



## Policy: Keeping Siblings Placed Together

**ChildNet Number: CN 003.032**

**Original Approved Date: June 18, 2003**

**Policy Revised Date(s) December 28, 2009, July 9, 2014**

**Policy Sunset Date:**

**COA Standard(s): FKC 6.02, FKC 6.03, FKC 6.05, FKC 6.06, FKC 6.07, FKC 7.01**

### Statement of Policy:

ChildNet recognizes the importance of maintaining sibling bonds and minimizing the effects of separation and loss by placing siblings together. Sibling relationships are the longest lasting relationships and are often times crucial to the siblings' well-being. It is ChildNet's policy to both nurture and preserve sibling relationships in the event that separation of sibling for placement purposes is deemed appropriate.

**Board Chair's Signature:**

**Date:**

07-29-14



## **Procedure: Keeping Siblings Placed Together**

**ChildNet Number: CN 003.032**

**Original Approved Date: June 18, 2003**

**Procedure Revised Date(s): April 22, 2014, December 28, 2009, July 9, 2014, April 25, 2018**

**Procedure Sunset Date:**

**COA Standard(s): FKC 6.02, FKC 6.03, FKC 6.05, FKC 6.06, FKC 6.07, FKC 7.01**

**Definitions (If any):**

### **Statement of Procedure:**

In order to ensure that siblings are only separated when appropriate; when separation of siblings occurs, siblings bonds are maintained; and efforts to reassess separation of siblings are on-going, the following procedures are performed consistent with, but not limited to the application of the provisions of Florida Administrative Code and Florida Statute.

### **A. Initial Placement**

It is the priority of Intake and Placement Unit to place siblings together from the time of initial placement.

1. Consistent with placement procedures located in CN 003.038, Matching Child to Proper Placement and Minimizing Disruptions, the Intake and Placement Advocate assesses the siblings individually and as a group to identify their respective needs.
2. If the Intake and Placement Advocate determines that one or more of the siblings has a need or circumstances exists such that separation of the siblings is in the best interest of one or more of the concerned children he or she obtains approval from the Director of Intake and Placement or designee. In these situations the Director of Intake and Placement or designee make a best interest determination based on factors that include, but are not limited to, those set forth in Section B(2) of this procedure.
3. If the Intake and Placement Advocate determines that none of the children have individual needs that may pose an obstacle to placement as a group, he or she initiates contact with network providers or other available placement resources to identify an appropriate placement. The Intake and Placement Advocate documents all contacts in the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) within 48 hours.
4. In the event the Intake and Placement Advocate has identified a placement but there is a documented insufficiency of beds to place the siblings together, the



Intake and Placement Advocate follows the established protocol to request a waiver as specified in CN 003.047 Over Capacity Waiver.

5. If the Intake and Placement Advocate exhausts all administrative options and an appropriate placement has not been identified for the sibling group, the Intake and Placement Advocate notifies the Director of Intake and Placement or designee for further review.
6. The Director of Intake and Placement's or designee approval is required prior to any separation of sibling due to current unavailability of beds.

## **B. Re-placement**

When circumstances warrant a change of placement, efforts are taken to re-place siblings together unless contrary to court order or there has been a determination that such placement would not be in the best interest of one or more of the concerned children.

1. In order to consider the separation of siblings in those situations where separation may be appropriate, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager consults with his or her supervisor and requests approval. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager obtains approval in writing and documents in the case chronological section of CCWIS within 48 hours.
2. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor consider various factors when determining the appropriateness of sibling separation. These factors include but are not limited to the following:
  - a. Mental health, emotional, physical needs of each sibling
  - b. The emotional ties existing between and among the siblings and the degree of harm which each child is likely to experience as a result of the separation.
  - c. Feedback from the Guardian ad Litem (GAL), if assigned.
3. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor consider the positive and negative aspects of keeping the children together and separation. The alternatives are thoroughly explored on a case by case basis in an effort to make a best interest determination.
4. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor take into consideration any feedback from the GAL if assigned and any providers that may be providing services to the children.
5. If the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor agrees that separation of the sibling group is appropriate based on the best interest of one or



more of the siblings, the overall needs of the sibling group and/or other applicable factors, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager submits the placement request through the Intake and Placement Unit.

6. The Director of Intake and Placement or designee approves any separation of siblings based on a best interest determination. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager obtains approval in writing and documents in the case chronological section of CCWIS within 48 hours.
7. If the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor disagrees with the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager's recommendation for separation, he or she consults with the Case Management Director. The Case Management Director and Director of Intake and Placement or designee make the final determination.
8. In rare occasions when the Case Management Director and Director of Intake and Placement's position differs as to the appropriate placement options for the sibling group, the Executive Director or designee is consulted and makes the final determination after careful consideration of all relevant factors.

### **C. Contact and Visitation**

In situations where a decision is approved to separate siblings, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager makes documented efforts to maintain contact and communication by way of visitation and shared activities.

1. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager maintains in-person contact between separated siblings under supervision unless the visitation would compromise the safety or well-being of either child. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager limits or terminates visitation by order of the court, and such restrictions are reflected in the case plan.
2. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager recommends weekly in-person visitation between separated siblings to the court unless this is not feasible or not in the best interest of one or more of the children concerned.
3. If the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager does not recommend weekly in-person visitation between separated siblings, the court is to be advised of the reasons for the recommendation.
4. In any circumstance where the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager makes a recommendation to suspend visitation or limit to less than weekly visitation because it is not in the best interest of at least one of the children, the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager has clinical support for this recommendation and provides such clinical documentation to the Court.



5. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and the Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor assess the limits on visitation on an on-going basis. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager develops a written plan that addresses the frequency and duration of contact and visitation. This plan includes an assessment of any short term or long term effects that may arise as a result of the separation. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager places the written plan in the file and documents in the case chronological section of CCWIS within 48 hours.

#### **D. Ongoing Efforts to Reunite Separated Siblings**

The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and the assigned Intake and Placement Advocate maintain ongoing efforts to reunite siblings who have been separated unless contrary to court order or not in the best interest of one or more of the concerned children.

1. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and assigned Intake and Placement Advocate document all efforts to reunite separated sibling in the case chronological section of CCWIS within 48 hours.
2. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor review the status of any siblings that have been separated during monthly supervisory reviews. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor documents the review on the Supervisory Review form and CCWIS consistent with Supervisory Review documentation procedures located in CN 003.069.
3. The Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager and Child Advocate/Dependency Case Manager Supervisor review the status of any siblings that have been separated with the Permanency committee during the 3-month, 6-month, 9 months and any subsequent staffing. The staffing chair gathers input regarding the separation from the members of the committee and documents on the respective staffing forms.
4. The Director of Intake and Placement maintains a current log of all separated sibling groups for administrative review.
5. ChildNet administers ongoing recruitment efforts to increase the number of beds to better meet the needs of children in care.

**President Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

05-04-18