


**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201**

**DATE:** July 15, 2015

**POLICY #:** SSA-CW #16-03

**TO:** Directors, Local Departments of Social Services  
Assistant Directors, Services

**FROM:**   
Deborah Ramelmeier, Executive Director  
Social Services Administration

**RE:** Caseworker Visitation with Child  
Replaces SSA #12-7

**PROGRAMS AFFECTED:** Out-of-Home Placement Services

**ORIGINATING OFFICE:** Out-of-Home Placement

**ACTION REQUIRED OF:** All Local Departments

**REQUIRED ACTION:** Implement Policy and Procedures

**ACTION DUE:** August 1, 2015

**CONTACT PERSON:** Jill Taylor, LCSW-C  
Manager, Out of Home Placement  
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**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to set forth the requirements for local department caseworker visitation with a child in out-of-home placement. This includes any child that is under an order of shelter care, commitment, guardianship or voluntary placement agreement to the local department of social services. Visits are face-to-face contacts with a child, which involve directed and purposeful communication and interaction. This policy supplements any court orders, L.J. Consent Decree requirements, or circumstances, which may require a caseworker to have more frequent visits with a child. The standards established by this policy are minimum standards and may be increased according to the child's needs, circumstances, and best interest. The policies for both the frequency of visits and the contents are included.

**BACKGROUND:**

The local department is required to have frequent contact with all children in out-of-home placement. Contacts can be in the form of phone calls, emails, letters, or visits. A visit is a face-to-face contact that includes dialogue (or communication as appropriate to the age and ability of the child) and exchange of information pertinent to the child and family. This distinguishes a visit from a simple contact. Visitation is extremely important to the provision of appropriate child welfare services, meeting the needs and best interest of the child, and achieving permanency. The information gathered by regular, purposeful visitation with the child is one of the greatest assessment tools available to the child welfare professional.

***Visitation Frequency:***

Visitation frequency is the number of visits that are required during a specified period. Caseworker child visits may be combined with other visits, such as when the caseworker is in the home for a trial home visit, home visits with the foster parent, or during a visitation between siblings where the foster parent or parent provides the location or transportation. While visits should be scheduled, it may be beneficial to case assessment to allow for an occasional impromptu visit. Scheduled visits should be made by the 25th of the month to allow for rescheduling due to unforeseen emergencies.

***Visitation Content:***

All visits shall involve a stay of sufficient duration to allow full and frank discussion with the child. Visitation content is the directed or focused activities to be completed by a caseworker during a visit. The main content requirements are communication, observation, and assessment. Content standards set forth areas of information to be derived from these activities during a visit.

***Purpose and Outcome:***

All visitations shall be conducted to accomplish the following:

1. Setting the stage for the communication and interaction during the visit;
2. Obtaining essential information for case management;
3. Allowing for active participation of the child in permanency case planning;
4. Obtaining information for ongoing assessment of the child and the child's relationship with his/her family and supportive others;
5. Ensuring that the child's needs for safety, permanence, and well-being are met;
6. Providing individual life skills guidance and assessment when exiting care to promote

- successful transition for productive self-sufficiency; and
7. Ensuring that the placement meets the needs of the child.

National minimum standards for visitation require that a child is visited by the caseworker at least monthly and that the content of the visit is directed so as to provide information to aid in the assessment of the child's needs and well-being and to promote accomplishment of the permanency goal.

### **Monthly Visitation Frequency:**

#### ***Monthly Visitation:***

The caseworker shall visit with the child in out-of-home placement at least monthly (e.g. once per month). This applies to every child in the care and custody of a local department, **regardless of placement type or location**. The caseworker shall visit with every child in out-of-home placement in the child's placement 7 out of 12 months. The child's placement is the place where the child sleeps. During the visits at the child's placement, the caseworker shall observe the child's bedroom. If the child is in a group home or residential treatment facility (RTC), the caseworker shall observe the bedroom and living areas for the child. Children placed out-of-state in group homes or RTC placements shall be visited monthly if fiscally or geographically feasible. If it is not fiscally or geographically feasible for monthly visits, the caseworker shall visit the child in the out-of-state group home or RTC placement quarterly. If the visits are quarterly, the visits shall occur in the placement and the caseworker shall observe the bedroom. The location of the monthly visit may be varied as appropriate for the child. Visits can occur during transportation and waiting periods for medical visits, in the placement, at school, at a community area, or a social area such as a fast-food restaurant.

*\*Youth placed in Semi Independent Living Arrangement (SILA) shall be visited at least once monthly but more frequently depending on the youth's needs and independent living goals.*

#### ***Placement/Re-placement Visitation:***

The caseworker shall conduct a face-to-face visit with the child within 5 business days of placement or re-placement. This visit shall occur in the child's actual placement and the caseworker must observe the bedroom where the child shall sleep.

#### ***College Visitation:***

Children/youth enrolled in college (in-state) shall also be visited monthly. The caseworker shall observe the room where the child/youth resides at least once during the school year if the child/youth resides in an on campus dorm. If the child/youth resides off campus in their own apartment, the 7 out of 12 month rule applies. Visits shall be made to the "home placement" (i.e. where the child/youth stays when not at school) during school breaks. When children/youth are enrolled in out-of-state schools, the caseworker shall visit monthly when geographically and fiscally feasible. If the caseworker is unable to visit monthly, the caseworker shall maintain monthly contact via emails, letters and telephone calls. If it is not fiscally or geographically feasible for monthly visits, the caseworker shall visit the child/youth enrolled in the out-of-state college quarterly.

***Approved Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC):***

When Maryland is the receiving state for children through interstate compact, the caseworker shall visit the child monthly and provide the sending state quarterly reports on the child's progress. The reports shall be sent to the sending state through the interstate office and shall not be sent directly to the sending state. Children who are in the custody or guardianship of the local department placed in another state (out of state placement) through interstate compact shall be visited by the receiving state monthly. An out of state placement includes any placement not within Maryland, including placement in out of state tribal service areas. Maryland has no designated tribal service areas within the state. The caseworker shall document these visits in MD CHESSIE on the contact screen in the same manner as visits completed by the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) caseworker. Children placed out-of-state in group homes or RTC placements shall be visited by the Maryland caseworker monthly when fiscally or geographically feasible. If the Maryland caseworker is unable to visit monthly due to fiscal or geographical feasibility the Maryland caseworker shall visit quarterly.

***Trial Home Visit:***

Intense visitation is crucial when a child is returned to the care of a parent and/or legal guardian. During the period of aftercare, the caseworker shall visit the child in the placement **at least once every two weeks**. These visits shall occur for the entire period of time the child is in the local department's care. At least one of the parents/legal guardians shall be present during these visits.

**Child Visit Content:**

All visits shall be of sufficient duration and privacy to allow the child the opportunity to express any concerns regarding the placement, services or the child's needs. The suggested content for the face-to-face visit with a child include:

- Discussions of relevant issues related to why the child is in care;
- Safety;
- The service needs of the child;
- The service needs of the parent/family;
- The necessary steps to achieving permanency for the child;
- Placement;
- Education;
- Health;
- Social and interpersonal areas;
- Financial Literacy;
- Family Planning;
- Life skills issues for self sufficiency; and
- Transition Plan.

**Child Visit Content – Focus Areas:**

The documentation of each visit shall include at minimum a discussion of major focus areas related to the child. This narration is a result of interacting with the child during the visit. The discussion during the visits shall be relative to the child's age and ability. While a great deal of the focus information can come out of talking with a child 4 years old or older, the younger child or special needs child may not be able to speak with the caseworker on the issues. The

caseworker may have to use alternate ways of communication and observation to be able to gather information in the focus areas.

***Child Identification:*** The caseworker shall use visits to maintain a good quality, up-to-date picture of the child including descriptive information (e.g. hair color/style, identifying marks such as tattoos or piercings, glasses, braces, eye color, height, et cetera). **The picture of the child along with the descriptive information needs to be regularly updated in MD CHESSIE.**

***Child safety:*** This includes not only the overall safety of the placement as related to the child's care needs, but also any illness, incidents or injuries that may have occurred since the last visit.

***Physical and Mental Health of the Child:*** The caseworker shall observe and discuss how well these needs are being met. This may include discussion and assessment on whether medical appointments and follow-up are being completed, how the child is feeling (any illness in the past month), whether needed mental health services have been arranged and how the child feels about the services.

***Progress of the child and child's concerns:*** The caseworker's discussion with the child shall focus on what the needs of the child are from the child's point of view, what concerns/complaints the child has about the placement, school, family, staff, and social interactions. In turn, the caseworker must report the child's concerns/complaints. A child, parent or caseworker may initiate a complaint to report concerns about a placement. If the concerns/complaints relate to a group home or a private treatment agency, the caseworker must complete the online Complaint Form located on the DHR Knowledge Base intranet webpage under the Office of Licensing and Monitoring (OLM) link (see pages 7-8 for instructions on how to find and submit the Complaint Form). OLM is required to investigate all complaints made against group homes and private treatment agencies. Any concerns related to LDSS approved foster homes must be reported to the LDSS and reviewed, evaluated and resolved by the LDSS. The process of reporting a concern provides an opportunity for the caseworker to further assess how the child is adjusting to the placement and to foster care.

***Child's relationships or visits with parents, siblings, and other relatives:*** The caseworker shall discuss how these meetings, visits, contacts, or interactions went and how they can be improved, and what the child's expectations are regarding these occasions and relationships.

***Child's relationships with caregiver and staff:*** The caseworker shall observe the interaction between child and caregiver, including other children present during the visit. This observation provides an opportunity for the caseworker to document the behaviors and conditions impacting placement.

***Overall well-being of child:*** The caseworker shall discuss with the child how things are progressing, how the child is feeling, and if the child's overall needs are being met. This includes whether educational needs are met, how the child is doing in school, how they feel about school, and if the child is receiving the educational services they need.

## **Placement Observation**

In-Placement visits have an extra content standard: placement observation. During the in-placement visit, the caseworker shall observe and document:

- The conditions in the home, including the child's bedroom, and assess how it impacts the safety of the child;
- The parental interaction with the child or children;
- The interaction with the family in their home setting to identify strengths and areas of difficulty/stress;
- Any new distinguishing marks, scars, tattoos, et cetera. These identifying features are to be found anywhere on the body and can be anything from small marks to piercings, tattoos that simply specify a name or have an artistic bent or scars from recent/previous wounds;
- The need for additional services; and
- Other individuals visiting or residing in the home in relation to:
  - How frequent are these individuals in the home?
  - Are they living there?
  - Do they change or impact the risk levels or safety threats within the family?
  - Are these individuals a support or resource for the family?

During in-placement visits, caseworkers are also required to look beneath the surface for any situation where they suspect that a child may be or has been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Knowing the red flags and indicators of human sex trafficking is a key step in identifying victims and helping them find the assistance they need. For example, any child detained on prostitution-related offences should be screened given the clear linkage between sex trafficking and prostitution. Caseworkers are expected to utilize the **Foster Care Screening Interview tool** for assistance with identifying victims of human trafficking and help trafficking victims obtain the protection and services they need.

Furthermore, the caseworker shall determine during the in-placement visit whether there have been any changes in the household composition, and if so, follow-up with the foster parent/caregiver regarding those changes. As previously noted, it is important that the caseworker remember to allow the opportunity for some privacy during the in-placement visit, away from the foster parent/caregiver and other children in the home.

## **Communicating With Child During Visits:**

Visits with the child shall be a focused conversation and interaction, not a question and answer session. The child age 4 and over shall be given an opportunity during visits to meet privately with the caseworker, out of the presence of the foster parent or caretaker. This time is an essential part of allowing the child to openly share concerns regarding treatment and care.

Visits with special needs children or children under age 4 who may not have communication skills require other types of interaction and observations. Caseworkers can use several strategies to assess children that lack the capacity to communicate their needs or concerns. This includes observations of each caregiver's verbal and nonverbal interaction with the child. Observations need to cover the following:

- How the parent or caregiver talks to the child;
- How/whether the parent or caregiver shows affection and warmth;
- How the parent or caregiver sets boundaries and offer guidance.

Additional strategies to assist children that lack the capacity to communicate their needs and concerns include:

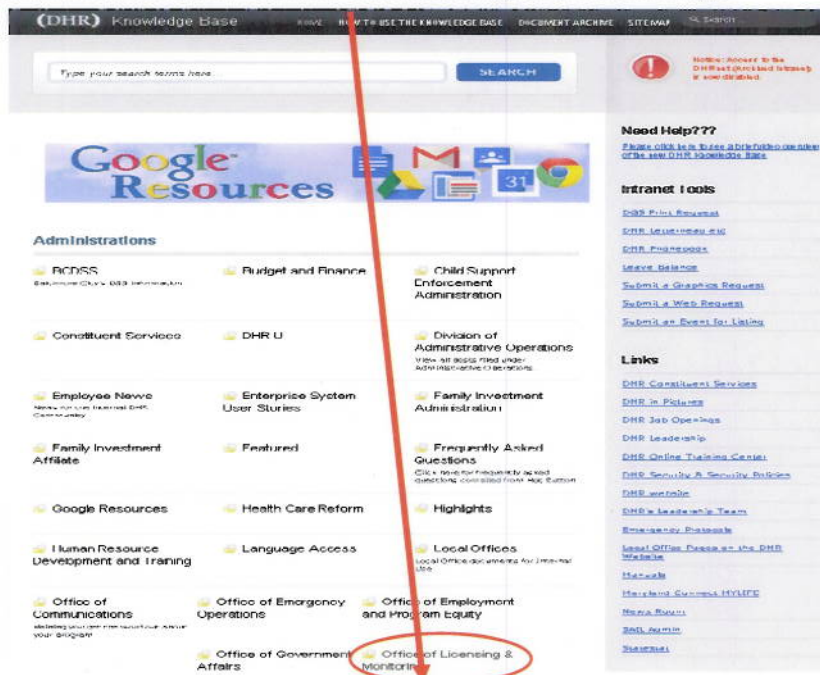
- Providing the child with choices;
- Consulting with family to determine what is culturally appropriate for the child and family;
- Breaking down questions and or concerns into smaller, more manageable parts so the child better understands what is being communicated.

In general, the caseworker determines how best to interact and observe the child in order to address each content area. Visits with youth age 14 years and older shall include discussion of transition planning. Once a transition plan is established for the youth, the caseworker shall review the goals and monitor the progress during the monthly visits with the youth.

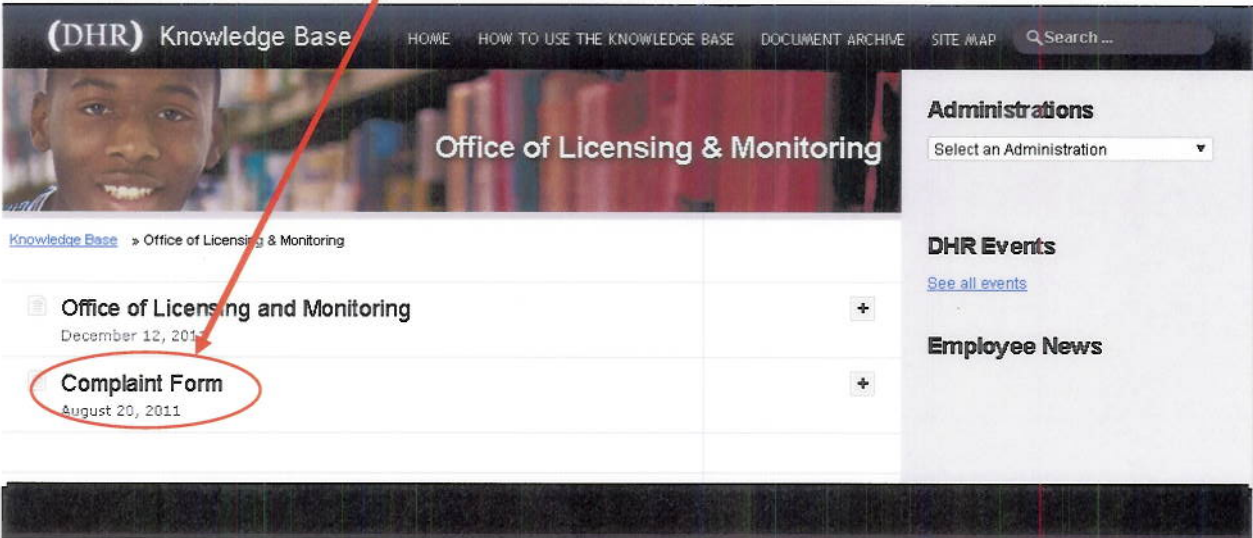
### How to Submit A Complaint to the Office of Licensing and Monitoring (OLM)

The following are step-by-step instructions for reporting a complaint to the Office of Licensing and Monitoring:

- Go to the DHR Knowledge Base homepage located at: <http://kb.dhr.maryland.gov/blog/>
- Scroll down the DHR Knowledge Base homepage, under the Administrations heading, and click on the link titled “Office of Licensing and Monitoring.”

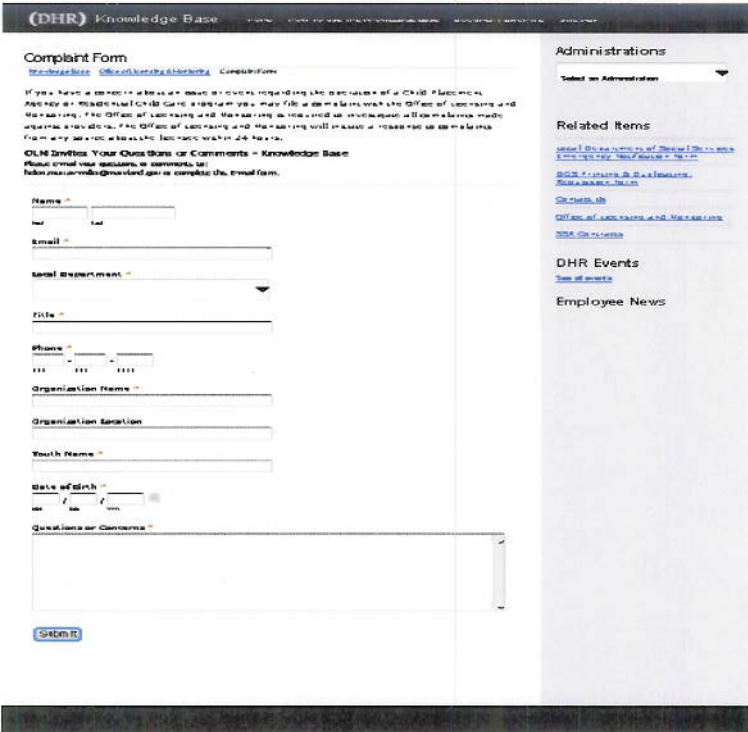


- You will be taken to the Office of Licensing and Monitoring webpage. Please note there are two available options: "Office of Licensing and Monitoring" and "Complaint Form." Click the link titled "Complaint Form":



Items on the Complaint Form are self-explanatory or are discussed below. The headings match the headings on the Compliant Form.

- Local Department:** Specify the Local Department of Social Services providing services to the child.
- Questions or Concerns:** Describe the concern, issue, question or event regarding the operation of a Child Placement Agency or Residential Child Care program for which clarity and direction are sought.





- Please e-mail questions, comments and concerns with respect to the Complaint Form to [helen.murray-miller@maryland.gov](mailto:helen.murray-miller@maryland.gov).

### **MD CHESSIE:**

All face-to-face contacts, as well as planned visits and reasonable efforts, shall be documented in the case record Contact Sheets in MD CHESSIE. The monthly visit with the child shall be documented as immediately as possible in the case record but not later than 5 business days after the visit occurs. Documentation is crucial to visitation compliance. The contact sheets shall include discussions of the major areas listed in the content standards. Proper documentation of caseworker visits with children in out-of-home placement is necessary for visitation statistical reports to state and federal stakeholders. MD CHESSIE shall contain the official record of the caseworker visit.

Steps for documenting in MD CHESSIE:

1. Locate the case on your tree & click (+) next to the Case Head name.
2. Click the Contacts folder to open the Contact Summary Screen.
3. Click New Contact hyperlink at the bottom of the screen to open a new contact.
4. The Contact screen has 3 tabs across the top of the screen
5. Detail Tab- the following is required to document the monthly visit in placement:
  - Date and Time must be date and time the visit occurred;
  - **Type of contact must be “Face-to Face”;**
  - **Location, if at the child placement “Child’s Residence”;**
  - The Contact Initiated button should be selected;
  - Duration of Contact must be entered;
  - Status should be “Completed”;
  - Participants must include the child;
  - **Reason must be “Monthly Visit”.**
6. Comments Tab allows worker to write a narrative of the visit.
7. If the visit is conducted by someone other than LDSS staff, the worker and agency conducting the visit must be listed in the narrative. If an outside entity is conducting visits (ICPC out of state placements, for example), the staff person doing the visits should be added as a collateral in the case and selected as a participant when documenting the contact.
8. Click Save after completing each tab.

Pre Production - Contacts - Service Cases (#3168124)

Service Cases > Poddestwo, Patti (#3168124) > Contacts

Home Search CIS Window Help Exit

Home  
 Referrals  
 Investigations  
 Service Cases  
 Poddestwo, Patti (#3168020)  
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 Case Service Summary  
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 Provider Referrals  
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Contact Summary  
 ID: 3168124 Type: Service Case Name: Poddestwo, Patti

Contact Date	Entered By	Entered Date	Contact Location	Contact Type	Status	Updated Date

[New Contact](#) [Detail](#) [Contact Log Report](#) [Detail Contact Report](#)

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