

NEWCASTLE CSC VISIT GUIDE



Seeing, Speaking
To and Spending
Time with
Children and
Young People



June 2024



**Newcastle
Children's
Social Care**

Child Centred

Working Together

Family Solutions

Safety at Home

Balanced Response

Challenge and Support



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 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 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 our service's requirements for the frequency of visits to 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.



Allocated Worker Expectations

Newcastle Children's Social Care's policy is that the allocated worker for the child is responsible for completing visits. As such, it is expected that all visits are undertaken by the child's allocated worker.

In exceptional circumstances, such as attendance at court or planned and unplanned leave, there may be a need for another suitably qualified worker to undertake a visit to the child.

It is expected that when a practitioner other than the child's allocated worker has completed the visit, this is done so with management approval and oversight. We must ensure that families are made aware when this will happen and the reasons why, acknowledging that change is difficult, and the introduction of new workers or unknown professionals can be confusing, disappointing or even upsetting for children.



CHILD PROTECTION VISITS

Children subject of a Strategy Meeting need to be seen within 1 working day (24 hours) of the Strategy Meeting unless it is agreed otherwise. The rationale for this later visit must be detailed within the meeting minutes/ record.

When a **Section 47 investigation** is in progress, children must be seen at least **once every 5 working days**, until the enquiry is concluded and authorised.

Newcastle Children's Social Care requires that children **subject to a Child Protection Plan are seen at the family home at least once every 10 working days**.

This should include **unannounced** visits.

Remember, children can also be visited in other environments e.g. extended family member's homes, schools or community buildings. It should be clearly recorded where the child was seen within the visit. When visiting a child in an alternative setting, practitioners should always consider (where applicable) issues of consent from those with Parental Responsibility.

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 they are seen awake and at different times of the day so that their lived experiences, level of care and daily routines can be ascertained and understood.

Children should be seen by their Social Worker in line with identified need and risk. Presenting risks and the needs of children are dynamic and the frequency of visits to a child and their family may need to be increased depending on the circumstances and what is happening at any given time.



CHILD IN NEED VISITS

Children subject of a Child & Family Assessment must be **seen within 3 working** days of the child being allocated.

When a **Child & Family Assessment is in progress**, children must be seen at least **once every 28 days** (20-22 working days), until the assessment is concluded and authorised.

Newcastle Children's Social Care requires that children **subject to a Child in Need Plan are seen at the family home at least once every 28 days** (20-22 working days).

Remember, children can also be visited in other environments e.g. extended family member's homes, schools or community buildings. It should be clearly recorded where the child was seen with the visit. When visiting a child in an alternative setting, practitioners should always consider (where applicable) issues of consent from those with Parental Responsibility.

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.

Visiting patterns should include opportunities to see and spend time with the child alone. For babies and infants, it is critical that they are seen awake and at different times of the day so that their lived experiences, level of care and daily routines can be ascertained and understood.

Children should be seen by their Social Worker in line with identified need and risk. Presenting risks and the needs of children are dynamic and the frequency of visits to a child and their family should be reviewed regularly.



Section 37 & Section 7 Visits

The minimum 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 minimum will be determined by whether the child is subject to a child protection or child in need plan.

The 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 visiting pattern in this specific circumstance must be clearly discussed and recorded within supervision and evidenced within CareFirst/ Eclipse as a supervision action.

Children subject to Support & Commissioning Arrangements

The minimum visiting pattern for a child open to our service by virtue of support and commissioning is 1 visit every 6 months. The child should also benefit from a review of the support and commissioning arrangements once every six months – creating a pattern of a visit or review for the family at least once every 3 months.

Whilst this is the minimum requirements, children's needs and their families support requirements will change over time and it is more often than not that more frequent visits and meetings may be required. The visiting pattern should be individual to the child, their family, and the identified support needs.

Children who are Privately Fostered

The minimum visiting pattern for a child in a private fostering arrangement is once every 4 weeks until the first review. The visiting pattern should be discussed at the first review and where proportionate and agreed, the minimum visiting pattern will change to at least once every 6 weeks.



VISITS TO CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

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.

These visiting frequencies are defined in law in the care Planning and Review regulations and so these visits are referred to as Statutory Visits.

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 standard 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 **2 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 **2 weeks** or until the final hearing has been completed in the care proceedings.

PWP - Care Order: Social Work visits must take place at intervals of not more than **4 weeks** following the making of the order.

Children Placed with Connected Persons

If the child is placed with a **Connected Person** 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 **4 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 **4 weeks**.

Children Placed for Adoption

If the child is placed for adoption, the child and prospective adopter must be visited within one week of the placement and once every 5 working days until the first review. The first visit will usually be undertaken by the child's social worker. If the adoption social worker or another worker is to undertake this visit agreement must be given from the manager of the child's social worker and the adoption manager.

The weekly visits can be shared between the child's social worker and the adoption social worker but there should be clarity from the outset about which worker will conduct each visit. It may not be appropriate for the adoption worker to undertake the visit as in the early stages of placement the child may not be familiar with the worker. As part of the visit, the visiting social worker should see the child without the prospective adopter being present. The child's age and



relationship with the visiting worker needs to be taken into consideration and a “common sense” approach taken to seeing a young child on their own so soon into a new placement.

A first review must be held within the first 4 weeks after the date on which the child is placed for adoption. The visiting schedule must be agreed within the first review. Good practice suggests that a similar frequency to those undertaken to a looked after child should be followed. For this reason, it a minimum of monthly visits from the child’s social worker should continue up until the second review. The child’s social worker will be responsible for all visits to the child following the first review. If any other worker is to undertake these visits, this needs to be agreed with the line manager for the child’s social worker.

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](#).

Where a child is placed in an arrangement outside of these parameters, the visiting pattern needs to be determined by the relevant Service Manager and reflected on the child’s file.

Visits to Young People 18+

The statutory timescales for visiting a care leaver (18+) is **once every 60 days**. This is the minimum requirement and must be adhered to, however it is fully expected that more frequent visiting and communication would be supported if the young person needs or requests this.

If a care leaver is placed in custody, visits will increase to 2–6 weekly.

Visits should be led by the young person however focus must be given by the LCSO in respect of their emotional wellbeing, housing, finances and employment, training and or/ education.



VISIT HINTS & TIPS

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.

