# Visiting Children Best Practice Guide

## Updated Jan 2023

## Visiting Children – Children in Need, Children supported by a Child Protection Plan and Children in our Care.

This guidance provides standards and expectations and promotes best practice for visiting children (including statutory compliance) to all children and young people in North Somerset. The purpose of all our work is:

*“To have authentic, close relationships with children of the kind where we see, hear and touch the truth of their experience and are able to act on it”*

What are our guiding principles and good practice standards? There may be a number of reasons Social Workers are visiting children at a frequency significantly more than ‘minimum requirements’, this will include (but not be limited to):

* Developing a new relationship with a child
* Sustaining a relationship with a child
* Addressing and discussing needs and/or safeguarding concerns
* Increased risk or new significant issues highlighted
* Direct work with children
* Developing your understanding of their daily life
* Delivering specific sessions focusing on goals for change and or delivering therapeutic interventions.

As with all interventions with children their views will need to be considered when discussing, negotiating and agreeing the visiting frequency with them. If a young person is struggling to engage in the plan of intervention or agree to a visit from their workers, you are expected to be tenacious in demonstrating unconditional positive regard and continuing to form or sustain a relationship.

There are several underlying assumptions that all Social Workers will need to consider when carrying out a Statutory Visit to a child, these are:

* All children, notwithstanding their age, will be seen and spoken to in the place where they are living and in a variety of environments which are important to the child, such as school, separated parents’ homes and wider family members.
* All children must be given an age-appropriate explanation of why they have an allocated Social Worker and what the plan of support they are receiving is and what it is trying to achieve.
* Ensure all children in the family are seen. Keep in mind **sibling groups and how each child may experience home life differently** and the impact of this on individual children within the family.
* The child’s personal physical surroundings, e.g. bedroom/play areas must be seen in a regular and appropriate basis and routines known and understood in terms of the impact on the child.
* In accordance with age and understanding, the child should be notified in advance when a visit is to be completed (unless unannounced)
* Social Workers should ensure that they are not late and only in very exceptional circumstances should visits be cancelled.
* The Social Worker must manage their time to allow the visit to be planned, meaningful, dynamic and creative.

**Take time to know the young person you are working with, what they enjoy, what their concerns are and what are their ambitions and aspirations.**

**Spending time with children, talking to them, and making sure that you are actively listening and taking seriously what they say is an essential safeguarding activity.**

## 1. Why is it important to visit children and young people in a variety of environments.

* The primary address of where the child is living is the most important environment to see the child in and therefore visits to the home MUST be completed at least every 28 days.
* Part of the practitioner’s central role is to build a relationship with the child. This relationship is crucial to ensuring that assessment and planning for children, and practice, is centred on the child’s needs, and takes account of their views and their understanding of their lived experience and world.
* Most children, for whom we have responsibility, have had difficult and sometimes traumatic experiences, and need support from practitioners to regain their confidence and trust in adults.
* In some cases, children may need the opportunity to share their voice and expertise outside of the home. Alternative environments could include school, separated parents’ homes, and the wider family/network. It is important to see children in different settings to build a holistic picture of their life and world.
* Research shows that children want to be listened to and to be treated respectfully.
* Building a relationship with a child requires regular contact, not only in times of crisis but also at times when the child’s life is relatively calm and undisturbed.

## 2. What do I need to do before I undertake a home visit/visit to a child?

* Before an announced visit takes place, the practitioner must arrange the visit with the family/carers and plan the purpose of the visit.
* Before an unannounced visit takes place, the practitioner must schedule the time and plan the purpose of the visit.
* Consider any risks that have been identified within the referral and/or Chronology. If risks are identified to the children/household members clear planning must be given to ensure that your visits are not going to trigger or escalate the risk. Each practitioner should also consider any potential risks to themselves and, when necessary, discuss a safety plan with their manager which may include visiting with a colleague and use of a safety phone call back to the manager if the workers are not returning to the office. Where significant risks are clear, if threats to the worker have been made the manager will compete a risk assessment before the visit commences.
* When possible, read and/or compile a chronology of significant events.
* Fully understand the purpose of the visit:
  + Safeguarding the child
  + Gathering the child or young person’s view
  + Ensure the welfare of the child
  + Meet statutory responsibilities and compliance
  + Address and discuss specific issues
  + To understand the family dynamic and who is part of the family unit (remember to keep the father and wider network in mind)
  + Undertake direct work/intervention with the child and/or family
  + Assess the home environment
  + Inform planning for the child/young person

## 3. What do I need to do during a visit to a child/young person?

* During all visits and statutory visits, the practitioner must:
  + See the child (alone where appropriate).
  + Explore with the child how they feel and their views about their life (using direct work skills and tools).
  + Observe relationships and undertake ‘intimate depth’ of practice in the home environment (Ferguson 2011).
  + Assess and critically think about holistic needs of the child and how they are being met at home.
  + Communicate with children and carers about planned next steps.
  + Consider how to capture the child’s contributions and feelings.
  + Review progress of the plan and past agreed actions.
  + Note any significant events/changes to the plan.
  + Undertake direct work/planned interventions.

## 4. What is a statutory Child Protection Visit?

A Statutory Child Protection visit is a visit made to a child who is supported by a Child Protection plan, where meaningful engagement and interactions has taken place.

A Statutory Child Protection visit will only be deemed to have taken place if the child has been **seen** and meaningful engagement has taken place.

* Meaningful engagement is not:
  + Briefly seeing the child in passing.
  + Dropping something off to the family home.

In these cases where a child is seen but not in a meaningful way this should be recorded as a case note. If you are uncertain if your visit was a statutory visit, you should seek management oversight.

* Meaningful engagement is:
  + Conversations about the child’s life and their plan.
  + Direct work – wishes and feelings.
  + Detailed observations.
  + Playing games with the child.

**Children supported by Child Protection plans must be seen every 10 working days, and at home at least every 28 days.**

Any **failed** statutory Child Protection visit (that is where the child was not seen) must be brought to the attention of the Team Manager immediately and a further statutory visit attempted within agreed timescales with your manager, no later than 48 hours. Repeated or continued failed visits must be discussed with the Team Manager and a course of action agreed to ensure the child is seen and that he/she is safe and well.

All statutory Child Protection visits should be a combination of announced and unannounced visits.

The Child Protection plan must be discussed and referenced within the purpose and plan for the visit. When appropriate to do so the plan and progress of the plan should be discussed with the child (age appropriate) so that they know what adults are worried about and what adults are doing to try and help.

## 6. What is the frequency of visits?

**For Child in Need (CIN) Plans** – The frequency of the visits should be:

* Agreed with the Team Manager on an individual basis.
* At least every **20 working days.**
* Or more frequently if indicated in the CIN plan.
* Visits need to be recorded as a CIN Visit on LCS within 5 days.

**For Child Protection Plans** – the frequency of visits must be:

* At least every **10 working days** (at least once in every **28 days** in the primary home address).
* Visits may be needed more frequently if indicated in the Child Protection plan and in agreement with the Team Manager.
* Visits need to be recorded as a CP statutory visit on LCS within 48 hours.

**For Children in our Care** – the frequency of visits must be:

* Within one week of the start of any new placement.
* At intervals of not more than 6 weeks for the first year of placement.
* Thereafter, where a placement has been identified as intending to last until the child is 18 years, the visits should be at no more than 3-monthly.
* Where a child is living within an adoption placement, children will be seen weekly for the first 4 weeks and 6-weekly thereafter until adoption order is made.
* Visits need to be recorded as CLA Child in Care statutory visits on LCS within 5 days.

In addition, the Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 state in Regulation 28 (3A):

*“If the child is in a long-term foster placement (see definition) and has been in that placement for at least one year, and the child being of sufficient age and understanding, agrees to be visited less frequently than required paragraph (2) (c), the responsible authority must ensure visits at intervals of no more than 6 months”.*

In these circumstances, any decision to extend the frequency of visits as outlined above must be agreed by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) at a Child in Care Review. Visiting frequency is inextricably linked to purpose and any risks identified. Social Workers are expected to consider increasing their visiting frequency regularly with the young person and team manager as and when circumstances change. If the young person requests to see their Social Worker more frequently than the agreed visiting frequency we should listen to their voice and offer visits proportionally.

References:

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

Child Protection Practice, Harry Ferguson 2011