# Visiting Children Best Practice Guide

## Updated October 2023

## Visiting Children and Young People – Children supported by Intensive Family Wellbeing, Children in Need, Children supported by a Child Protection Plan, Children in our Care, and Care Experienced Young People.

This guidance provides standards and expectations and promotes best practice 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 practitioners are visiting at a frequency significantly more than ‘minimum requirements’, this will include (but not be limited to):

* Developing a new relationship
* Sustaining a relationship
* Addressing and discussing needs and/or safeguarding concerns
* Increased risk or new significant issues highlighted
* Direct work
* 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 and young people their views will need to be considered when discussing, negotiating and agreeing the visiting frequency with them. If there are struggles with engagement either in the plan of intervention or agreement to a visit, you are expected to be tenacious in demonstrating unconditional positive regard and continuing to form or sustain a relationship.

## 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 them in and therefore visits to the home MUST be completed at least every 28 days.
* Part of the practitioner’s central role is relationship building. This relationship is crucial to ensuring that assessment, planning and practice, is centred on their needs, and takes account of their views and their understanding of their lived experience and world.
* Most children and young people, 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, they 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 them in different settings to build a holistic picture of their life and world.
* Research shows that children and young people want to be listened to and to be treated respectfully.
* Building a relationship requires regular contact, not only in times of crisis but also at times when life is relatively calm and undisturbed.

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

* 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/young people/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 not returning to the office. Where significant risks are clear, if threats to the practitioner have been made the manager will compete a risk assessment before the visit commences.
* Fully understand the purpose of the visit:
  + Safeguarding visit
  + Gathering their views
  + Ensure their welfare
  + 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
  + 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/young person (alone where appropriate).
  + Explore 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 and how they are being met at home.
  + Communicate about planned next steps.
  + Consider how to capture their 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. Statutory Visits**

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

* Notwithstanding their age, they will be seen and spoken to in the place where they are living and in a variety of environments which are important to them such as school, separated parents’ homes and wider family members.
* They 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 individual may experience home life differently** and the impact upon them within the family.
* Their personal physical surroundings, e.g. bedroom/play areas must be seen on a regular and appropriate basis and routines known and impact understood
* In accordance with age and understanding, they 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 child or young person you are working with, what they enjoy, what their concerns are and what are their ambitions and aspirations.**

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

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

A Statutory Child Protection visit is a visit made to a child or young person 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 or young person has been **seen** and meaningful engagement has taken place.

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

In these situations 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/young person is seen and that they are safe and well.

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/young person (age appropriate) so that they know what adults are worried about and what adults are doing to try and help. It is also important we hear what their thoughts and ideas are about how their safety can be prioritised.

**6. Children with Disabilities**

Children with Disabilities (CWD) often require their practitioners to have specialist communication skills such as Makaton, Pecs, Teach. Whilst we aim to equip our colleagues with such skills there are of course occasions when this is not possible, there will also be use of signers. Children with specialist communication needs often have other professionals who spend much more time with them and with whom they have built strong relationships. In these situations, it is unreasonable to expect the child or young person to meet with their social worker or Family Support Worker without the reassurance of this person who is best able to understand their communication needs. Therefore, seeing a child with disabilities along with another professional constitutes seeing the child alone in these circumstances. If the child is on a CP plan seeing the child alongside the parent even if this relationship aids communication with the child, does not constitute a statutory visit.

## 7. What is the frequency of visits?

See Appendix A for frequency.

Whilst there is a minimum practice standard, visiting frequency is inextricably linked to purpose and any risks identified. Practitioners are expected to consider increasing their visiting frequency regularly with the child/young person and Team Manager as and when circumstances change. If the child/young person requests to see their practitioners more frequently than the agreed visiting frequency, we should listen to their voice and offer visits proportionally. This should be discussed in supervision and recorded clearly.

**8. What are our recording standards?**

**For Children supported by Intensive Family Support**

* Visits to be recorded as Family Support Worker visits on EHM within 5 days.

**For Child in Need Plans**

* Visits to be recorded as a CIN Visit on LCS within 5 days.

**For Child Protection Plans**

* Visits to be recorded as a CP statutory visit on LCS within 48 hours.

**For all Children in our Care**

* Visits to be recorded as Child in Care statutory visits on LCS within 5 days.

**For Children with Disabilities supported by packages of short break care**

* Visits to be recorded as a CIN Visit on LCS within 5 days.

**For Care Experienced Young People**

* Visits to be recorded as Leaving Care Stat Visit statutory visits on LCS within 5 days. Post 21 – Leaving Care Contact.

**Appendix A – visit headings to be used by any practitioner visiting children**

**Aim/purpose of visit and type**

**Where, who was present?**

**The child/children's views & or observations (written to the child)**

**Observations home/parent (or carer), interactions with children & their views**

**Analysis & Safety/Wellbeing Plan**

**Agreed actions & timescales**

**Appendix B**

**Frequency of visits:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Service** | **Frequency** |
| **Intensive Family Wellbeing** | At least every 20 working days. |
| **Child in Need (CIN) Plans** | At least every 20 working days. |
| **Child Protection Plans** | At least every 10 working days (at least once in every 28 days in the primary home address). |
| **Children in our Care** | 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 no less than 3-monthly. (If agreed at a Child In Care review) |
| **Children in an adoption placement** | Within one week of the start of the new arrangement.  At weekly intervals for the first 4 weeks and 6-weekly thereafter until adoption order is made. |
| **Children with Disabilities supported by packages of short break care** | 6 monthly |
| **Care Experienced young people (aged 18-21 years old)** | 8 weekly |
| **Care Experienced young people (aged 21 and older)** | Agreed via Supervision as there is no statutory expectation after the age of 21. |

**Appendix C**

| **Rule Description** | **After Event or Recorded Date** | **Before First Review** | **In First Year** | **In Subsequent Years** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Default Timescales - Until Age 18** | 1 week after event date or user defined date |  | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 3 months |
| **Default Timescales – Other cases** | 1 week after event date or user defined date |  | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Regulation 19** |  | In intervals of 1 week | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Regulation 24** |  | In intervals of 1 week | In intervals of 4 weeks | In intervals of 4 week |
| **Care Order under Section 31** | 1 week after event date or user defined date |  | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Other Living Arrangements** | 1 week after event date or user defined date |  | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 3 months |
| **Default Timescales – until age 18 (CIN)** | 6 weeks after plan start date or user defined date | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Children in Foster Placement, S20, ICO, CO** | 1 week after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 12 weeks |
| **Placement with Parents During Assessment** |  | In intervals of 1 week | In intervals of 4 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Placement with Parents under ICO** |  | In intervals of 1 week | In intervals of 4 weeks | In intervals of 4 weeks |
| **Placement with Parents under CO** | 1 week after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Relative friend, connected person** | 1 week after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 1 week | In intervals of 4 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks |
| **Remanded to LA, Youth Detention Accommodation** | 1 week after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 3 months |
| **Placed with Foster Carers Short Breaks** | 1 day after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 3 months | In intervals of 6 months | In intervals of 6 months |
| **Children in Residential Placements** | 1 week after placement date or user defined date |  | In intervals of 6 weeks | In intervals of 12 weeks |
| **Care Leavers** | 7 days after placement date or user defined date | In intervals of 2 months | In intervals of 2 months | In intervals of 2 months |
| **CIN Statutory Visit** | 20 working days after plan start date or user defined date | In intervals of 4 weeks | In intervals of 3 months | In intervals of 6 months |
| **Child in Need – DCS 8 Weeks** | 8 weeks after plan start date or user defined date | In intervals of 8 weeks | In intervals of 8 weeks | In intervals of 8 weeks |