

## **New Kinship Caregiver Bio-Parents' Rights and Visitation FAQs & Resources**

### **1) Why do we need to do these visits?**

- a. Frequent visits can reduce feelings of grief children experience at being separated from parents.
- b. Visits can be challenging but they are vital to the development of the child for several reasons.
- c. They help children retain a stable identity within their family.
- d. They help bio parents accept that their child is in a safe and loving home, which can reduce friction in your dynamic.
- e. They allow you to model effective parenting strategies to the bio parents.
- f. They allow you to ask important questions about the child's likes and dislikes, fears, allergies, sleep habits, schedules and more.
- g. They increase the likelihood of ongoing contact with the child if they are returned home. Establishing a good relationship with the bio parent means you will always be a place the child can come back to when they need you.

### **2) How often will the visits be?**

- a. They will be one hour every week to start.
- b. Newborns to 3 year-olds should get 2 hours weekly.
- c. Visits hopefully will increase as the dynamic improves, to give the child more time with their parent, but if the bio parent isn't fulfilling obligations or has a safety issue ongoing this can be decreased. This can change in either direction over the course of kinship.

### **3) Where will we do the visits?**

- a. They start at the CUA agency, and as things improve they can be held in the community within walking distance of the CUA (if supervised visits). Unsupervised visits can happen anywhere in the community within the time limit allowed. If visits are held at CUA you are responsible for transportation to the CUA and back.
- b. Eventually they can be in the bio parent's home and the children can visit the bio parent overnight if it is deemed appropriate. The home

must be checked by a case worker and deemed safe and any perpetrators from the case cannot be around the home.

- c. Visits can occur in your home if you are supervising the visit yourself (as opposed to agency supervision). If so you would report any noted issues to the case worker immediately. It helps to keep a log about the visits if you are the one supervising.

#### **4) Do I need to be present for the visit?**

- a. No, you will drop off the child and can leave until the visit is over.

#### **5) What should I bring to the visit?**

- a. It's helpful to bring things that show what your kinship child has been up to since they came into your care, such as report cards, drawings, and things they've made. Things that celebrate their accomplishments and anything you would want to invite the bio parent into discussing about the child. It is also good to bring a snack so the child is in the best mood possible, but the bio parent is encouraged to bring food to increase rapport.
- b. Bring diapers, wipes, a change of clothes, and formula if the child is young enough to need them.
- c. Some caregivers keep journals of the child's progress, milestones and struggles to share with bio parents.
- d. Bringing things the child likes or things they can do with the bio parent can be helpful to the dynamic of the visit.
- e. If the child just had a medical appointment bring the records to give to your visitation coach.

#### **6) Who is responsible for scheduling the visit?**

- a. When you begin kinship you and the bio parent will submit your schedules to determine the best weekly time to meet.
- b. Once a day is picked you are assigned a visitation coach for that day and time. It will remain the same every week.
- c. You will create a visitation agreement at that first session to agree to this day and time.
- d. Bio parents are contacted to confirm first and if they don't hear back they will reach out to you to cancel the visit. If you don't hear from

anyone the visit is expected to be held and you should show up as usual.

**7) Will CUA provide transportation to visits? And can the child transport themselves if they're old enough?**

- a. The kinship parent is required to transport the child to visits, but CUA will work with your schedule to decide what day is best (that day stays the same weekly)
- b. Assistance can be offered, usually for younger children, but they ask that the caregiver gets them one way. This is dependent on circumstances.
- c. Supports in your life should be looped in to fill transportation gaps first

**8) Will anyone be monitoring the visit?**

- a. A worker from CUA will be supervising at first, whether that is their CUA worker, a visitation aide, or other staff). If things improve and it is deemed appropriate eventually the visits will not require supervision.
- b. The court order will list the visits as supervised or unsupervised and that is what needs to be changed for it to switch

**9) If the child doesn't want to go to the visit, do I have to bring them?**

- a. Children have to attend all visits unless the court order says "at the child's discretion"
- b. If the child is saying they don't want to come regularly it can be brought up to your worker to be discussed in court
- c. If a child is 12 they can make their own choice if asked for in court first. You would ask to change the order to say "at the child's discretion"

**10) Do workers have to be informed about every contact with the bio parent?**

- a. You don't have to, but if something major occurs in a call or if it is affecting the child it should be reported.
- b. If the caregiver and bio parent have a relationship the bio parent can call and speak to the child. If the child's behavior deteriorates due to these calls it will be reassessed.

- c. Unsupervised calls can lead to mixed messages and promises that can't be fulfilled, so having the calls on speaker is best.

**11) I am allowing the bio-parent into my home to see the children but I want to scale it back and only have supervised visits, what do I do?**

- a. If this setup is an agreement with the case manager they will need to speak to the case manager and ask to change it or discuss it further.
- b. If this is informal your case worker may tell you to not allow extra visits. Only court involved agreements are binding so it is up to your discretion up to the point where there is a severe safety issue with the parent.
- c. It is best to follow the court order around visits so there is no confusion of boundaries or expectations that can lead to long term harm to the family relationship. The frequency of visits can also be adjusted as a reward for the bio parent completing requirements so this would disrupt that system.

**12) Are bio parents allowed to take the children to spend time together?**

- a. Only when unsupervised visits are allowed in the court order.

**13) What rights do I have and what rights do the bio parents have?**

- a. The bio parent still legally the parent so they have similar rights that they did before kinship. They have the right to celebrate birthdays with the child and must sign off on changing a child's school, what religion they practice, what doctor they go to (you can switch doctors within the practice but not what practice they go to), any name changes, and permanent changes in appearance (piercings, drastic haircuts). If they are not available to give consent they can be approved with a court order.
- b. Neither the bio parent or the caregiver have the right to change the medical setup for a kinship child unless the child is moved out of the county. This is managed by CUA. Dental is the exception, the caregiver can take them wherever they want.

**14) Am I allowed to change the arrangement and rules between me and the bio parent or do we need to ask permission from someone?**

- a. You don't need permission if you're the one supervising or if it's unsupervised, but if it doesn't work out well in that arrangement you will need to communicate with the case manager about it.
- b. It is important to hold boundaries if you are opening doors for the bio parent to connect more so things stay stable for the child.

**15) What happens if the parent doesn't show up for the visit? How long do I have to wait before leaving?**

- a. Your CUA worker should get confirmation the day before the visit and cancel if the bio parent can't make it. If they said they would and don't show up after 15 minutes it is usually canceled.

**16) If the parent doesn't show do they have to make up the time? Is there a time period they have to do it in?**

- a. The bio parent does not get makeup time if they don't show up for a visit unless it's an emergency.
- b. If you don't make a visit it must be made up later, within a week is the goal. The next visit can be extended for the time missed if needed.

**17) What happens if the bio parent is late?**

- a. If the visitation coach isn't getting a response after 15 minutes the visit is canceled. If the bio parent says they are on the way and will be there shortly they are usually given grace to show up in that time, but if they aren't there after that time stated the visit is canceled. If the person is repeatedly late they lose that courtesy.

**18) How do I help my kinship child deal with the emotions of their parent missing visits or being late?**

- a. Every situation is unique so you will have to learn the child's needs and what helps them, but there are strategies that can help
- b. Some caregivers choose not to tell the children they're going to a visit until they are sure the bio parent is coming, and instead say they're going for a drive or out for another plan that they can do if the visit is canceled.
- c. Kids can sometimes feel that they are the reason the parent isn't showing up so it helps to tell them the parent is dealing with

something separate from them and it isn't their fault. This is more likely with elementary school aged kids.

- d. Keep track of the visits that are missed for court and the number of visits can be adjusted if it is becoming an ongoing issue
- e. It helps to avoid talking badly about the bio parent to console the child, because it can lead to more issues down the line. Try to be a supportive ear to the child and focus on the feelings they're having and how to cope with them.
- f. When the visitation dynamic gets stressful try to vent to other adults and not let the child be an outlet for those feelings

**19) Who do I talk to if the bio parent isn't showing up to visits on time (or at all)?**

- a. You should report it to the case worker and it will be brought up in court. This could lead to a decrease in visit time or frequency.

**20) What happens if I'm late to a visit?**

- a. If you're late to a visit whatever time you arrive is the start of the bio parent's full hour session. Visits aren't canceled unless the bio parent can't stay the full hour after it starts, in which case it is rescheduled.

**21) Who do I contact if I need to cancel a visit? And if someone is sick do I need a doctor's note?**

- a. Contact your visitation coach instead of the case manager in these situations so everyone is in the loop in time for plans to be changed.
- b. If the child is old enough and is sick, they can do a virtual visit if needed. If the parent wants the visit in person it is rescheduled.
- c. If you are sick and the child is not, you should try to arrange for other transport for the child. CUA may be able to assist if it's occasional.

**22) If the parent isn't allowed to be alone with the child who takes the to the bathroom during visits (if young enough to be relevant)?**

- a. The bio parent will take the child if needed and the visitation coach enters the bathroom with them outside the stall.

**23) Is there anything we aren't allowed to discuss during visits?**

- a. The bio parent cannot discuss the case, tell the child they're going home soon, promise the child things, question the child about the caregiver, record the visits, make phone calls during the visit.

- b. The caregiver is not present in the visit.

**24) How and when are boundaries set between us and the bio parents for these visits?**

- a. Boundaries should be set with the help of the supervising worker at the first visit.
- b. It is up to you to determine your own boundaries; they should not be too rigid or vague – remember to empathize and imagine yourself in the other’s situation.
- c. Remember to vocalize your boundaries and stick to them – remain consistent.
- d. If you listen, understand, and respect the other person’s boundaries they are more likely to respect yours.
- e. Things might change over time and boundaries can be re-evaluated and changed.

**25) What do I do if I have concerns about things that go on during the visit that my kinship child reports to me?**

- a. Talk to visitation coach and cua worker and follow up consistently until you hear back what will be done if this is seen in a visit again
- b. If the child reports it continuing reach out to the cua supervisor or make a dhs report using the hotline and ask for it to be brought up in court

**26) Tips:**

- a. Come in with an open mind and try to be a support for both the child and the bio parent, so you can keep the relationship once the child is back home. If something comes up again they will have you to call so they don’t end up in another home.
- b. If you come early you may be waiting with the bio parent for it to start, so bring things for the child to do in case they are agitated in that situation.

**Free courses and seminars with Mental Health Partnerships that help with managing this dynamic – learn more at [mentalhealthpartnerships.org](https://mentalhealthpartnerships.org)**

- 1) Getting Off the Emotional Rollercoaster

- 2) Various online Support Groups for those with family members who are dealing with mental health issues