



NH Department of Health & Human Services  
Division for Children, Youth & Families

## DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

### 1503.3 MAINTAINING SIBLING CONNECTIONS-CPS

Policy Directive: **20-32**

Approved:

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This SOP defines procedures for maintaining sibling connections for children involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) through an open case.

#### Procedure

*The following information is to support the implementation of the above referenced policy. This document shall not preclude staff from using their professional judgement based on individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the policy.*

- I. When siblings are separated due to placement, frequent contact can be essential to maintaining their connection. For as long as siblings remain apart and in care, ongoing efforts will be made to maintain and support this connection. These efforts may include, but are not limited to:
  - A. Supporting caregivers in recognizing the need for ongoing connection and encouraging their participation in ensuring regular contact;
  - B. Setting the expectation with caregivers that the siblings will have regular visitation together and that they will celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions together, including exploring and problem solving around barriers to visitation;
  - C. Keeping siblings in close geographical proximity to each other so that regular and frequent contact is possible;
  - D. Keeping siblings in the same school or school district;
  - E. Keeping siblings in the same daycare (if applicable);
  - F. Enrolling siblings in camp or other activities together (if applicable);
  - G. Encouraging regular contact via telephone/videoconferencing, texting, social media, or email/other written correspondence (as developmentally and age appropriate, unless there are safety concerns);
  - H. Assessing needs/barriers and utilizing caregivers, family, and community supports, and if necessary, paid services, to facilitate visitation or other contact; and

- I. Strengthening the sibling connection when necessary by providing individual family therapy or other services to promote a healthy relationship when appropriate.
- II. When siblings must be removed from their home, the CPSW is expected to explore placement options that will allow the siblings to remain together unless there are child-specific needs (as outlined below) that warrant separate placement.
- III. The appropriateness of placing siblings together must be given significant consideration with placement together as a priority. Factors to be reviewed include:
  - A. The connection between the siblings;
  - B. Any safety concerns around the siblings being placed together;
  - C. Any special placement circumstances that might inhibit placement together, such as:
    1. The availability of a protecting parent who is not biological parent to the sibling and is not able/willing to provide care for the sibling;
    2. The availability of a relative caregiver who is not biologically related to the sibling(s) and is only able/willing to provide care for the child they are related to; or
    3. The unavailability of a relative caregiver or foster home that can take the sibling group; and
  - D. The specific needs of one or more of the siblings that may warrant placement apart from their sibling(s). Specific needs may include one sibling's:
    1. Need for specialized care, such as medical care or hospitalization;
    2. Developmental or behavioral needs; or
    3. Need for a more intensive placement, such as a residential treatment program, to meet developmental or behavioral needs.
- IV. When consideration is being given to separating siblings, Field Administrator approval is needed.
- V. If the decision is made that siblings cannot be maintained together at the start of placement, efforts must be made to reunify the siblings as soon as possible. These efforts must continue until the children have been reunited, permanency has been achieved for all siblings, or it is determined that continued efforts to reunify the sibling group are not in one or more of the children's best interest. These efforts shall include:

- A. Continued exploration of the possibility of the caregiver of one sibling providing care for the other sibling(s) (the relative is considered a relative of the sibling through affinity and therefore eligible for consideration);
  - B. Reassessing once the specific needs that initially warranted separate placement are overcome or stabilized;
  - C. Continued exploration of a home that will accommodate the sibling group;
  - D. The implementation of services to meet specific barriers to placement including:
    - 1. Safety concerns;
    - 2. The specific needs of one or more of the siblings; or
    - 3. Additional supports needed by a potential home to maintain the sibling group. These services should be used to address the needs of a caregiver who is willing to care for the sibling group with support;
  - E. A 3 month initial Permanency Planning Team (PPT) meeting that specifically addresses the barriers to sibling reunification;
  - F. Continued, consistent, and specific discussion around the barriers to sibling reunification during each sibling's subsequent PPTs and other team meetings (treatment meetings, etc.) that includes specific tasks set to move efforts at sibling reunification forward; and
  - G. Regular discussion around sibling reunification in ongoing supervision.
- VI. When a sibling remains in the home and another is removed, connections between the siblings must be maintained whenever possible. These efforts will be ongoing (as outlined above) until permanency is achieved.
- VII. All efforts to place siblings together, or support the sibling relationship and reunite them when separated, are documented in the DCYF electronic information system. This will include documentation around efforts discussed at any PPTs or other team/treatment meetings.
- A. If frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between siblings does not occur, documentation is entered into the DCYF electronic information system explaining why and if contact would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the sibling(s).

### Frequently Asked Questions

- Q1. If one child is going to live with their non-accused parent, who is not the parent of the sibling but who is willing and physically/financially able to care for the sibling, can I place the sibling with them if they are not a licensed foster home?**

**A** Yes, you are able to place a child in the home of a relative of a sibling as a relative placement because the non-related child is considered a relative through affinity.

**Q2. What if a relative caregiver wishes to care for a sibling group, but finances are a barrier?**

**A** If financial considerations are a barrier to relative placement, consult with your Resource Worker about the possibility of the relative being permitted and becoming a licensed child-specific foster home.

**Glossary and Document Specific Definitions**

A - B   C - D   E - F   G - I   J - L   M - N   O - Q   R - S   T - V   W - Z

**Document Change Log**

<b>PD</b>	<b>Modification Made</b>	<b>Approved</b>	<b>Date</b>
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