

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Business Process: Engaging Incarcerated Parents

I. POLICY

It is the policy of CFSA to commit resources to providing children in care with regular opportunities for contact with a parent who is incarcerated or under another form of correctional supervision. Social workers are responsible for substantive engagement of these parents to ensure they are involved in the lives of their children, to strengthen family relationships and to ensure their involvement in case planning and decision making.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Locating Incarcerated Parents

1. During the investigation process, and throughout the life of the case, the assigned social worker shall initiate efforts to determine the location of a child's parent(s) when it is suspected or known that the parent is incarcerated or under correctional supervision. At a minimum, the social worker will initiate attempts to determine the parent's location every 30 days. The social worker shall complete the following activities:
 - a. Attempt to obtain the full names, aliases, nick names, addresses, telephone numbers, and any other identifying information that may be helpful in locating the person being sought.
 - b. Check FACES and hard-copy records to determine if there has been previous CFSA involvement for the parent.
 - c. Contact authorities at other government agencies for possible involvement with the parent and check for new location information.
 - d. Contact the parent's child abuse and neglect attorney and criminal attorney ("parent's attorneys") to try to locate the parent.
 - e. Contact the D.C. Department of Corrections and D.C. Jail or conduct an internet search at the websites for both the federal Bureau of Prisons (www.BOP.com) and the National Victim Notification Network (www.vinelink.com) to determine if the parent is incarcerated.
2. If the social worker is unable to locate the parent after completing the steps above, the social worker shall consult with his or her supervisor to determine whether the search is complete. A determination shall then be made by the supervisory social worker as to whether further action is required by the social worker, or whether the case should be referred to the Agency's Diligent Search Unit (DSU).
3. If the case is referred to DSU, staff from the DSU shall continue the search to locate the parent in accordance with the Agency's policy for the diligent search process. (See [Diligent Search Policy](#))

B. Contact with Correctional Authorities

1. The social worker shall only share information with appropriate correctional authorities as permitted by the Agency's Confidentiality Policy. (See [Confidentiality Policy](#).)
2. The social worker shall involve the assigned facility case manager for the incarcerated parent in planning for contact with the child and other appropriate activities throughout the life cycle of the case (such as, notifying the incarcerated parent of child support obligations, placement decisions, involvement in case planning and team meetings, medical emergencies involving the child).
3. The social worker shall coordinate with the assigned case worker every 60 days to discuss all types of communication and contact that have occurred between the parent and child, whether tasks have been accomplished and whether goals need to be reevaluated.
4. The social worker shall request, obtain and strictly adhere to all security rules and regulations of the correctional facility or program. In some instances, security rules and regulations are posted on the website of the correctional agency. (See [tip sheets on visitation with incarcerated parents](#)).
5. The social worker shall document and update as appropriate the parent's release date, conditions of release, and changes in parent's status through consultation with the assigned facility case manager and the parent.
 - The social worker shall share the parent's release date with the child's GAL, service providers, and parent's attorney.
6. In the event contact between the child and parent is interrupted, the Agency shall make efforts to reestablish and ensure contact between the child and the parent is maintained, unless such contact is determined by the family court to not be in the best interest of the child based on a clinical determination by the child's team or such contact is at any point prohibited by a court.
7. The social worker shall contact the incarcerated parent's attorney to obtain forwarding address information as necessary to continue efforts to engage the parent in the child's life.
8. When the social worker is aware of the release of the incarcerated parent and no forwarding address has been provided nor obtained, the social worker shall continue efforts to locate the parent. Once other efforts required (see Procedure A: Locating Incarcerated Parents above) have been exhausted, the social worker shall submit a referral to the DSU for further assistance in locating the parent.
9. The social worker shall consult with the parent's assigned facility case manager to determine if there is a plan for reintegration of the parent into the community. The plan developed by the facility should identify available facility and community resources that have been coordinated to address the affected parent's continuing needs (such as, housing, employment, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, HIV/AIDS counseling and medications, transportation, parenting classes, education services, vocational training, child support payments, anger management classes).

C. Engagement with Incarcerated Parents

1. At a minimum, once the location of the incarcerated parent is established and initial consultation with the assigned facility case manager occurs, the social worker shall make contact with the incarcerated parent within **30 days**, and then not less than **monthly thereafter**.
 - The frequency of contact between the social worker and the incarcerated parent is determined by the case planning expectations for the child's plan, as well as documented service and resource needs identified through the case planning process.
2. The methods used by the social worker to establish contact with a parent who is incarcerated includes but may not be limited to the following:
 - a. Seeking to obtain signed releases of informed consent from the incarcerated parent to reduce the risk of losing contact information concerning the parent's location.
 - b. Using public information to determine procedures for contacting the parent, which may vary from correctional institution-to-institution and state-to-state.
 - c. Identifying and contacting the incarcerated parent's facility case manager (via phone, email, mail).
 - d. Writing to the parent using the letter template for parents who are incarcerated (see [Notice to Incarcerated Parent](#)) and sending this correspondence via mail.
 - e. Contacting government agencies and community resources to obtain or corroborate information essential to the engagement process.
 - f. Communicating using other available methods approved by the institution for contacting parents who are incarcerated (such as, video conferencing/video visitation, email, in-person visits).
 - g. Addressing any special challenges and issues facing the parent or the child, including literacy, learning disabilities, physical or mental disabilities, or indigence, etc.
 - The social worker shall arrange for an interpreter, as needed, in advance of contact or visits to ensure there is no delay in contact between the child and parent.
3. The social worker shall document the following information on the contact screen in FACES.NET:
 - a. All direct contact and attempted contacts with the parent.
 - b. All collateral contacts to the parent or child that have implications for the visitation activity.
4. In the event that both parents of the child are incarcerated, the social worker shall make arrangements for contact or visitation between the child and each parent individually.
5. The social worker shall make efforts to engage the parent(s) throughout periods of incarceration, consistent with the current goals and concurrent planning recommendations approved by the Agency for the case. This occurs even if contact between the child and parent are contraindicated or prohibited by court order.
 - a. Unless otherwise prohibited by law or court order, the assigned social worker shall provide information to the incarcerated parent to encourage their engagement in the child's life developmental activities and progress.
 - b. The social worker shall redact, edit or remove any information that would lead to safety or security concerns, or information that any parent or caregiver has explicitly not agreed to disclose (for example, location of the child's school, foster home address, foster parent's social security number, or banking information).

- c. Unless otherwise indicated by policy, such information provided to the incarcerated parent shall be mailed. Such items include, but are not limited to the following:
 - i. Case plans
 - ii. Relevant court reports and orders
 - iii. Child's activities, achievements and educational progress
 - iv. Athletic participation and accomplishments
 - v. Child's drawings, letters, pictures (if receipt of such items are permitted by the facility or program)
 - vi. Special events in the child's life (birthdays, graduations, bar or bat mitzvah)
 - vii. Hospitalization or other medical issues. *Note: The assigned social worker shall ensure that the incarcerated parent is notified immediately when there is a medical emergency or serious medical event involving the child. The social worker shall obtain informed consent from the parent, if required for certain procedures or decisions. Arrangements shall be made with the facility case manager to share this information with the incarcerated parent.*
 - viii. Date of next court hearing involving the child. Encourage the parent to speak with his or her abuse and neglect attorney about being present for the court hearing via telephone or video conferencing if such capabilities are available and permitted by the facility or program.

D. Assessment

1. The social worker shall utilize team meetings, supervision, assessment tools, and clinical judgment to determine whether engagement or contact between each affected child and the parent who is incarcerated is appropriate.
 - If assessment determines that contact with the parent is not in the best interest of the child, contact will be limited or denied, consistent with applicable law and court orders. The social worker shall maintain contact with the incarcerated parent regardless of parent-child visitation arrangements.
2. The social worker shall participate in every contact or non-contact visit between the parent and child, as appropriate, to obtain information required for the ongoing clinical assessment.
3. The social worker shall conduct secondary and follow-up assessments to collect and analyze additional information to gain a more extensive understanding of the family's past and current situation, living conditions, family dynamics, underlying issues, strengths and weaknesses. Outstanding concerns are discussed and resolved in consultation with the social worker's supervisor.

E. Case Planning With Incarcerated Parents

The social worker shall complete the following activities related to the case planning process:

1. Provide the parent who is incarcerated with updated information on their child's progress, the child's needs, and the established goals for the case. If possible, the social worker will attempt to arrange for the incarcerated parent to participate in case planning activities over the phone.
 - The social worker shall ensure that an interpreter and translated communications are available as needed.

2. Solicit input from the incarcerated parent in terms of strengths of the child, concerns for the child, ways they believe they could be helpful and supportive to the child (such as, talking with the child about finishing his or her homework or doing chores in the foster home), placement options, and child's needs
3. Obtain information from the incarcerated parent concerning other family members who could be potential placement options as kinship caregivers or lifelong connections for the child.
 - a. The incarcerated parent should also be asked about substance abuse or other concerns that might not make one or more of these other family members a suitable candidate for kinship care.
 - b. The social worker and the parent's facility case manager shall arrange for telephone calls to establish contact and involve family members to determine if they are suitable for such roles.
4. Suggest that the parent talk with their attorney regarding the permanency plan for the child.
5. Ask the incarcerated parent about his or her release date, if/how he or she will continue or reestablish the relationship with their child and what supports they need to make this successful, and the plan for re-entering the community. If the release date is imminent, ask the incarcerated parent about his or her needs.
 - The social worker shall support the parent in planning/connecting to services in line with their case plan upon his or her release.
6. Discuss with both parents and the child, where appropriate, how visitation and parenting will occur once the parent is released. The worker should also discuss with the parent plans to fulfill the remaining requirements of correctional supervision. Lack of preparation for the parent's release may result in an uncomfortable or stressful experience when the incarcerated parent returns to the community.
7. If the child is close to aging out of the child welfare system and does not desire to continue contact with the incarcerated parent, the social worker shall engage the parent and child in a period of transition activities prior to the voluntary termination of contact by the child. All efforts concerning these transition activities shall be documented on the contact screen in FACES.NET and included in court reports.