



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY

**Chapter 10:** Guardianship and Adoption

**Section 05:** Maintaining Sibling Connections

**Effective Date:** July 1, 2023

**Version:** 5

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### POLICY OVERVIEW

The bond between siblings is often the longest lasting relationship most people have, and these bonds help children develop their own unique personal identity throughout their lives. When siblings are placed together, they are less likely to feel isolated, and they may share experiences and familiar family history. When siblings cannot be placed together, the ability to maintain contact with each other may help alleviate the emotional impact of removal for each child.

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### PROCEDURE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will, to the extent possible, attempt to place a sibling group in the same permanent home, including:

1. Any additional siblings taken into care at a later date; or
2. Any siblings of a child in a previously finalized permanent home that have re-entered out-of-home care or who may need a new permanent placement.

DCS will make an exception to the requirement of placing siblings together when:

1. There is documentation from a Qualified Mental Health Provider (QMHP) therapist, or counselor explaining why placement together would not be in the best interest of one (1) or more of the children, and why the issues cannot be rectified by intensive family services;
2. A court ordered separation of the siblings; or
3. A sibling is in residential treatment, hospitalized, or in a juvenile detention center.

Sibling visitation should be promoted for every child who is placed in out-of-home care, including visitation when all siblings are not in out-of-home care. Siblings should be placed together, but if they are not placed together, a Visitation Plan should be implemented to ensure the siblings are having face-to-face contact on a regular basis. When face-to-face contact does not occur between the child and their siblings, alternate forms of contact should be considered. See policies 8.12 Developing the Visitation Plan and 10.09 Permanency Transition Plan and Pre-Placement Visits for additional information.

**Note:** If there is a concern that sibling visitation or contact is not in the best interest of one or more siblings, DCS may seek a court order on the issue.

The Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Conduct a search for any siblings that are in separate placements;
2. Interview each sibling, if appropriate, based on the child's age and developmental level, and discuss:
  - a. Any concerns the child may have, and
  - b. The child's feelings about maintaining the sibling relationship, through visitation and phone contact if placement together is not possible.
3. Interview the parent, relative/kin, resource parent, therapist, and other service providers or individuals who may provide insight on each child's sibling relationships, as applicable;
4. Document requests for visitation from the following in the case management system within three (3) business days of receipt of the request:
  - a. Child,
  - b. Child's adoptive parent,
  - c. Resource parent,
  - d. Guardian ad Litem (GAL)/Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), or
  - e. Agency responsible for the care, treatment, or supervision of the child.
5. Provide notice of DCS findings regarding any request for sibling visitation to the individual or agency who made the visitation request no later than seven (7) business days after receipt of the request;
6. Engage the Child and Family Team (CFT) and assess the needs of the child and provide a recommendation regarding child's placement and visitation plan. See policy 5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings for additional information;
7. Forward the recommendation of the CFT and any information gathered from the parent, relative/kin, resource parents, therapist, and other services providers or individuals that provided information to the FCM Supervisor for review;
8. Document all actions, including any decision to not place the siblings together, into the case management system; and
9. Implement the visitation plan and ensure sibling connections are addressed in the child's permanency transition plan if children are not able to be placed together. See policies 8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan and 10.09 Permanency Transition Plan and Pre-Placement Visits for more information.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Review the recommendations of the CFT and the information gathered from the parent, guardian/kin, resource parent, therapist, other service providers, and other individuals as applicable;
2. Make a recommendation based on the information gathered by the FCM;
3. Ensure a Case Plan Conference or staffing with the Adoption Consultant is scheduled, if applicable. See policy 5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan for more information;
4. Provide assistance and guidance during regular case staffing to ensure all documentation is complete and in accordance with best practice; and
5. Ensure all documentation is entered into the case management system.

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## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### Definitions

#### Case Staffing

Case staffing is a systematic and frequent review of all case information with safety, stability, permanency, and well-being as driving forces for case activities.

### Forms and Tools

- [Adoption Consultant Map](#)
- Visitation Plan – Available in the case management system

### Related Policies

- [5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings](#)
- [5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan](#)
- [8.13 Implementing the Visitation Plan](#)
- [10.09 Adoption Transition Plan and Pre-Placement Visits](#)

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## LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 31-9-2-117.3 “Sibling”](#)
- [IC 31-28-5-3: Persons who may request sibling visitations; department establishment of sibling visitation; department's notice of findings](#)

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## PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 10.05

*Practice Guidance is designed to assist DCS staff with thoughtful and practical direction on how to effectively integrate tools and social work practice into daily case management in an effort to achieve positive family and child outcomes. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.*

### **Long-term Impact of Sibling Relationships**

The complex bonds linking brothers and sisters are universal and among the most important in life. These relationships form the blueprint for later relationships with peers, friends, marriage partners, and their own children. Siblings share the same genetic makeup; this becomes very important as children move into resource and adoptive families where they may differ in physical and cultural experiences, as well as differences in medical predisposition, talents, and intellectual capabilities. A sibling is the only person who knows how things were in both the family of origin and the subsequent history of foster care placement. Integration of the child's past experiences, along with future experiences will help in the child's development and understanding their own identity.

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