

Improving Outcomes for Children and Families



PIP Tips Item 12: Placement with Siblings

Each monthly 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 placement with siblings, included in Permanency Outcome 2.

Permanency Outcome 2:

Continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Related performance items

Item 11: Proximity of foster care placement

Item 12: Placement with siblings

Item 13: Visits with parents and siblings in foster care

Item 14: Preservation of connections

Item 15: Relative placement

Item 16: Relationship of child in care with parents

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review evaluates placement with siblings based on the following criteria:

- Placement with one or all siblings
- Reasons for sibling group separation
- Agency efforts and resources available to support sibling group placement.

First and foremost, siblings should be placed together in foster care unless it is determined not to be in their best interest.

Placing siblings together in foster care facilitates reunification with parents and provides for more stable foster care placements. However, national studies reveal that up to 75 percent of children are separated from at least one of their siblings when placed in foster care (Casey Family Programs, 2003 and CASCW, 2000).

Statewide performance on placement with siblings, measured by the Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews in 2003, improved by nearly 18 percent from performance measured by the federal Child and Family Service Review in 2001.

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews rated placement with siblings a Strength in 95 percent of the cases reviewed in 2003. In ranked order of performance on all items, placement with siblings ranked two out of 23.

“Children have an inherent right to maintain their sibling relationships and live with their siblings whenever possible.” (DHS Guiding Principle)

**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

Casey Family Programs has developed best practice guidance for recruiting and supporting “sibling group foster/adoptive homes.” Sibling groups are featured in all recruitment materials. Prospective foster/adoptive parents are educated from the beginning that most children coming into care have siblings and they will be placed together. Supports are in place for families who care for sibling groups. Respite care, specialized training and support from extended family members and informal community helpers are included in children’s placement plans (Casey Family Programs, 2002).

Placement with siblings

Placing siblings together is critical to maintaining family connections and promoting children’s sense of permanency and well-being. Sibling groups are most likely to remain together when they are placed with relatives. Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is an effective resource for identifying potential relative caregivers and extended family supports needed to promote and maintain sibling group placement.

If placing siblings together is not possible, the placement agency must develop a plan, and make active and continual efforts to reunite the children in placement. The agency must immediately plan for sibling visitation in the meantime.

Sibling separation

Sibling relationships are significant and unique. Children often express feelings of loss and grief as a result of separation from one or more siblings. Agencies must give consideration to maintaining sibling relationships in all placement decisions and work to keep all siblings together when it is in their best interest (Casey Family Programs, 2003).

Sibling separation must be based on circumstances in which a child’s individual needs can be met only in a separate placement. These may include situations in

which one sibling is abusing another and separation is necessary to manage safety risks; or a sibling has special needs necessitating therapeutic services, available only in a separate placement setting. In these situations the agency must continue to assess sibling needs and plan for reuniting siblings in care whenever possible and appropriate.

Agency efforts and resources that support sibling placements

Agency efforts that promote sibling group placements include:

- placing all siblings together at the time of initial placement
- placing sibling groups in relative foster care
- conducting specialized foster/adoptive parent recruitment for a sibling group
- assessing needs and providing services to support foster/adoptive parents caring for sibling groups
- using treatment and therapy, rather than separation to address sibling issues
- using a team approach, such as FGDM, for decisions regarding placement, supporting placement and separating sibling groups.

Minnesota requirements

Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, subdivision 2, requires placement of siblings together in foster care and adoption at the earliest possible time, unless it is determined not to be in the best interests of a sibling or is not possible after appropriate efforts have been made to keep them together. Children under state guardianship cannot be separated for the purposes of adoption or foster care without the Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioner’s consent, Minnesota Rules, part 9560.0450, subpart 2 (g).

Out-of-home placement plans require documentation of efforts to place siblings together, and a plan for reuniting siblings placed separately in foster care.

DHS Bulletin #03-68-04, *Improving Outcomes for Children*, provides considerable practice and policy guidance for placement of siblings.

Counties can improve and monitor performance on sibling placement

- Ensure that policy, case practice and agency resources are aligned to support placing siblings together in foster care.
- Define clear expectations for placing all children in a sibling group together in foster/adoptive care whenever possible and appropriate.
- Conduct regular supervisory consultations and case reviews that target sibling group placement.
- Use data systems and reports to monitor performance on sibling placements. SSIS General Report: Children in Placement by Date Range may be used to determine the location of siblings in foster care.
- Track reasons for sibling separations. Clearly document decisions regarding sibling placements and separation in SSIS case chronology. Institute naming protocols to clearly identify sibling placement activity. For example, “sibling placement” could be used to identify all activities related to sibling placement decisions.
- Assess adequacy of foster/adoptive care resources and community-based services necessary to support sibling group placements.
- Conduct timely and comprehensive relative searches and provide supports to relatives caring for sibling groups.
- Recruit, prepare and support foster /adoptive families to care for sibling groups.
- Educate all individuals involved in placement decisions, such as caseworkers, supervisors, attorneys, guardians ad litem and judges, on the importance of sibling relationships, the effects of sibling separation and other sibling issues.

Resources and technical assistance

- *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_000310.hcsp.
- Casey Family Programs. *Is Our Family Focus Wide Enough to Include Siblings?* 2002. Available on National Resource Center for

Foster Care and Permanency Planning Web site: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/html>.

- Casey Family Programs. *Siblings in Out-of-Home Care: An Overview*, April 2003. Available on National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning Web site: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/html>.
- *Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) Practice Notes*, Issue No.9, Fall 2000. Available on: <http://ssw.che.umn.edu.cascw.html>.
- [DHS Bulletin #03-68-04, Improving Outcomes for Children, issued April 2003.](#)
- Minnesota Child Welfare Training System: Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Parent training. Contact your area training manager.
- *PIP Tips*: Item 13 Part 2 “Visits with Siblings in Foster Care”, issued July 2004. Available on DHS supervisor’s Web site.
- SSIS Reports: *Children in Placement by Date Range and Case Chronology*.

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