

# Improving Outcomes for Children and Families



## PIP TIPS: Item 20 Worker Visits with Parents

*Each issue of Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Tips focuses on one aspect of the safety, permanency and well-being of children in Minnesota. This issue examines worker visits with parents, included in Well-Being Outcome 1.*

### Well-Being Outcome 1:

Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

### Related Performance Items:

Item 17: Assessing Needs and Services

Item 18: Involving Families and Children in Case Planning

Item 19: Worker Visits with Child

### Item 20: Worker Visits with Parents

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review evaluates worker visits with parents based on the following criteria:

- Frequency of visits
- Quality of visits
- Visits with mothers and fathers
- Sufficiency to ensure children's safety and promote attainment of case goals.

Worker visits with parents are linked to better performance on 13 out of 23 performance items across safety, permanency and well-being outcomes! Worker visits with parents are strongly associated with performance on placement stability and achieving timely reunification (Administration of Children and Families, 2004).

Common contributing factors to rating Item 20 an Area Needing Improvement are insufficient frequency of worker-parent visits, concerns regarding the quality of worker-parent visits and lack of agency efforts to contact fathers.

Statewide performance on worker visits with parents, measured by the Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews in 2003, declined by over eight percent from performance measured by the federal Child and Family Service Review in 2001.

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews rated worker visits with parents a Strength in only 74 percent of the cases reviewed in 2003. In ranked order of performance on all items, worker visits with parents ranked 19 out of 23.

**The Minnesota Department of Human Services and County Social Service Agencies:  
Working Together to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families**



## Putting good practice into practice

“*Parent’s Expectations of Caseworkers*” (Poertner, 2000), is a research-based practice guide resulting from a survey conducted with nearly 700 parents who had children in foster care. The document provides practice interventions related to 24 caseworker behaviors rated highly by parents. The following are excerpts pertinent to worker visits with parents:

- Prioritize and plan visits with parents by which cases require more frequent contact, which cases have upcoming family meetings or court hearings, or which cases pose the greatest potential for crisis.
- Emphasize the importance of parent’s involvement by asking parents about services they are receiving and encouraging them to evaluate their own progress in achieving goals.

## Frequency of visits

Frequency of worker/parent visits is based on many factors such as level of risk to the children, presenting issues in the case, or current circumstances of the family. Structured Decision Making contact standards can help guide decisions and planning. Frequency of visits and type of contacts between the worker and parents should be included in the case plan. Visits should occur at a time and place that is favorable for the parents.

In some cases, multiple staff and service providers are involved with families. The case plan may delegate some face-to-face contacts to other staff or to providers with a contractual relationship with the agency to augment worker visits. However, these visits are not a substitute for worker visits with parents.

Workers should make concerted efforts to conduct frequent face-to-face visits with both mothers and fathers who are involved in their children’s lives, including non-custodial parents. In some cases this may require development of separate plans.

## Quality of visits

Visits between workers and parents should be focused on issues pertinent to case planning, service delivery and goal attainment.

Quality visits with parents are the foundation for engaging the family in an effective casework

relationship. Visits provide a venue for parent participation in case planning and decision-making. Clear communication and information sharing between workers and parents during visits contribute to strong parent-worker alliances and help achieve positive outcomes for children (Rycus/Hughes, 1998) and (Poertner, 2000).

## Visits with mothers and fathers

An analysis of cases reviewed from 2001 to 2004 in the federal Child and Family Service Review demonstrates a significant difference in worker contacts with mothers and fathers. In general, the findings reflected that when both parents were involved in their children’s lives, workers made at least once per month visits with mothers in 56 percent of the cases and with fathers in 31 percent of the cases (Administration of Children and Families, 2004).

## What does Minnesota require?

Minnesota Rules offer guidelines for minimum contact standards between social workers and families receiving child protective services. Minnesota Rules, part 9560.0228, subpart 4 reads, “When a child remains in the home while protective services are being provided, the child protection worker shall meet with the family at least monthly....”

To claim Child Welfare Targeted Case Management under Medicaid, there is a requirement for one face-to-face contact per month with a child, or a relevant person if the child is in the same county as the worker.

## Counties can improve and monitor performance on worker visits

- Define clear expectations and policies around the *frequency* of social worker visits with parents.
- Define clear expectations and policies around the *quality* of social worker visits with parents.
- Clarify expectations for conducting visits with both mothers and fathers, including non-custodial parents.
- Assess and make efforts to align caseloads to allow adequate time for staff to visit parents.
- Define clear expectations and policies around documenting visits with parents.

- Institute naming protocols to clearly identify worker visits in the SSIS case chronology. For example, when creating a new *activity*, social workers could routinely enter “visit w/parent” in the *purpose* line. When entering a new *case note*, social workers could enter “visit w/parent” in the *comments* line. This phrase shows up in the chronology grid and is viewable at a glance.
- Discuss worker visits with parents during supervisor consultations.
- Conduct regular supervisory case reviews that target frequency and quality of social worker visits with parents.
- Use data systems and reports to monitor performance on worker visits with parents.

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## Resources and technical assistance

- Administration of Children and Families (ACF), *General Findings from the Federal Child and Family Service Reviews, 2004*.  
 Available on:  
<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/index.htm>
- *Case Review and Consultation Guide* (based on Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews) available on DHS Supervisor’s Web site:  
[http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county\\_access/documents/pub/dhs\\_id\\_000308.hcsp](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp)
- Poertner, John, DSW, *Parent’s Expectations of Caseworkers*, Children and Family Research Center, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, January 2000.  
 Available at:  
[http://cfrcwww.social.uiuc.edu/pubs/pdf.files/pa\\_rexpect.pdf](http://cfrcwww.social.uiuc.edu/pubs/pdf.files/pa_rexpect.pdf) and is featured on the current Quality Practices Spotlight on the DHS Supervisor’s Web site.
- Rycus, Judith S. and Hughes, Ronald C. *Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II*. CWLA Press, 1998.
- SSIS Reports:
  - General reports: Workgroups that need contact
  - *Child Welfare System Activity Indicator Measures* SSIS4-available with SSIS version 3.8
- *Structured Decision Making Contact Standards* available on DHS Supervisor’s Web site.