

# Child, Youth, and Family Supports

# ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Transforming our core programs and services for better outcomes

## Access and Family Visitation

Access, family visitation and transportation services are intended to enable continuity of relationships, reunification, healthy growth and development and a sense of normalcy and routine for children in care.

Access and Family Visitation planning is child-centered. This includes assessing the safety and developmental needs of the child and prioritizing what is in the child's best interests. This is done while considering the child's wishes regarding if, how and how often they wish to have contact with parents and relatives. This also recognizes the importance of the child's consistent school attendance, the child's current placement, the child's extra-curricular activities, the child's therapeutic needs, and the travel time involved for access and family visitation events.

In the first month of a child entering care, the focus of contact for the child will be with the parent who is seeking the child's return to their care and who is engaging with the agency for this purpose. Rather than an access schedule that defaults to three visits per week, we are moving to tailoring the access plan — and any subsequent family visitation plans — to reflect the child's circumstances and needs.

## Supported Access

Ideally, access will occur in as normal an environment and under as normal conditions as possible, provided safety of the child can be confirmed. The safety of the child remains at the forefront of decision making.

If the safety of the child is an issue, the agency will determine what level of **support** — either **partial or full** — is required to mitigate the concern. Preferably, support during access should be done by a safe individual who is familiar to the child and can support the child and ensure that their needs are met during access and family visitation.

Fully supported contact will only be required if a safety risk is identified. Where it has been determined that there is a need for fully supported contact, access will be periodically reviewed to ensure it is aligned with the case plan and identified progress.

## Access, Family Visitation and Transportation

**Access** — is defined as contact between a child in temporary care and custody and the parent from whom the child was removed, or any other individual identified as part of the reunification plan.

**Family Visitation** — is defined as contact between siblings, extended family members, significant others (elders, godparents, etc.) and parents not included in the reunification plan for a child in care. Family visitation should generally be unsupervised and in a community or home environment, except for sibling visits where adult supervision is required because of the ages/developmental needs of the children.

**As of March 1st, 2017, when a child enters temporary care and custody, the new access, family visitation and transportation policies will apply.**

**In fully supported access, the support participant is present at all times during the visit to ensure the child's safety.**

**For partially supported access, the support participant is present at specific periods during the visit to confirm the child's safety.**

**Transportation** — is defined as the transportation of a child to and from appointments, such as school, daycare or court. Transportation may also refer to the transportation of parents to and from appointments, such as therapy or court when no other transportation options are available.

### Some Key Shifts Include:

- Scheduling access and family visitation events at times that are best for the child
- Considering the impact of travel times and distances for the child
- Regularly reviewing and updating access plans as family circumstances change
- Scheduling access and family visitation events closer to a child's temporary home and in child-friendly locations such as a parent's or relative's home, park, community locations, etc.
- Emphasizing continuity of individuals supporting access and family visitation including engaging family members and foster parents, when possible — to limit the number of persons involved with each child
- Shifting away from detailed, narrative summaries to focused, relevant documentation specific to incidents
- Increasing permanent staffing to enhance flexibility of service provision
- Staggering staff shifts, recognizing peak access hours i.e. after school, evenings and weekends.

The new policies, provide a framework to effectively and comprehensively plan for children where contact with parents, siblings and other significant relationships are in the child's best interests.

Transition to the new access and family visitation planning process for children who entered care prior to March 1<sup>st</sup>, will occur naturally over the next 30–90 days, consistent with scheduled case planning activities for these children.