

DCFS Comfort Call Procedures

Best Practice:

The comfort call is a phone call made by the caseworker and foster parent to the birth parent(s) shortly after a child is removed from their home to comfort the child, take the first step in establishing a positive co-parenting relationship between the foster parent and birth parent(s), and discuss vital information needed to meet the child's needs. This call also provides an opportunity for the child and parent to speak to each other after removal, which can help both to feel more comfortable with the placement. This call should always occur within 12 hours, if at all possible, otherwise, as soon as it can be done once the child is placed. During the call the foster parent should allow the birth parent(s) to be the expert on their child by discussing information needed to meet the child's needs such as: *

- a. Medical – allergies, medications, upcoming or needed appointments, immunizations, etc.;
- b. Behavioral – past trauma, placement history, therapeutic history;
- c. Educational and Developmental – school attended, teachers, academic performance, special services, etc.;
- d. Family/Fictive Kin/Peer support systems – Who else can the child call for support?
- e. Routines – extracurricular activities, schedules, bedtimes, etc.;
- f. Set up an Icebreaker and first in person visit; and
- g. Let the children speak with their parent – The placing case worker should help to set guidelines with the parents for appropriate conversations, phone should be on speakerphone

****The “Child Health/ Social History” form should be provided to the foster parent with all information previously gathered – the foster parent can then fill in any blanks based on the information gathered during the comfort call****

General Guidelines

- The comfort call can be made in a variety of ways:
 - From the caseworker's work cell phone at the foster home
 - a three-way call from the caseworker's office (to the foster and birth parents) (if not being completed at placement)
 - if the foster parent is comfortable with it, from the foster parent's phone
 - through Google Voice
- Begin the call by reminding the birth and foster parents that the purpose is to provide important information that may only be known by the birth parent to make sure the foster parent has the information necessary to provide the best care possible to the child.
- Introduce birth and foster parents by providing first and last names, unless specific safety issues exist, then utilize first names only.
- Encourage foster parent to acknowledge positive attributes, appearance, manners, etc. of child.
- Caseworker should remain near the phone and utilize speaker phone to monitor information shared and to intervene, if necessary. The caseworker can assist in re-directing conversations as needed to support continuation of the call and to maintain focus on the child and not on removal or other issues. If the call becomes inappropriate and the caseworker is unable to re-direct, the call should be terminated.
- In concluding the call, acknowledge with each the difficulty they may have experienced but, by participating, they were able to share important information about child, alleviate some of their fears

and anxieties, and their first meeting will be much easier having had this conversation. Thank each for their participation and their commitment focusing on their child.

- When back in the office, case note the comfort call, including if the call occurred, who participated, what was discussed, if all parties were appropriate. If the comfort call did not occur, case note this as well, including why it did not occur.

Outcomes of Comfort Calls:

- Minimizes trauma of separation for both child and parents
- Sets stage for ongoing focus on the child
- Reinforces that the birth parent is the expert on their child
- Provides for smoother transition into foster home by allowing foster parent to ask about specific information pertinent to their home environment and routines
- Provides birth parent the opportunity to convey, in their own words, information they feel is critical for care of their child
- Initiates and promotes immediate communication between foster parents and birth parents – humanizes “stranger” foster parents
- Establishes a positive working relationship early in the case by developing trust and open and honest communication

Unique Circumstances

Hospitalized or Incarcerated birth parent(s):

- Depending upon the hospital, treatment facility, detention facility, criminal charges, etc... contact with and explanation of the purpose and procedures of the initial call with the physician, nurse, social worker, jail warden etc... may allow for a brief or modified call - it doesn't hurt to ask.
- If the call cannot be conducted immediately due to incarceration, the initial call should be made as soon as possible once the birth parent is released or able to have such a call.

Parent's Whereabouts Unknown:

- When parent(s) are located, the initial call with the foster parents should be done immediately to exchange information, reduce trauma for the child, and demonstrate trust and establishment of relationship between caregivers.

Safety Concerns:

Unfortunately, there may be rare situations where there are confirmed significant safety issues and risks which may preclude the initial call or require modification to the call procedures. When such situations exist, the caseworker shall discuss with his/her supervisor the specific safety concerns, jointly assessing options, and possible procedural modifications which would ensure the safety of all and allowing for the call to be held.