

# Arkansas Division of Children & Family Services Practice Guide Series

## *How We Do the Work is as Important as the Work We Do*

### **How We Do the Work of Preparing a Child for Adoption: Good-bye Visits**

**Purpose** - Provide standard guidance for preparing children and families for adoption by effectively preparing for and conducting good-bye visits.

#### **Related Policy**

- Policy VIII-D
- Policy VIII-E

#### **Related Practice Model Goals/Principles**

- Enhance well-being in all of our practice with families.
- Ensure adoptions, when that is the best permanency option, are timely, well-supported, and lifelong.
- Practice with families is interrelated at every step of the casework process.

#### **How We Do the Good-bye Visit**

An important step in preparing a child for adoption is the good-bye visit with his/her birth parents. The good-bye visit represents a significant change in the child's life and relationship with the birth parents. It is an opportunity to continue the process of preparing the child for a new family, for parents to give their "blessing" as the child embarks on this new stage of life, and possibly a chance to gather some previously missing information that may be helpful for the child.

Preparation for the "goodbye" visit involves much more than scheduling a date, time, location, and notifying the appropriate parties. Consideration must be given to factors such as length of time since last contact with the child, prior relationship with the child, therapist recommendation, and preference of the child. It is crucial that the FSW gains the cooperation of the birth parents, child's current caregivers, and service providers to ensure the child and family are supported. The visit should be well-planned (e.g., make sure everyone understands his or her role; hold the visit in a location that is conducive to positive and confidential family interaction) and conducted in a way (e.g., allow ample time for the visit), that can be beneficial for the child and birth family. It is important to recognize that this can be a highly emotional event for all parties.

#### **How We Prepare the Child for the Good-bye Visit**

- In a face-to-face meeting, tell the child about the upcoming good-bye visit. The purpose and significance of the good-bye visit should be explained to the child in terms he or she can understand, with consideration to the child's age and intellectual functioning. It may be helpful to have current caregivers and/or the child's therapist, if applicable, present for this meeting to provide support. Decide prior to the meeting whether the FSW, therapist, or caregiver will take the lead in this discussion with the child.
- If the child's therapist will not attend the preparation meeting, make sure the therapist knows the date of the good-bye visit and schedule an appointment following the good-bye visit to allow the child the opportunity to process the event with the therapist.
- Be prepared to answer the child's questions. Often a child will have questions regarding future contact with the birth family.
- Determine if there are other individuals the child would like to be present for the goodbye visit. This may include extended family members or other important people in the child's life.
- Ask the child, as age appropriate, if s/he would like to write down questions s/he would like to ask the birth parents during the good-bye visit.

- Ask the child, as age appropriate, if s/he would like to draw a picture or write a letter to give to the birth parents at the good-bye visit.

### **How We Prepare the Birth Family**

Regardless of how it is approached, TPR is devastating to parents. Here are some tips that may help prepare the birth parents for the good-bye visit:

- In a face-to-face meeting, discuss with the birth parents the purpose and importance of the good-bye visit. Because this can be such a difficult conversation, take safety into consideration. If possible, do not have this conversation by yourself with the birth parents.
- Reinforce the important role the parents have played in the child's life. Emphasize that because of the child's love for the parent, it is important for the parents to give the child "permission" to be happy and to love and trust another family. Research indicates children are less likely to disrupt from an adoptive placement if the birth family has given "permission."
- Make sure the birth parents' issues relating to the case or court proceedings have been addressed. The birth parents should understand the good-bye visit is time for them to spend with their child, not to bring up case or court issues again in front of the child.
- Discuss with the birth parents whether there are special activities they would like to do at the good-bye visit such as sharing family pictures, telling the child the story of his/her birth or early childhood, or bringing keepsakes that have special meaning to the child and/or birth parents.
- Consider giving parents the chance to write a good-bye letter or video a "good-bye" and/or "blessing" — their child will need this at different stages of his/ her life. Ensure any letter or video is appropriate for the child to view.
- It may be helpful to practice with the parents what they will say to the child during the visit. Emphasize the importance of telling the child:
  - how much s/he is loved;
  - how much s/he will be missed;
  - involvement with the child welfare system is the not child's fault; and,
  - it is okay to be happy and love other important adults in the child's life.

Most children need to hear from the parent that attaching to an adoptive family is not a betrayal of the birth parent.

- Determine with the birth parents if there are other extended family members the birth parents would like to invite to the good-bye visit, or whether the birth parents are agreeable to inviting significant people the child has mentioned.

### **How We Prepare the Foster and Adoptive Parents for the Good-bye Visits**

- Ensure foster and adoptive parents are prepared for what may be a very emotional meeting for everyone in attendance.
- If the plan is for the child to be adopted by the current foster parents, initiate a discussion in advance with the foster parents to determine their plans for future contact with birth family members. The child can then be given honest and consistent answers.
- If the foster and/or adoptive family is opposed to future contact, or if such contact would not be in the child's best interest, it may be helpful to discuss other ways that connections can be maintained; for example, sharing photographs, keepsakes, child's life book, letters or cards, contact other significant figures in the child's life, etc.

**Time Frames**

- A good-bye visit should occur within 30 days of the TPR ruling, if no appeal has been filed.

**Documenting the Good-bye Visit**

- Document the date of all preparation meetings as well as the date of the good-bye visit in the contact screens in CHRIS. Be sure to note who attended all meetings, a brief description of what took place during the meeting, any next steps determined during the meetings, and any other important information related to the meetings.

**Outcomes**

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Resources: Kentucky Department for Community Based Services Standards of Practice 13.8.  
North Carolina Division of Social Services, Children's Services Community Practice Notes. Vol. 6, No. 1