

Sibling Placements

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Forms

This policy references the following forms:

- 04-18 Genogram Worksheet
- 04-258 Placement Needs and Services Plan (CWS/CMS Template)
- [LIC 625](#) Appraisal Needs and Services Plan

Introduction

Positive sibling relationships provide support and improve outcomes for children who are involved with CWS. The sibling connection can serve as a protective factor for children removed from their parents. Per WIC 16519 (d) "Research shows that children in out-of-home care placed with relatives and nonrelative extended family members are more stable, more likely to be placed with siblings, and more likely to stay connected to their community and extended family. California statutory and regulatory provisions should maximize the likelihood that a child will initially be placed in the care of a safe relative or nonrelative extended family member who is willing to provide permanent care if reunification cannot be achieved."

In situations when it is not possible, or it is not in the best interest of the children to be placed together, CWS will support the children's well-being by making concerted efforts to preserve the sibling connection.

Definitions

Law/Regulation	Definition
WIC 362.1	A sibling is a child related to another person by blood, adoption, or affinity through a common legal or biological parent.
WIC 361.5	A sibling group as two or more children or NMD's who are related to each other as full, half, or step siblings.
California Rules of Court Rule 5.502(37)	A sibling group as two or more children related to each other by blood, adoption, or affinity through a common legal or biological parent.

Policy

The Agency's top priority is to place siblings together and the efforts to place the children will be documented in CWS/CMS and court reports to ensure the status of the efforts and/or barriers are clearly identified throughout the life of the case. The SW will document and assess if separating children in different homes is warranted and/or actively work to address the barriers that prevent placing them together.

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 306.5 directs that whenever a child is brought into protective custody, the SW will do the following:

- to the extent that is practical and appropriate, place the child together with any siblings or half-siblings who are also detained, or
 - include in the court reports the continuing efforts to place the siblings together, or
 - include in the report a statement of why the sibling interaction is contrary to their safety and well-being.
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Placing a Sibling Group

CWS staff are required to make concerted efforts to place one or more siblings together unless it is contrary to their safety or well-being. When assessing the placement of sibling groups, staff will consider and document the:

- Child's placement preference and wishes
 - Child's concern or worry for their sibling(s)
 - Child's worry or fear of a sibling
 - Placement of siblings with different relatives
 - Willingness of resource family and/or relatives to facilitate sibling visitations
 - Shared significant common experiences
 - Existing close and strong bonds
 - The Genogram Worksheet connections
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Placing a Sibling Group (cont.)

A CFTM will be held to address barriers that may exist to placing siblings together such as:

- Large sibling groups
- Differing needs of siblings
- Entrance into foster care at different times
- Lack of resource homes to accommodate sibling groups
- Lack of support system to care for a sibling group
- Siblings having different identified reunification or permanent plans, such as adoption, guardianship, APPLA, family reunification
- Transportation
- Different parents (maternal/paternal relatives) input
- Lack of capacity in resource homes to accommodate a sibling group
(See Capacity to Accommodate Siblings)

NOTE: WIC 16002 & 16519.5 explain that capacity can be increased as long as the child has an age appropriate place to sleep. The lack of capacity needs to be clearly detailed in CWS/CMS and in Court reports to explain the barrier.

Capacity to Accommodate Siblings

In 2021, assembly Bill (AB) 366 amended WIC 16002 which specifies that the physical capacity of the home shall not be the sole reason to deny the placement of a sibling group if:

- Each child has an age appropriate sleeping arrangement and appropriate place to sleep and
- there are no other safety risks present.

NOTE: When referring to siblings, children of different genders may share a bedroom if the children or NMD are siblings.

Per [Resource Family Approval Written Directives](#), a county may approve for a capacity greater than six to allow siblings to remain together, but the following will be considered:

- ability of a resource family (RF) to comply with applicable laws and the written directives
- the resource family is capable of providing care and supervision for the number of the children in the home including adopted, biological, guardianship, and children of minor or NMD parents in the home.
- Other household members who live in the home and their individual needs.
- Circumstances in the family environment that may affect the RF ability of an applicant or RF to provide care and supervision to a child/NMD.
- Physical features of a home including:
 - Number of bedrooms and bathrooms
 - Sleeping arrangement of family members and other individuals in the home.
 - Number of children or NMD who may share a bedroom.

Capacity to Accommodate Siblings (cont.)

All new RFA homes are approved to capacity based on the total number of children the home can accommodate and the resource family can appropriately care for. However, to provide support to newly approved RFA homes and ensure they gradually obtain the experience in working with foster children, the Placement Coordinators Office (PCO) limits all newly RFA homes to two children at time for the first year of approval.

The PCO PSS may make an exception to accommodate sibling sets. The following is considered:

- The number of siblings to be placed in a resource home.
- If resource family has never parented and request for placement is for multiple siblings (e.g., 3 or more) and the support that the family has in place
- Number of children a newly approved resource family has had placed in their care since approval and how the placements went/any concerns were identified with those placements
- Willing to work with a Grossmont College and Adoptive Kinship Caregiver Education ([FAKCE](#)) caregiver mentor if not already working with one.
- If family is aware of supports such as Respite Care.

Placing Siblings Separately

When it is not possible to place siblings together, the SW has the responsibility of preserving ties between the siblings. The following ongoing efforts will be made by the SW:

- Establish a visitation plan during the Child and Family Team meeting (CFTM) and document it in the case plan to ensure consistent sibling visits while in foster care.
- Arrange transportation
- Continually assess and document each visit to determine if visits can be increased and include resource parent's or the supervising adult's observations
- Maintain communication with siblings' SW (if SW is not the same for all the children)
- Continually assess and document impact of the sibling relationships on child's placement and planning for legal permanence
- Explore placing with relatives/Nonrelative Extended Family Members (NREFMS) if they can accommodate siblings
- Placing the siblings near each other
- Arrange for other types of contact such as letter, email, phone calls, or video conferencing
- On-going assessment of the sibling relationships from the perspective of each child to help strategize how to place the children together
- Facilitate joint outings and camp experiences such as Camp Connect
- Encourage resource families to support each other by scheduling activities or providing respite care amongst each other so the siblings can see each other
- Overnight/day visits in resource home of siblings
- Explore how caregivers can work together to determine how they can best support sibling visitations
- Explore with placement team if they are aware of resource families who work together to support sibling visitations

Placing Siblings Separately Cont.

Visits between siblings who are not placed together are required to be incorporated in the case plan, unless the court finds that sibling interaction is contrary to the safety and well-being of either child. Children/youth residing in Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) must have a visitation plan documented in the Appraisal Needs and Services Plan.

NOTE: The Appraisal Needs and Service Plan is updated every 30 days by the STRTP and signed by the SW.

Documentation by SW for Siblings Under the Court's Jurisdiction

At each Dispositional and all Review Hearings thereafter, in the Sibling Placement subsection of the court reports, the SW will document if the child has any siblings also under the court's jurisdiction, and if they are not placed together, the SW will provide the frequency, length and nature of the visits between siblings. In addition, the ongoing efforts to place the children together and/or existing barriers to placement will be documented.

Documentation will consist of:

- The nature of the relationship between the child and his or her siblings, including if:
 - the siblings were raised together in the same home
 - the siblings shared significant common experiences or have existing close and strong bonds
 - the siblings express a desire to visits or live with one another
 - ongoing contact is in the child's best interest
- The appropriateness of developing or maintain the sibling relationship
- Relative/potential caregivers contacted and follow-up conversations
- Engagement efforts to facilitate visitations
- Level of supervision
- Reasons why sibling visits are supervised and what needs to be accomplished to move to unsupervised for older children.
- Assessing bond between children and their caregiver vs siblings when considering placing them together.

If reunification services are not ordered, the child's permanency assessment will include **consideration and existence of the relationship with the child's siblings.**

NOTE: The Jurisdictional/Dispositional and Status Review court reports have a "Sibling Placement" section within the "Out of Home" section that populates where staff will provide the documentation.

Case Plan

If siblings are not placed together the case plan must list the provisions for the development and maintenance of sibling relationships including visitation schedule and alternative methods of contact.

In order to maintain ties between siblings who are not placed together, the SW will document the frequency of the interaction among siblings until reunification is achieved or as part of the permanent plan for the child.

Case Plan (cont.) If it is determined that the sibling interaction is contrary to the safety and well-being of one or more of the siblings and the visitation was suspended, the suspension of sibling interaction will be reviewed at each review hearing.

Change of Placement (COP) The SW is required to provide notice to the court and all parties when there is a COP for a child and will document if the change will result in a separation from siblings or a change for an existing visitation plan.

Life Events WIC 16501.1 (g)(6) states that when siblings, who are dependents of the court are not placed together, the SW will ensure that the siblings are informed of significant life events that occur within their extended family. These significant life events will include:

- The death of an immediate relative.
- The birth of a sibling.
- Significant changes regarding a court dependent sibling such as changes in placement, major medical or mental health diagnoses, treatments, or hospitalizations, arrests, or changes in the permanent plan, unless the child objects to the sharing of the information with his or her siblings.

NOTE: If the SW is concerned about the appropriateness of informing the youth about a sibling's life event, the SW will consult with their PSS to determine if informing the child is appropriate.

Termination of Parental Rights and Sibling Visits Siblings may continue to have visits even after the Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and the finalization of an adoption. The SW, in collaboration with adoptive parents, will develop a Post Adoption Sibling Agreement for ongoing sibling visitations per WIC 16002(e).

Alignment with SET This policy aligns with [Set Value 3](#), which is committed to enhancing the well-being of children in foster care by striving to preserve their connections with siblings to support the lifelong permanent connections.
