



Close to Home Practice Bulletin January 2008



Close to Home

Expectation: Make concerted efforts to ensure that the child's out-of-home placement is close enough to the parent(s) home to facilitate frequent face-to-face contact between the child and the parent(s) and siblings while the child is in foster care. It is preferable that the child remains in their neighborhood and in their same school placement. The location of the child's placement should be based on the child's needs and intended to ensure that the child's case plan goals are achieved. If the child's parents live separately, determine which parent is most involved in case planning and is most likely to be reunified with the child. Preference should be given to a location that will allow frequent contact with that parent.

Visits, Reunification and Connections: Visitation is the single most important factor in maintaining the relationship between the child and the biological parent while the child is in placement. Visits that occur early in the placement and often support attachment and have been demonstrated to promote earlier reunification. Neighborhood based placement promotes parents staying as connected as possible with their children.

When children are not reunified timely, the most frequent reason cited include foster care placements far from the birth families' homes and inadequate resources (such as transportation and supervision) to facilitate more frequent visits.

If the child is placed farther than 30 minutes from the parental home, maintaining weekly visits can be a nightmare. It also makes it difficult for parents, who often have transportation issues to participate in school activities, doctors' appointments, and important events in the child's life.

Placement close to home can also promote children visiting with their siblings and sometimes even having

daily contact when they attend the same school.

When a child is placed in foster care there are multiple disruptions in that child's life. If they remain in their neighborhood or community, they can more easily maintain connections with friends, extended family, and participate in community activities that are important to them. When children are placed in their own neighborhood, there are fewer disruptions with school and school progress.

Being placed **close to home**, promotes resource family and parents relationships from which the child and the parent can benefit. It makes it easier for the parent who may have challenges with transportation. It also relieves the foster parents who are often relied upon to provide transportation for visitation with the parents.

One foster parent related, "If mom is in the neighborhood and you have a problem with a kid, you can call mom and have her come down to sit with a kid who won't sleep at night until they've seen their mom. "That really helps.

General Notes on Choosing a Placement Setting

The worker should carefully choose a placement setting that can meet the child's individual needs and that will minimize the changes to which the child must adapt. The child should be placed in the least restrictive, most homelike environment possible.

- ❑ The child should be placed as close to home as possible to minimize the number of losses they will experience. Relatives, family friends, and neighbors must be assessed to determine their willingness and ability to provide care for the child.
- ❑ The fewer changes in lifestyle and environment, the better.
- ❑ A placement should be chosen that would allow the child to remain in the same school, if at all possible.
- ❑ Research shows that group homes, receiving centers, or other institutional settings are inadequate placement substitutes for young children (Berrick, Needell, Barth, and Jonson-Reid, 1998). Placement in group care should be avoided even if there is a lack of available family foster care. In situations with limited relative or foster family care, relative, recruitment and training of foster family homes should be a priority.
- ❑ The success of the placement is greatly increased when the child's family and the foster family are involved in the planning and implementation of all aspects of the placement.