

510.5 Preserving Sibling Connections

CHAPTER 5, Foster Care & Permanency Planning

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PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The relationship between a child and his or her siblings can be an important source of stability, comfort, and security—especially for children in foster care, who often report feelings of uncertainty and helplessness. To protect and nurture these important relationships, this section describes policies and procedures related to placement with and visitation between siblings in DSS's custody.

POLICY:

The term "sibling," for purposes of DSS policy and practice, shall include any individual who:

- a. shares a common biological or adoptive parent with the child; or
- b. Would share a common biological or adoptive parent with the child but for a termination or other disruption of parental rights (including the death of a parent).

Reasonable efforts shall be made to place siblings removed from their home in the same placement. Exceptions will only be considered if a clear and convincing rationale is documented and approved that demonstrates that such a joint placement would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings. This rationale should include reference to and copies of any evaluations by professionals and any documentation of siblings' preferences if age appropriate.

Should siblings be placed separately, the agency shall make reasonable efforts to provide for frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between the siblings, unless a clear and convincing rationale is documented and approved that demonstrates that such contact would be contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings. This rationale must include reference to and copies of any evaluations by professionals and any documentation of siblings' preferences if age appropriate. If visitation is to occur, the agency shall provide for as much contact between the child and sibling(s) as is reasonably possible and consistent with the best interests of the child.

PROCEDURES:

1. The Removal Worker, Foster Care/IFCCS Worker, or Adoption Specialist shall, in consultation with the FSC, seek a placement that can accommodate the entire sibling group, unless joint placement is contrary to the welfare of any of the children.
 - a. If a placement is not available that can accommodate all siblings, the worker shall seek separate placements that are in as close proximity to one another as is possible.
 - b. The worker shall document his or her efforts to find such placements in CAPSS dictation.
2. If the worker suspects that a child or the child's sibling's history or characteristics would make joint placement contrary to one of the children's welfare, the worker shall request a psychological evaluation to determine

whether sibling separation is supported by a clinical recommendation.

- a. If an evaluation cannot be obtained prior to the separation of siblings (e.g., if safety concerns necessitate immediate separation), the worker shall seek such an evaluation as soon as possible.
 - b. If separation is not supported by a clinical recommendation, the worker shall seek joint placement as described in Procedure 1.
 - c. If separation is supported by a clinical recommendation, the worker shall convene a staffing with the child's case planning team as soon as possible to:
 - i. determine whether any siblings can be placed together;
 - ii. develop a plan and timeframe for sibling reunification; and
 - iii. Determine if a therapeutic intervention could sustain or strengthen sibling relationships.
 - a. If the case planning team recommends separation, the worker shall seek placements according to the clinical recommendation and plan developed in the case planning team staffing.
1. The worker shall arrange frequent visitation and other contact between separated siblings, absent a clinical recommendation to the contrary.
- a. In addition to this contact, other communications such as text messages, phone calls, emails, social media messages, and/or video calls shall be allowed and encouraged.
 - b. Sibling contact cannot be limited or prohibited by a placement's disciplinary methods or household rules. If sibling contact conflicts with other valid limitations or disciplinary practices, the worker shall discuss with the placement an alternative or structured means of maintaining such contact.

DOCUMENTATION:

- ♦ Contacts with the child, the child's kin, and the child's placement
- ♦ Efforts to find joint placement and, if applicable, the reasons necessitating separated placements
- ♦ Efforts to arrange contact and, if applicable, the reasons necessitating no contact
- ♦ The clinical recommendation for sibling separation
- ♦ Results of the staffing regarding sibling separation

COLLABORATION:

- ♦ Assessment Worker
- ♦ Foster Care/IFCCS Worker
- ♦ Foster Care/IFCCS Supervisor
- ♦ Adoption Specialist
- ♦ Adoption Supervisor
- ♦ Foster Parents
- ♦ Private Providers

REFERENCES:**Legal Citations:**

42 U.S.C.A. § 671(a) (31): sibling connections

42 U.S.C.A. § 675(12): sibling definition

S.C. Code Ann. § 63-7-1680(E): visitation

Tools:

Seneca Search Report

Forms:

[DSS Form 3062: Supervisor Case Consultation](#)

Practice Guidance:**REVISION COMMENTS:**