

Section 17 – Visitation Overview

“Research shows that regular, frequent visitation increases the likelihood of successful reunification, reduces time in out-of-home care, promotes healthy attachment, and reduces the negative effects of separation for the child and the parent.”

- Margaret Smariga, ABA Center on Children and the Law

Frequent, quality, age-appropriate visitation is vital to establishing, repairing, or maintaining a healthy child/parent relationship. A healthy child/parent relationship is vital to safe reunification. Safe reunification is typically, in all but the most serious of cases, a child’s initial permanency goal. One of the first considerations made by courts, in addition to safety, is the establishment of a meaningful parent/child visitation plan.

This section contains three primary and three additional resources to assist judges in answering these and other important questions regarding visitation. How frequent is “frequent”, what creates “quality”, and what is the best schedule and setting for “age-appropriate” visitation? Should visits be supervised and if so, by whom? Who should be included in visits? Where should visits occur?

- I. This resource, written by a juvenile and family court judge, directly relates to judges and provides practical advice. The best practice section and the role of the judge section are excellent. The resource is an excellent guide for both new and seasoned judges. (See, *Edwards, L.P., 2003*)
- II. The Pennsylvania State Roundtable Visitation Workgroup provides practical resources for judges including handouts, links, reports, books, guides, and recommendations for visitation between children and their parents. (See, *Office of Children & Families in the Courts: Trauma, n.d.*)
- III. Why is frequent visitation important for young children? What are the key elements of a visitation plan? What are strategies to address barriers to visitation? What is the judge’s role in supporting visits? Where should visits occur? (See, *Smariga, M., 2007*)

