

Language that Cares

You will notice some changes to language within this guidance which will be different from what you may be used to. For instance, the document will refer to **Child in Our Care Review** instead of LAC Review, and **Family Time** instead of contact.

We are working hard to think more carefully about the words we use. Language is incredibly powerful and from individual practitioners to the service as a whole, we have a responsibility to our children and families to use language that is inclusive, respectful and keeps people, rather than their circumstances or status, at its heart.

This will be a journey for us, as the task is a big one. We will need to change language in forms, procedures and processes as well as challenge ourselves and partners in practice to change, what for some will be, long standing habits and norms.

Any ideas you have for this work are welcome and we hope you find this Guidance useful in starting to consider how we use our words differently and, with care.

Introduction

Seeing and speaking to children and young people about their lives, experiences, worries and dreams is at the heart of child and family social work. In fact, for a lot of practitioners, it is one of the very reasons they became a social worker.

Across our service we use a ‘Statutory Visit’ form to record when we visit children at home or in their placement, to better understand their lives, circumstances and build trusting and meaningful working relationships that help to support and keep children safe.

Recording visits to Children in Need, Children in need of Protection and Children in Our Care is a requirement within Social Work practice. They are useful, informative accounts and provide relevant information that enables best practice in planning for a child. The recordings we complete of visits also form part of a child’s record which one day that child may view as an adult, looking back on the Social Worker who came to see them and how they were included and involved in decisions about their lives.

However, when we are gathering information, conducting assessments or delivering interventions to support and keep children safe - effective and well recorded statutory visits can be a demanding and often complex task.

What should you look out for? Where do you begin? What questions should you ask? What needs to be recorded and what doesn’t?

Within this Practice Guide you will find details of the procedural and service expectations for visiting children and young people, along with some useful and practical tips and hints which focus on good practice.

Practitioners should read this guide in conjunction with the TriX Procedures



**Children should be seen by their Social Worker in line with identified need and risk.**

Risks and the needs of children are dynamic, and the frequency of visits or visiting pattern should be needs led. Visits to a child and their family may need to be increased depending on the circumstances and what is happening at any given time.

The initial visiting pattern should be agreed through assessment and / or at CIN/CP Reviews. In all cases the patter must be authorised by a Team Manager. Visiting patterns should be updated by the core group / care team in line with developments in the plan that enable us to adjust our response as needs and risk change over time. Changes to the plan must be agreed by a Team Manager and will be considered in future review meetings.

**For Child Protection Cases, this should include unannounced visits.**

Newcastle Children’s Social Care requires that children subject to a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan are seen at the family home *at least* once every 28 days. Remember children can also be visited in other environments, e.g. extended family member’s homes, schools or community setting. It should be clearly recorded where the child was seen within the visit. When visiting a child in an alternative setting you must always consider (where applicable) issues of consent from those with Parental Responsibility.

**The family home must continue to be seen every four weeks with the child present**

An observation of the family home should take place during the visit when the child’s bedroom, the family bathroom and the kitchen area should be seen. This may be more frequent if there are concerns about neglect and / or home conditions.

**Children must be seen on their own unless there are exceptional reasons to prevent this and these reasons must clearly be recorded**

**For babies and infants, it is critical that children are seen awake and at different times of the day so that their lived experiences can be ascertained and understood**

Section 37 & Section 7 Visits

The minimum statutory visiting pattern must be followed when a **Section 37 Report** has been requested by the Court and a Court Assessment form has been opened on ICS.

The statutory visiting pattern may be required when a **Section 7 Report** is requested, and a Court Assessment document is opened on ICS for this reason. Any decision not to complete visits in line with the minimum of four-week statutory visiting pattern in this specific circumstance must be clearly discussed and recorded within supervision and evidenced within CareFirst as a supervision action.



It is good practice and a service expectation that when a child is placed into care they are accompanied by their social worker to the placement. Where this is not possible, we should make every endeavour to ensure that it is someone the child knows, has met before and feels comfortable with. Following this, the child's social worker must visit at the following intervals:

* Within one week of the start of any placement;
* Then at least once every four weeks **during the first year** of the placement;
* Thereafter, at intervals of no more than 6 weeks;

The frequency of visits should be agreed within the Care Team and should also be written into the child’s Care Plan. Practitioners should review the visiting pattern regularly at Care Team Meetings and within Child in Care (CIC) Review Meetings and this should include understanding how the child or young person feels and their wishes.

**Meetings involving a child or seeing a child during Family Time do not constitute a statutory visit**

**Some visits should be unannounced.** The foster carers, parent or residential unit should be informed by the child's social worker at the time of placing the child that there will be occasional unannounced visits and the reason for this explained, which will be case specific.

**Whatever the placement arrangements and irrespective of where the child is placed, the child must be seen in private and alone**

(unless the child is of sufficient age and maturity and refuses, or the social worker considers it inappropriate to do so having regard to the child’s age and understanding).

Exceptions to the Visiting Pattern for Children in Our Care

**Children Placed with Parents**

PWP- Pending Assessment: Social work visits must take place at least once a week until the first CIC Review, thereafter at intervals of not more than **6 weeks**.

PWP - Interim Care Order: Social work visits must take place at least once a week until the first CIC Review, thereafter at intervals of not more than **4 weeks** or until the final hearing has been completed in the care proceedings.

PWP - Care Order: Social Work visits must take place within one week of the Care Order, thereafter at intervals of not more than **6 weeks**.

**Children Placed with Connected Persons**

If the child is placed with a [**Connected Person**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/connect_pers.html) with temporary approval, visits must take place at least once a week until the first CIC Review, thereafter at intervals of no more than every four weeks or until the carer is approved as a foster carer.

**Children Placed in a Young Offenders’ Institution or Health Care Setting, etc.**

If the child is in the care of the Local Authority where another person is responsible for the child's living arrangements (e.g. A child is remanded) visits must take place within a week of the start/change to arrangements and at intervals of no more than every four weeks.

**Notice of Concern by the Registration Authority**

Where a Registration Authority notifies a local authority in respect of a children’s home, a fostering agency, a voluntary adoption agency, or adoption support agency, that the Registered Manager has had their Registration withdrawn, proceedings brought against them or notice served - Then a visit must also be made within one week of receiving a notification made under [**Section 30A of the Care Standards Act 2000**](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/section/30A).



**What time did you visit? -** Try to plan visits at different times in the day in order to observe how the child and their parent(s) or carer(s) interact throughout the day.

**Who is present? -** Be specific about who is present during the visit. This should include parent(s), carer(s), immediate and extended family members as well as any family associates.

**What was the condition of the home or placement? -** Be specific in your observations relating to home conditions. For example: the garden, lounge, kitchen and bedrooms. Are they appropriately clean and with all amenities present? What items does the child have access to in his/her bedroom? What are the bed routines/times?

**What was the child wearing? -** Does the child have appropriate clothing? Or are they in need of new clothes? Does the child have enough clothing/underwear? Do they know where to get their clothes washed?

**How does the child interact with their parent(s)/carer(s)? -** Does the child feel confident to discuss information with their carer(s)/parent(s)? What is their relationship like on observation?

**Speak to the child alone. -** Age and ability appropriate: how are they coping/feeling? What is their daily routine? What are their likes and dislikes, worries or concerns and what do they feel positive about? Do they feel safe at home, school, in the community? Practitioners can use the Participation Toolkit for a number of accessible resources, tools and activities for engaging children and young people in conversations and 1:1 session.

**Child’s plan -** All children (where safe and appropriate to do so) should be spoken to with regard to their CIN, CP or CIC plan.  If in care proceedings- children should be notified of the court proceedings and process.

**For a full and comprehensive Practice Overview for completing Statutory Visits, please use this guide in conjunction with the TriX Procedures Manual.**