

The Practice Playbook

Pre-Placement Contact



Our Best Practice: One or more gradually increasing in-person visits. However, if time and circumstance truly do not allow, then organizations should employ alternate types of contact.

What is a pre-placement visit?

A pre-placement visit is in-person contact between the child(ren) or youth and the caregiver(s) prior to placement.

Is it in the Minimum Standards?

Of course! Minimum Standards 749.1251 requires pre-placement visits for children over 6 months if it is a non-emergency placement. The requirement is waived for emergency placements. There is not a specific timeline, rather the visit must be for a “meaningful interval” that “must be at least sufficient to allow a child and foster parents to have privacy, an opportunity to discuss and consider placement, and to have their questions, opinions, and concerns addressed.” There are not specific requirements for pre-placement visits for General Residential Operations.

Watch This...



Elements of Pre-Placement Contact



Reduced Stress & Trauma

Placing children and youth with new people (especially repeatedly) can be destabilizing even to a child who has not experienced trauma—and even more so for those who have. This is true for children and youth of all ages, including infants who thrive on routine and familiar surroundings.



Lowered Likelihood of Disruption

Quality pre-placement practice is front-end disruption mitigation. Making placements against the wishes of a youth is almost certain to backfire so slow it down and let the youth have a voice.



Increased Buy-In

Pre-placement contact can increase buy-in from the child/youth, as well as, the caregiver.

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Our Best Practice: Pre-Placement Contacts should NOT end in the child or youth experiencing rejection. It is NOT an interview for them or an opportunity to prove themselves.

How Providers Create Pre-Placement Contact



1 Preparation

Prepare the child or youth and let them know this is their chance to ask questions. Some caregivers choose to prepare LifeBooks, photo albums, slide decks, videos or Canva flyers to help others learn more about them!

2 Location

In-person visits in the home or residential space are most ideal so that children and youth have an opportunity to tour the setting. If in-person visits are not an option, some alternatives include: Virtual visits via Zoom, FaceTime or other phone calls. In urgent situations, this could even happen on the way to the placement.



3 Format

The pre-placement visit is not an audition. It's meant to empower the child/youth and offer them agency over their placement. If possible, having current and former caregivers together can help the child or youth to know that both parties support this transition. Sometimes it can be helpful for the other children and youth in the placement to be present to represent the normal operations of the space. And if there is time, setting up respite with the new placement family or setting can provide strong support for the new transition. Lastly, the child or youth should not be punished if they are not as thrilled to participate as we would like.



How to Get Started

- Make Pre-Placement Contact baseline practice in your intake department.
- Retrain staff and caregivers to get input from children or youth rather than others who may seek to substitute their judgment.
- Train staff and caregivers that the youth is never to be in the position of proving themselves.
- Do not set up contact if the placement is not already committed to the youth.
- Train staff and caregivers to be prepared for distress if a child or youth comes to them in an emergency or without any preparation.
- Sending agencies can prepare children and youth for what it may be like to move as well.



How to Support Youth: Working with the caseworker and your staff/families to offer more than one placement option where possible is ideal. This empowers youth and gives them time to decide. Although you and your team may be facing intense pressure to admit the youth, don't rush it. If the youth doesn't feel like the decision is theirs, the placement is far less likely to be successful.