



Policy Title:	Shared Parenting Policy				
Policy Number:	Admin. Policy #008	Version:	2	Effective Date:	9/9/19

Approved By: YFS Operations Team

Date: 04/30/2019

Overview

Description:

The Shared Parenting policy seeks to provide guidance around the process by which Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services-Youth and Family Services (DSS-YFS) Child Welfare Specialists (CWS) will guide foster/adoptive/kinship caregivers and biological parents through the shared parenting process to ensure consistency and minimize trauma for children and youth served by YFS.


Purpose/Rationale: Mecklenburg County DSS-YFS is committed to strengthening families and communities to keep children safe. For children and youth involved with child welfare, shared parenting is a key mechanism by which YFS upholds this mission, in that shared parenting promotes children's sense physical and psychological safety, minimizes the trauma associated with their system involvement, and provides an opportunity for strengthening the alliance between biological parents and foster/adoptive/kinship caregivers. Additionally, North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) policy requires that foster parents/temporary caregivers engage in shared parenting by:

- Developing partnerships with the children and their parents or guardians;
- Helping children maintain and develop relationships that will keep them connected to their pasts;
- Helping children placed in the home build on positive self-concept and positive family, cultural, and racial identity.

Applicability: Frontline, supervisory, and managerial staff from all child welfare service areas; Director & Deputy Director(s)

Definition(s):

Shared Parenting: a continuum of contact that emphasizes foster parents/temporary caregivers as being a support to birth families instead of substitute caretakers.

	Policy Title:	Shared Parenting Policy			
	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy #008	Version:	2	Effective Date:

¹ North Carolina Child Welfare Manual for Intake, Assessments, In-Home & Permanency Planning Services

Failure to Comply:

Policy

Shared parenting meetings must be held within 7 days of any initial placement into out-of-home care or any subsequent placement change. This requirement applies to families served by all child welfare service areas, including Investigations and Family In-Home. In cases where a shared parenting meeting is being convened due to a child’s legal removal from their family of origin, the Pre-Custody child welfare specialist must facilitate completion of the meeting. In cases where a shared parenting meeting is being convened to support ongoing development of the relationship between the biological family and temporary caregiver or due to a subsequent placement change, the Permanency Planning child welfare specialist must facilitate completion of the meeting.

Shared parenting meetings must be documented within the Shared Parenting Questionnaire (SPQ) computer application, as well as within the client record. Shared parenting relationships involving both of the child’s biological parents (whenever possible), as well as the foster/adoptive/kinship caregivers, must be facilitated for children and youth served by YFS in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

Procedure(s) that apply:

Child Welfare Specialists must require and facilitate shared parenting in all cases where a child is placed outside of the home. This includes placement in:

- Licensed foster homes (family foster care therapeutic);
- Relative and non-relative kinship placements;
- Group home placements; and
- Any other placement in which the county child welfare agency has legal custody of a child and the child is separated from his or her parent or caretaker.

In accordance with NCDHHS policy, the child welfare child welfare specialist must prepare for and/or complete the following steps before the shared parenting meeting:

- Be aware that they do not impose their own biases about a birth parent’s previous decisions;
- Model positive communication about the birth parent to the foster parent/temporary caregiver and about the foster parent/temporary caregiver to the birth parent;



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- Brief the foster parent/temporary caregiver about any birth parent fears or needs and help the caregiver to understand these needs;
- Be prepared to discuss how the needs and interests of the child will be recognized during the shared parenting meeting;
- Plan for if the birth parent may be visiting the child;
- Make visitation arrangements when the child is visiting with the birth parent before or after the meeting; and
- Encourage the foster parent/temporary caregiver to engage the birth parent about a positive attribute they see in the child.

To support an ongoing shared parenting relationship that continues throughout the life of the case, child welfare specialists must educate the foster parents/temporary caregivers and birth parents about confidentiality expectations and help them to exchange information essential to promoting their ability to provide optimal care to the child including:


- Medical information;
- School progress;
- Sleeping habits;
- Eating habits;
- Response to discipline; and
- Any of the children's strengths and needs.

If allowable, foster parents/temporary caregivers should be encouraged to invite birth parents to attend school and medical appointments. If the birth parent is unable to attend an appointment, the caregiver should provide progress reports to the birth parent on how their child is performing in school and at home, as well as updates on medical information and other activities. The exchange of information not only helps the caregiver, it helps the birth parent remain connected to the routine of the child's care.

The foster parent/temporary caregiver can be a wonderful resource for the birth parent as they can model what others might assume parents know how to do such as play with the child, encourage positive responses in their child, or how to care for child's physical and medical needs. Child welfare specialists have a unique opportunity to empower foster parents/temporary caregivers to perform to their greatest capacity in the modeling of effective caretaking skills, as well as in the formation of supportive relationships that keep the needs of the children at their core. Towards this end, child welfare specialists must explore opportunities to (as long as the court-ordered visitation plan allows):

- Encourage the foster parents/temporary caregivers to host sibling visits;
- Allow the birth parent to call the caregiver's home; and
- Schedule visitation together with the birth parent.

YFS child welfare specialists must also consider the role of extended family within the shared

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	Policy Number:	Admin. Policy #008	Version:	2	Effective Date: 9/9/19

parenting relationship for custodial youth in non-relative placements. Decisions regarding whether to include relatives in shared parenting meetings must be made by assessing the following areas:

- Pay close attention to the dynamics between the birth parent and their relative.
- Consider whether the information the relative would provide is critical to the daily care of the child and whether the information is needed to meet the needs of the child and/or provide support to the biological parents.
- Consider the long-term goal of developing a partnership between the foster and birth parents.
- Is the relative able to provide needed information for the care of the child in another way other than being involved in the shared parenting meeting?
- Consider a discussion with the family that may give the relative other opportunities to be a part of the child's life/planning such as involvement in child and family team meetings.
- Be careful not to alienate the birth parent or relative.
- Make sure all feel heard.

SAFETY

The safety of the participants must always be considered when planning to begin shared parenting meetings. The child welfare specialist must make every effort to determine if there has been a history of domestic violence between the birth parents, as well as if a birth parent has any history of violence towards others. It would not be appropriate to facilitate or encourage any shared parenting meetings together if there are any court orders, including those imposed by probation and parole, that do not allow contact between the birth parents. However, it is possible that separate meetings could take place with the foster parents/temporary caregivers and each individual birth parent at separate times. Because the safety of all involved is paramount, any identified safety concerns must be documented and discussed with the child welfare specialist's supervisor.

Form(s) that apply:

Mecklenburg County DSS-YFS Shared Parenting Meeting
Shared Parenting Questionnaire

Reference(s):

North Carolina Child Welfare Manual for Intake, Assessments, In-Home & Permanency Planning

Shared Parenting 101 Training Curriculum



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Contact(s):

Policy and Practice Model Supervisor

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