

## **ACTION TRANSMITTAL 2020.02**

### **Parent – Child and Sibling Visitation**

#### **PROCEDURES 301 AND 315 SECTIONS PERTAINING TO PARENT-CHILD AND SIBLING VISITATION**

**DATE:** March 19, 2020

**TO:** All DCFS and POS Permanency Staff and Supervisors and Adoption Staff and Coordinators

**FROM:** Marc D. Smith, Acting Director

**EFFECTIVE:** Immediately

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Action Transmittal is to notify all DCFS and POS Purchase of Service Permanency Staff and Supervisors and Adoption Staff and Coordinators of actions being taken regarding Parent-Child and Sibling visitation in response to COVID- 19.

#### **PRIMARY USERS**

DCFS and POS Permanency Staff and Supervisors and Adoption Staff and Coordinators.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

##### **Addressing Logistical Problems During the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis**

The citizens of Illinois, and our country, are currently experiencing an unprecedented public health crisis. Following recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Illinois Department of Public Health, public and private schools are closed, and citizens are advised to stay in their homes and practice social distancing. As the Department and our private agency partners take the necessary steps to comply with these directives, it is crucial that we continue to provide important services to children and families.

In light of the extreme circumstances related to COVID-19 and the need to ensure that the health of children is protected through social distancing, **DCFS is suspending all agency supervised in-person visitation between parents and children in foster care and all sibling visitation.** This remains in effect until further notice from DCFS. All DCFS and private agency staff as well as caregivers are requested to identify alternative ways to allow parent/child and sibling contact during this crisis. Technology such as telephones, videoconferencing, etc. will allow children to continue to have meaningful interaction with their families during this time. Caregivers should use the technology available in their homes for this purpose. (For

example, all caregivers are required to have access to a telephone in their home.) Caregivers should work to ensure that the alternative means of contact provides an opportunity for meaningful interaction with parents and siblings given the current public health crisis.

**If unsupervised visitation is currently in place, it may continue.** It is recommended that the following pre-screening tool be utilized to ensure that it is safe and appropriate to do so.

**Pre-screening tool (must ask all 3 questions):**

1. Within the last 14 days have you traveled to an area with widespread coronavirus according to the CDC?
2. Within the last 14 days have you had close contact with a person with test-proven COVID-19?
3. Do you have fever, cough or trouble breathing?

**If the answer is YES to any of these 3 questions:**

- The unsupervised visits will be suspended until the youth/caregiver/family members are well and/or the 14-day quarantine has expired.
- The youth/caregiver/family members will be notified of the COVID-19 risk assessment results.
- The following isolation measures will be implemented.

**Isolation measures include, but are not limited to:**

- Persons who are ill but without travel or known COVID-19 exposure should stay home until symptom-free for 7 days after onset of symptoms and at least 72 hours without fever above 100.4°F (38°C). In group facilities, they should separate from other residents and have limited contact with staff.
- Persons with travel or contact exposure but without symptoms should follow the 14-day quarantine guideline; and
- Persons with symptoms and travel or contact exposure should contact their medical provider for guidance regarding medical evaluation and possible testing.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO PERMANENCY WORKERS AND SUPERVISORS (AND, WHEN REQUIRED, INTACT WORKERS) DURING THIS PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

**Effective immediately, Permanency Workers shall encourage all foster parents and relative caregivers to facilitate parent-child visitation via video and phone.**

**Within one week of the date of this Action Transmittal:**

- **DCFS and POS Permanency Workers must ask, and strongly encourage, caregivers to permit use of available technology in their homes for youth in care to stay in contact with their parents and/or siblings until this public health crisis is over.** Permanency

**Workers** should make every attempt to arrange this for a parent or caregiver who has limited access to video and phone capabilities. Possible methods of contact include phone calls, videoconferencing and phone apps which allow for video contact. For caregivers concerned with confidentiality, workers will review how to use \*67 to block caller ID when making phone calls.

Contact with parents and siblings can provide at least one predictable element in a stressful situation, as well as reassure children that their parents and/or siblings are safe. Permanency Workers and caregivers must consider how they can ensure that youth in care continue to have regular and frequent contact with their parents and siblings, and are able to communicate with each other at any holidays or milestones (birthdays, graduations, etc.) during this time.

**Note:** Holidays should include any recognized national or State holidays as well as holidays recognized by the religion or culture of the family of origin.

- **Permanency Workers shall establish a Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan for each child on their assigned caseloads who are allowed parent-child and/or sibling visits.** The Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan shall be in effect for the duration of the public health crisis, and shall remain in effect until further notice from DCFS.
- **The Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan shall address how parent-child and sibling visits and contacts shall occur using the technology available to the child's caregiver.** The Plan shall specify the frequency of visitation and contact that is being authorized, and:
  - identify the dates, times of day, and duration (recommended minimum: 30 minutes, but may extend to 1 or 2 hours) of each scheduled parent-child and/or sibling visit. As noted in Procedures 301 and 315, any time contact and visitation can be increased, the Permanency Worker should ensure it is done.
  - identify, by name, who is expected to participate at parent-child and/or sibling visits;
  - state whether the visit will be supervised, and if so, by whom; and
  - identify the modes of communication or contact that will be used for the visit.

As noted in Procedures 301 and 315, **any time contact and visitation can be increased, the Permanency Worker should ensure it is done.**

- **Permanency Workers shall notify the child, caregivers and each person expected to participate at parent-child and/or sibling visits of the Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan and how contact will be occurring (by phone number, etc.).**
- **Permanency Workers shall document each child's Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan and the contacts to inform participants in contact notes.**
- **Decreasing parent-child or sibling visitation is a Critical Decision!** A recommendation during this public health crisis to provide only video or phone visitation, or to reduce visitation, must be approved by the Permanency Supervisor and documented in a supervisory note.
- **In no instance shall withholding parent-child or sibling contact be used as a form of punishment or discipline.**

- Permanency Workers shall prepare a status update to the court for each child's case, informing the court of the details of the Temporary Visitation and Contact Plan. A copy of this Action Transmittal shall be attached to the status update.
- As noted in Procedures 301 and 315, **any time contact and visitation can be increased, the Permanency Worker should ensure it is done.**

## QUESTIONS

Permanency staff should direct any questions regarding this Action Transmittal through their chain of command and Private Agency staff should direct questions regarding this Action Transmittal through their APT Monitor. All other staff can direct their questions by e-mail through Outlook at DCFS.Policy. Non-Outlook users may send questions to [DCFS.Policy@illinois.gov](mailto:DCFS.Policy@illinois.gov).

## FILING INSTRUCTIONS

File this Action Transmittal behind the following sections of Procedures 301 and 315:

- 301.55 h), Visitation (temporary placement in Emergency Shelter Care)
- 301.255, Sibling Visitation With and Among Adult Siblings
- Appendix A, Family Visit Planning – Critical Decisions and Documentation Protocol
- Appendix B, Family Visit Planning Guide to Practice
- Appendix C, Sibling Placement and Visitation; Special Considerations
- 315.65, Prepare and File Initial Visitation and Contact Plan
- 315.150, The Visitation and Contact Plan