reunifying separated siblings



- Have a “temporary” mentality when appropriate
- Work with therapists early and often.
- Ongoing assessment of case through CFTM, Utilization Review and other reviews
- Collaborate with placement and providers
- More frequent visits for siblings that need to be reunified.
- Collaborate with all sibling’s caregivers to enhance connections.

# Legal Framework for protecting Sibling relationships

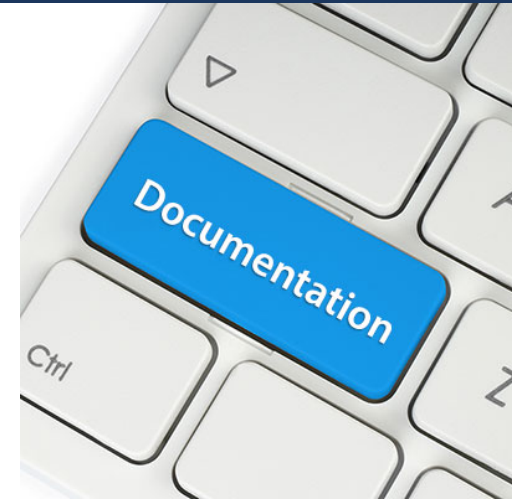
## *Administrative Policies and Procedures: 16.43*

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Supervised and Unsupervised Visitation Between Child/Youth, Family and Siblings</b>
<b>Authority:</b>	TCA 37-5-106, TCA 37-4-201; P.L 109-239 (Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Children in Foster Care); TCA 37-4-201-207.
<b>Standards:</b>	DCS Practice Model Standards – 6-510C, 12-400, 12-401, 12-402, and 12-403.
<b>Application:</b>	DCS Family Service Workers and Supervisory Staff and Contract Agency Staff.
<b>Policy Statement:</b>	
<p>The Department of Children's Services (DCS) shall ensure that visitation between children/youth in the legal custody of DCS and their families is conducted in the best interest of children and youth based on court orders, policy directives, and the individual circumstances of each case. Unless a court order indicates differently, visitation shall be no less than two (2) visits per month or weekly when appropriate and possible. This policy also applies to DCS custodial children/youth, their families and siblings who are subject to inter-jurisdictional placements under the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.</p>	
<b>Purpose:</b>	
<p>To provide directives and guidelines for staff to ensure that child(ren)/youth have an opportunity to visit their families and /or siblings. Decisions regarding supervised or unsupervised visitation will be based on the safety and well-being of the child and/or as directed by the court. Visitation is critical to reducing the trauma of separation to children and achieving permanency as quickly as possible. Visitation also affords parents and family the opportunity to demonstrate parenting skills necessary to ensure the safe return of the child to the home.</p>	

# Sibling Visit Documentation Checklist:

Documentation reflects :

- ✓ Visit of adequate duration and quality
- ✓ Visit was held in a home-like setting or other positive location.
- ✓ Visit included activities to engage the siblings in healthy/fun interaction.
- ✓ Children were adequately supervised if safety is a concern.
- ✓ Caseworker gathered details of the visit from those present.
- ✓ Provide an informally assessed through observations (personal or those of the visit participants) during the visit (mood of children; interactions; changes in behavior; foster parent/provider actions, etc.)
- ✓ Describe how the worker supported the siblings in maintaining or strengthening their bond.







**Goal:** Improve quality of sibling visits

**Plan/Action Steps:**

1. Improve visitation plans at next CFTM for cases with separated siblings.
2. Partner with team members to increase frequency of sibling visits.

**Update your Small Test of Change**

# Evaluation

## Course Title:

Quality Contacts: Sibling Visitations

**Trainers:** Check the Chat box

<https://www.tn.gov/dcs/program-areas/training/tpd/atl/dcstrainingevaluation.html>

The logo consists of a red square with the letters 'TN' in white, serif font. Below the red square is a thin white horizontal line, and below that is a dark blue horizontal bar. A small 'TM' trademark symbol is located at the bottom right corner of the blue bar.

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Thank you