



NH Department of Health & Human Services
Division for Children, Youth & Families

DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

1503.4 MAINTAINING SIBLING CONNECTIONS-JJS

Policy Directive: **20-32**

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Implements Policy: **1503**

Approved:

Joseph E. Ribsam, Jr., DCYF Director

This SOP defines procedures for maintaining sibling connections for youth involved with Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) through an open case.

Procedure

The following information is to support the implementation of the above referenced policy. This document shall not preclude staff from using their professional judgement based on individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the policy.

- I. When siblings are separated due to placement, frequent contact can be essential to maintaining their connection. For as long as siblings remain apart and one or more are in care, ongoing efforts will be made to maintain and support this connection. These efforts may include, but are not limited to:
 - A. Supporting caregivers in recognizing the need for ongoing connection and encouraging their participation in ensuring regular contact;
 - B. Setting the expectation with caregivers that the siblings will have regular visitation together and that they will celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions together, including exploring and problem solving around barriers;
 - C. Keeping siblings in close geographical proximity to each other so that regular and frequent contact is possible;
 - D. Keeping siblings in the same school or school district;
 - E. Enrolling siblings in activities together (if applicable);
 - F. Encouraging regular contact via telephone/videoconferencing, texting, social media or email/other written correspondence (as developmentally and age appropriate, unless there are safety concerns);
 - G. Assessing needs/barriers and utilizing caregivers, family, and community supports, and if necessary, paid services, to facilitate visitation or other contact; and
 - H. Strengthening the sibling connection when necessary by providing individual family therapy or other services to promote a healthy relationship when appropriate.
- II. When it is determined that siblings must be removed from their home to ensure safety and that foster care is a viable placement option, the JPPO is expected to identify

placement options that will allow the siblings to remain together unless there are mitigating circumstances of child/youth specific needs (as outlined below) that warrant separate placement.

- III. The appropriateness of placing siblings together must be given significant consideration with placement together as a priority whenever possible. Factors to be reviewed include:
 - A. The connection between the siblings;
 - B. Any safety concerns around the siblings being placed together;
 - C. The availability of placement options, such as:
 - 1. A protecting parent who is not the biological parent to the sibling(s) and is able/willing to provide care for the sibling(s);
 - 2. A relative to at least one of the children who is able/willing to provide care for the siblings together; or
 - 3. The availability foster home that can take the sibling group; and
 - D. The specific needs of one or more of the siblings that may warrant placement apart from their sibling(s). Specific needs may include one sibling's:
 - 1. Need for specialized care, such as medical care or hospitalization;
 - 2. Developmental or behavioral needs; or
 - 3. Need for a more intensive placement, such as a residential treatment program, to meet developmental or behavioral needs.
- IV. If the decision is made that siblings cannot be maintained together at the start of placement, efforts must be made to reunify the siblings as soon as possible. These efforts must continue until the youth have been reunited, permanency has been achieved for all siblings, or it is determined that continued efforts to reunify the sibling group are not in one or more of the youth's best interest.
 - A. Continued exploration of the possibility of the caregiver of one sibling providing care for the other sibling(s);
 - B. Efforts to reunify once the specific needs that initially warranted separate placement are overcome or stabilized;
 - C. The implementation of services to meet specific barriers to placement including:
 - 1. Safety concerns;

- 2. The specific needs of one or more of the siblings; or
 - 3. Additional supports needed by a potential home to maintain the sibling group. These services should be used to address the needs of a caregiver who is willing to care for the sibling group with support; and
- D. Continued, consistent, and specific discussion around the barriers to sibling reunification during each sibling's treatment team meetings that includes specific tasks set to move efforts at sibling reunification forward.
- V. When a sibling remains in the home and another is removed, connections between the siblings must be maintained whenever possible. These efforts will be ongoing (as outlined above) until permanency is achieved.
- VI. All efforts to place siblings together (when appropriate), or support the sibling relationship and reunite them when separated, are documented in the DCYF electronic information system. This will include documentation around efforts discussed at any treatment meetings.
- A. If frequent visitation or other ongoing interaction between siblings does not occur, documentation is entered into the DCYF electronic information system explaining why and if contact would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the siblings.

Glossary and Document Specific Definitions

A - B C - D E - F G - I J - L M - N O - Q R - S T - V W - Z

Document Change Log

PD	Modification Made	Approved	Date