

## Questions to Guide Planning and Evaluating Visits

The questions below can help caseworkers as they plan and evaluate visits. Answers to these questions will help determine how frequently visits should occur, when and where they should be held, who should be involved in them, whether supervision is necessary, and whether changes in the visiting plan are needed.

The questions below are organized around children, parents, and caregivers. They should be adapted as needed to reflect the particular case situation, for example, placement with a relative or the need for visits with persons other than parents.

### Children

- Child's significant relationships:
  - Who does the child define as family?
  - What relationships are important to maintain or build through visiting, including both those that existed before placement and those that might be created as a result of diligent search?
- Child's chronological and developmental age:
  - How frequently does the child need to have contact with parents and siblings in order to sustain relationships?
  - How able is the child to care for self?
  - How vulnerable is the child to potentially harmful situations?
  - How able is the child to structure his or her own activities?
- Child's requests:
  - For an older child, what is the child asking for in terms of visits, and what does this mean?
- Child's reaction to visits:
  - What reactions—positive and negative—does the child have to visits, and what is the meaning of these reactions?
  - If the reaction appears to be negative, is it a normal response to separation or does it suggest problems in the visiting situation or the parent-child relationship?
- Child's developmental tasks:
  - How can visit activities enhance the child's developmental progress?
- Child's therapeutic needs:
  - If applicable, how can visits help achieve therapeutic goals?
- Child's schedule:

How can visits encourage parents to be involved in the child's daily routines and in special events?

How can visits ease separation reactions by beginning and ending at natural transition points such as before or after school?

## **Parents**

- Parents' behaviors and abilities related to reason for placement:
  - How can visits promote and support the changes necessary for the child to be safe in the parents' home?
  - How can visits enable assessment of the child's safety in the home?
  
- Parents' compliance with visiting plans:
  - To what extent have parents complied with visiting plans to date?
  - If parents have failed to comply with the plan, what is the meaning of this failure?
  - Are there barriers to visiting that must be eliminated?
  
- Parents' requests:
  - What do the parents want in terms of visits, and what does this mean?
  
- Parents' past endangering behaviors:
  - Is there a history of attempted abduction; threatened or attempted harm to the child or other family members; leaving the child unsupervised or in harmful situations; or other endangering behaviors, such as use of illegal drugs in the child's presence?
  
- Parents' reactions to visits:
  - What reactions—positive and negative—do the parents have to visits, and what is the meaning of these reactions?
  - Are the parents able to refrain from expressing their reactions inappropriately or in a manner hurtful to their child?
  
- Parents' schedules:
  - How can parents' schedules be reasonably accommodated?
  - How important is visiting in relation to other expectations imposed by the agency and how can multiple expectations be addressed?
  
- Family Relationships and Interactions
  - How do family members interact during visits? Are the interactions healthy for the child?
  - What arrangements can minimize stress or conflict among family members during visits?
  - What arrangements will encourage parents to interact with their children rather than with other people during visits?
  - How can visit arrangements tap into and build upon the family's social support network?

## **Substitute Caregivers**

- Supporting substitute caregiver involvement in visiting:
  - Have substitute caregivers received training and information on IceBreakers during the recruitment and screening process, and what do substitute caregivers expect regarding their role in visiting? Appendix 4.1 describes Ice Breakers.
  - What help has been provided to substitute caregivers involved in visiting such as reimbursement for transportation costs?
- Substitute caregivers' willingness and ability to assist with visiting:
  - Are the substitute caregivers willing and able to allow visits in their home; to supervise visits in their home or elsewhere and, as requested, to document what occurs; and to teach a parent how to care for the child?
  - Are the substitute caregivers willing and able to provide transportation?
  - If unwilling or unable to assist with visiting, will the substitute caregivers support other agency efforts? If so, in what ways?
- Substitute caregivers capacity to support visiting:
  - What are the substitute caregivers' attitudes toward the child's parents?
  - Do the substitute caregivers value the child/parent relationship?
  - Can the substitute caregivers appropriately limit their relationships with the child's parents?
  - Can the substitute caregivers objectively record visit interactions?
  - Will the substitute caregivers intervene in a visit as necessary?
  - Will the substitute caregivers maintain confidentiality?
  - What are the substitute caregivers' resources in terms of physical and emotional energy and time?
  - Can the substitute caregivers be flexible and tolerate stress?
  - Can the substitute caregivers recognize their need for assistance, and are they comfortable in asking for help?
- Substitute caregivers' schedule:
  - How can visit arrangements minimize disruption of the substitute caregivers' schedule?
- Impact of visiting on other children in the substitute caregiver's home:
  - How distressing are one child's visits to other children in the home?
  - Does the substitute caregivers' support of one child's visits result in neglect of other children in the home?