



For additional copies of this Handbook please contact:

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Pennsylvania Teen Visitation Handbook

Who can you contact?

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Caseworker | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: _____ • Phone Number: _____ |
| Attorney or GAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: _____ • Phone Number: _____ |
| Casework Supervisor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: _____ • Phone Number: _____ |
| Administrator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: _____ • Phone Number: _____ |
| _____ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: _____ • Phone Number: _____ |
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The Purpose and Benefit of this Visitation Handbook

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you information and guidance regarding visits with your family. In this booklet, you will find information on:



- Why Child Welfare is involved with your family;
- Why visits are so important while you are in placement;
- What your rights are surrounding visits; and
- Answers to some questions you may have about visits.

In the back of this booklet are the names and phone numbers of important people working with you if you have any questions about your visits.

Why is Child Welfare involved with my family?

The job of a child welfare agency is to protect children from abuse and neglect, to keep families together when possible and to make sure every child has a safe place to live. Being safe means having food, safe housing, clothing, education, medical and emotional needs met through safe parenting to help you grow.

The child welfare agency can go by different names in different counties but the names you will hear most of the time will be Children and Youth Services (CYS) and Children, Youth and Families (CYF). Regardless of the name, the role of the agency is the same in all counties.

Most of the time when the agency receives a report, you can stay in your home with your parents and receive services to address safety concerns. Other times you may have to live somewhere else while your parents address the safety concerns.

What types of things might I feel before, during or after my visits?

It is normal to have questions or have strong feelings before, during and after your visits, such as sadness, anger, fear, anxiety or helplessness when you are not with your family. You may also experience excitement and happiness. Whatever emotions you are feeling are ok.

Everyone experiences different emotions and at different times. Sometimes you might have social events going on at the same time as a scheduled visit. You may prefer to go to your social event. Wanting to spend time with friends and do personal things is very normal. This does not mean that you do not love or want to see your family.

You should feel comfortable talking to your caseworker or caretaker about the events going on in your life so that your caseworker can try to adjust your visitation schedule.

Being away from your family can be hard. Frequent, meaningful visitation that takes place in the most family-like setting that allows you and your family to interact most naturally will help you feel connected and help your family stay involved in your life, until you are able to return home.

If you have questions or need help managing your emotions before, during or after visits, please reach out for help. Individuals who can help you are listed on the next page.



Will I be able to see my extended family?



It is important for you to let your caseworker know who in your extended family and community are important to you. Your caseworker is required to check out the people you identify and include them in your case planning, which includes your visitation plan.

Please talk to your attorney if this is not happening.

What do I do if I have concerns about visits?

There are several people you can talk to about your visits. You can start with the person you are living with such as a family member or foster parent. You can also talk to your caseworker, their supervisor, your attorney, or the guardian ad litem who has been assigned to represent you.

If you have a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) you can talk to them. You can also talk to the Judge. It is very important to the Judge that your voice is heard. The Judge will want to hear about how your visits are going.

You may be placed with a relative, friend of the family, in a foster home, or in a group home facility. Always be sure to talk to your caseworker and your attorney about family and friends who you would feel safe living with until you can go home.

Living temporarily with people you already know may help you and your family feel more comfortable.

When you have to live outside of your home, visitation must be set up for you and your parents. This will keep your relationship strong and help you deal with being away from your family. A meeting should take place to develop a visitation plan for you and your family. You and your family should ask that everyone you love and care about be included in developing this plan. Visitation is a very big part of you returning home so you should talk to your caseworker and attorney about seeing your family as often as possible.

Why are visits important?

Visitation with your family helps you stay connected. Your visits are important because you need to see your family no matter what has happened.

Visitation is a right, not a privilege, and should never be withheld as a punishment for your behaviors or as a result of your parents actions. You do not have to “earn” visits.

Visits should never be withheld because you do not reach a certain “level” or need an “adjustment period.” Visits will help you get back home to your family.

Visits that are meaningful and happen as frequently as possible are important to your relationship with your parents and assist in getting you home as quickly as possible.



What are my Rights?



Do I have the right to visit with my parents?

Yes. You have the right to visit with your parents or caretakers if you are not living with them.

Who has the right to put limitations on my visits? Like, who can or cannot be there,

The only person who can put restrictions on your visits is a judge. These restrictions will be spelled out in a court order.

Do I have any say about where my visits take place and what is in my visitation plan?

Yes, you should. If you are not with your parents a meeting should be held to cover these areas. At this meeting a plan is written to make sure everyone knows why the visits are happening, what everyone hopes to see from the visits, where they will be, how many times you will visit, how long, who will be there, what everyone's roles are, how everyone will get to the visits, and any special things that can happen during your visits with your parents.

Understand there are times when this might not occur because of safety. The Judge will have the final say, but every effort should be made to keep you in contact with your sibling(s).

If it is not safe for you to see them in person, discuss different options with your caseworker and caretakers such as phone calls, video chat, going to an event together, or writing each other letters to help maintain the bond between you and your siblings.



If your siblings are still living in your home, your parents may bring them to their scheduled visit. If your siblings are placed in another foster home or placement location, arrangements will need to be made for you to see them. Make sure to talk to your caseworker and attorney about your desire to see your siblings.

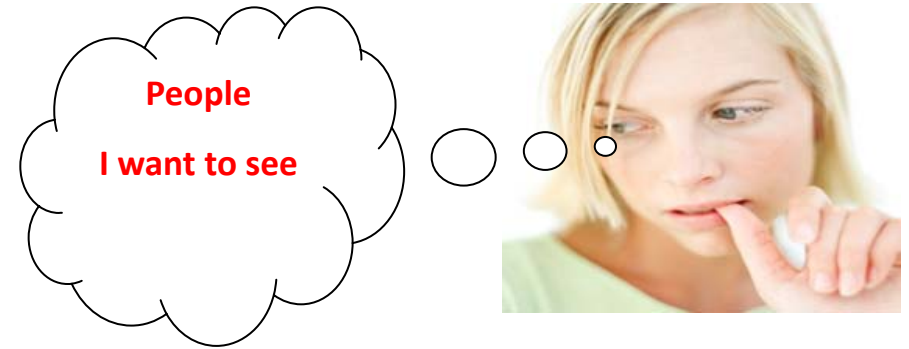
Can visits be taken away from my parents?

The only time visits can be taken away or limited is through a Judge's court order. If this occurs, it is most likely due to a concern for your safety. It is unlawful for visits to be taken away as punishment. Remember that visits are a right, not a privilege.

If you are in a group home setting, there may be times when your visits occur at the facility versus going home on what is often called a "home pass". As long as you are safe, these visits should gradually increase to be more frequent and in more family like locations.

What happens if my parents miss a visit?

Parents may miss a visit for a number of reasons including, transportation problems, work schedules or an illness. What is important for you to know is that your parents are not missing a visit because they do not want to see you. Parents are often very upset that they could not make their visit and seek to have a “make-up” visit scheduled so that they can see you. When a visit is missed, the agency will often do their best to schedule another visit so that you can see your parents.



Can I talk to my parents on the phone?

You will have the opportunity to talk with your parents on the phone. In most instances there may be rules surrounding the time and how long phone contact can occur. Discuss this with your caseworker or attorney.

Will I be able to see my brothers and sisters?



Special laws were written, such as the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, that require the county child welfare agency to arrange times and places for you and your siblings to see each other.

So I have a question about....



How soon after I am placed outside of my home can I visit with my parents?

The County Agency is to arrange for a visit between you and your parents as soon as possible, but no later than 72 hours after you are removed. You should also have a visitation plan developed right away with your family, which states when you will visit, where you will visit, how often you will visit, and if a professional will be in your visit with you. Your visitation plan will also say who else will be part of your visits. Your visitation plan should become part of your Child Permanency Plan. The goal when developing your visitation plan is for everyone to work together so that you and your family can maintain and build a strong bond. A Family Group Decision Making conference is a great place for your family to develop your visitation plan. Ask your caseworker or attorney about this as an option for you and your family. You can also contact your attorney or speak to the Judge if you have any questions or concerns about your visitation plan.

How often and where can I visit my parents?

You should see your parents as frequently as possible and as approved by the court. Your visits should take place in the most family like setting to allow natural interaction between you and your parents or guardians. This location could include your own home, a family member's home, a community location, a visitation house or the agency. Visitation in the agency should be rarely used as a location.

Besides my regular visits, are there other times when I can see my parents?

There are other times when you can see your parents. When safe and appropriate, your parents can attend medical, educational, and social events. These should not be counted as visits, but a way for your parents to continue to meet your needs and stay connected to what is happening in your life. In order for your parents to be aware of these events, it will be important for everyone, including you, to communicate when these events occur. If there are any special events you would like your parents to attend, please be sure to talk to your caseworker or attorney.

Finally, your voice is necessary and important to ensure you have the most meaningful visitation with your family. If you do not feel satisfied with your visits, please talk to your caseworker or attorney.

What if my parents do not have transportation to get to our visit?

Transportation arrangements for your parents can be made when developing the visitation plan. This should be discussed with your parents at the time of the visitation planning. While the agency may be able to help your parents with transportation, family and friends should also be considered.

This is something that is your parents' responsibility to discuss with your caseworker or their attorney.

