

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Child and Family Services Agency**



**Administrative Issuance: CFSA-09-25**

TO: All CFSA and Contracted Agency Staff  
FROM: Winifred Wilson, Deputy Director for Community Services  
DATE: December 2, 2009  
RE: Sibling Connections

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The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) recognizes that children may suffer trauma when they are separated from their parents. Preserving the sibling relationship often moderates that emotional trauma. To provide needed continuity and family stability during the time children are in foster care, CFSA is dedicated to maintaining the sibling bond of children placed in out-of-home care by using reasonable efforts to place and keep siblings together. When sibling groups are unable to be placed together because it is not in their best interest or it is not possible after reasonable efforts are made and documented, CFSA will ensure that on-going visitation and interaction occurs between siblings, unless such contact is contrary to their safety and well-being. This Administrative Issuance is developed in support of this philosophy and to comply with the sibling placement and visitation requirements of the *Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008*. Section 206 of the Act requires a child welfare agency to use reasonable efforts to place siblings removed from their home in the same foster care, kinship, guardianship, or adoptive placement, unless doing so would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the siblings. If siblings cannot be placed together, reasonable efforts must be made to place siblings in close proximity to each other and to provide frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between the siblings, unless this interaction would be contrary to any of the siblings' safety or well-being.

The Issuance provides guidance to the investigator, social worker and placement staff regarding making decisions about initial placements and placement changes for siblings in foster care. This Issuance is applicable to all CFSA and contract agency employees. If you have any questions regarding this administrative issuance, please contact the Deputy Director for Community Services.

**Investigator/Social Worker's Role**

To ensure reasonable efforts are used to place siblings together, the investigator/social worker is responsible for the following actions:

1. Upon removing the children or youth from their home, the investigator/social worker shall ask the parent(s) whether they have had other children voluntarily placed, removed or adopted in the past. If there are siblings already in placement, the social worker shall:
  - a. Ask the parent(s) to identify their location, and whether there are any known relatives or significant non-relatives that would like to be in contact with the children or youth and/or serve as a placement resource.

- b. Conduct a FACES search to attempt to determine the whereabouts of the child's or youth's siblings, including those who may have already been placed for adoption.
  - c. The SW shall request that the Placement Services Administration (PSA) determine if that resource family is available to accept other sibling(s).
2. Obtain as much information as possible regarding the needs of the sibling group and provide that information to the Placement Unit.
- a. The social worker shall obtain information regarding the attachment of the siblings to each other, the family and the community.
  - b. The social worker shall determine whether there are any factors that would prevent the siblings from being placed together such as:
    - i. The safety of the children or youth (i.e., unresolved physical or sexual abuse among any of the siblings, etc.)
    - ii. The special needs of one of the siblings, (i.e., determine whether any of the siblings require a specialized placement, specialized school setting etc).
3. The social worker shall continue to request and work with the PSA to identify a placement in which some or all of the siblings can be placed together, as long as the siblings remain in foster care and such a placement is in the best interests of the siblings.
- Note: If the social worker determines that placement with siblings is contrary to the safety and well-being, initially, during, or after placement, the social worker must document the reasons for not placing the siblings together in FACES. The social worker shall make this decision in collaboration with the parent, Family Court, therapist/counselors, supervisors, GAL, the resource provider and any other persons who may have a significant impact on the children's or youth's lives. Any plan to separate siblings shall be supported by a concrete plan for future contacts between the children.*
4. Before a placement can occur the investigator/social worker shall request and obtain placement approval from the PSA for all placements.

### **Placement Unit's Role**

CFSA's PSA shall use reasonable efforts to ensure that children and youth who are removed from their home shall be placed with their siblings in the most family-like, least restrictive setting. This is the standard in instances whether siblings are removed simultaneously or at different times. To ensure that this occurs, the Placement Unit is responsible for the following actions:

1. Obtain information from the investigator/social worker regarding the siblings' needs and whether there are any issues that may prevent them from being placed together.
2. Contact all placement providers to identify an appropriate placement(s) that will accommodate all or some of the siblings together.
3. If a placement cannot be immediately identified, the placement specialist shall contact St. Ann's Maternity Home for Children and place all children under the age of 13 together for a maximum of 30 days.
4. All decisions to separate siblings shall be reviewed by a placement supervisor, discussed with the social worker and his or her supervisor and the discussion(s) fully documented.

5. Whenever siblings are separated, the Placement Unit shall attempt to place the children in close proximity to each other. The children's home school location shall also be taken into account when making placement decisions. When practicable, siblings should attend the same school.
6. If siblings are separated for placement, PSA shall continue to respond to the social worker's requests to make efforts to reunite separated siblings in a suitable placement on an ongoing basis, as long as the siblings remain in foster care and when it is in the best interests of the siblings to do so.

### **Contacts Between Siblings That Are Separated**

When siblings are removed and are placed apart, the investigator/social worker shall use reasonable efforts to ensure that there are sufficient visits and frequent contacts (i.e., phone, mail, and/or email communication) among the entire sibling group to help preserve the sibling bond.

1. The social worker shall use reasonable efforts to ensure that siblings who are removed at the same time and are initially placed apart shall have contact with each other within 48 hours of placement.
2. Through the case planning process the social worker shall schedule a visitation plan between siblings as soon as possible after siblings enter foster care. The plan shall identify who is primarily responsible for ensuring that the visits occur and who is responsible for transporting the siblings for the visits.
3. The social worker shall encourage activities such as family visits, sleepover visits, attendance at one another's school and sporting events, having siblings join the same sports teams, etc.
  - a. At a minimum, face-to-face visitation between siblings who had regular contact with each other before removal should occur twice a month.
  - b. Reasons for exceptions to the sibling visitation plan or contact between siblings must be clearly documented in FACES.
  - c. Instances where visits are cancelled, not scheduled or do not take place should be fully explained and documented in FACES.
4. The social worker shall continue to request and work with the PSA to identify a placement in which some or all of the siblings can be placed together, as long as the siblings remain in foster care and such a placement is not contrary to the safety and well-being of any of the siblings.