

Promoting Partnerships between the Family of Origin and Resource Parents SSA-CW #21-04

Effective Date: June 1, 2021

Originating Office: SSA - Placement and Permanency Unit

Program Affected: Child Protective Services, Family
Preservation, Placement and Permanency Units, Resource
Homes, Private Child Placement Agencies



Learning Objectives

- To understand the role Comfort Calls and Icebreakers play in reducing trauma and promoting positive relationships between parents and resource parents;
- To understand the role the caseworker plays in setting the foundation for a positive co-parenting partnership between parents and resource parents;
- To understand the Continuum of Contact and the many ways that resource parents can support and partner with parents



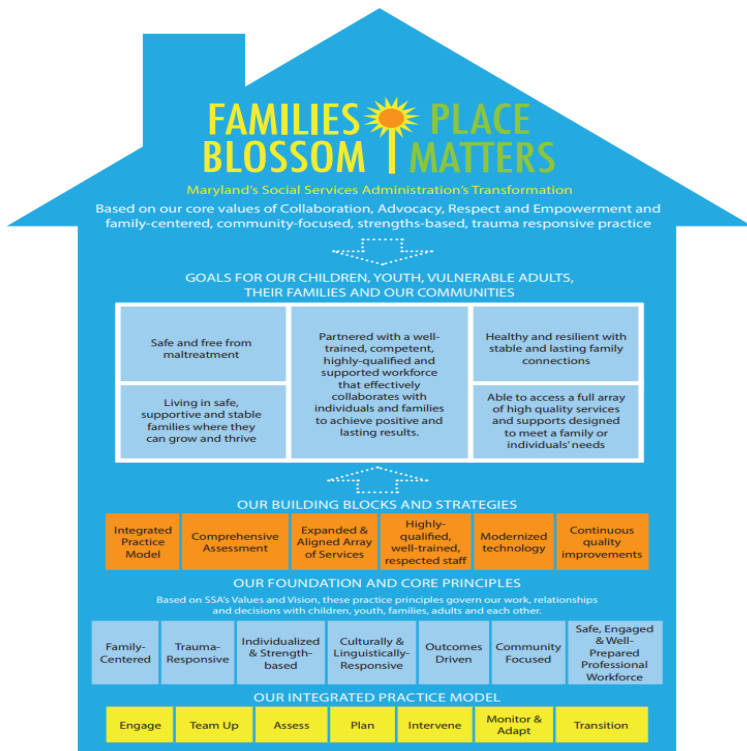
Agenda

- Overview of legal background and alignment with the Integrated Practice Model
- Key components of the policy: Comfort Calls, Icebreakers, and Continuum of Contact
- Technical information: documentation and forms
- Questions, feedback, and next steps



Policy and Legal Background

Maryland's Vision for System Transformation



Goal

- Empower Families of Origin to be partners in their child welfare experience

Strategy

- Strengthen teaming between Resource Parents, Workers, Family of Origin.



Alignment with Maryland's Integrated Practice Model (IPM)

Maryland's Integrated Practice Model (IPM) is based on values of CARE: Collaboration, Advocacy, Respect and Empowerment. MD IPM identifies being community focused as a key principle. This is described as building partnerships within communities and neighborhoods to ensure meeting individual and family needs is a shared responsibility.



Key Components of the Policy

Comfort
Calls

Icebreaker
s

Continuum
of Contact



What is Partnership?

Please visit www.menti.com and use the code
5204 4014



Comfort Calls



Comfort Calls

Guidelines

- To occur on the same day that the child enters out-of-home care and ideally within a few hours of separation
- A three-way call may be facilitated if unable to complete the call while in the resource home
- Parents and Resource Parents should be introduced by providing first and last names, unless specific safety issues exist (then utilize first names only)



Comfort Calls

Preparation

Parents

- Importance of establishing a good relationship for Child's wellbeing
- Information to be shared during the call
- A direct contact with Resource Parent



Resource Parents

- Comfort Call Education to be provided during Pre-Service Training
- Provide Resource Parents with family context, emotional state, and how the call would help alleviate everyone's concerns and anxiety
- Begin the call by providing information about themselves



Comfort Calls

Benefits

- Minimizes the trauma of separation for the child and the parents
- Initiates and promotes immediate communication between the parents and the resource parents
- Helps ensure that the resource parents receive the information necessary to meet the child's immediate needs
- Provides for a smoother transition into out-of-home care
- Establishes an authentic co-parenting partnership focused on the child
- Reinforces that parent is the expert on their child
- Reinforces the commitment to maintaining connections and contact with the family of origin



Comfort Calls

Special Circumstances

- Parents who are hospitalized or incarcerated
- Unknown whereabouts
- Safety issues



Icebreakers

The next step in building an authentic co-parenting partnership between parents and resource parents.



Icebreakers

Guidelines

- Held within five business days of the child entering foster care or changing placement. Include Treatment Foster Homes and Kinship Families.
- Generally, last an hour or less, and ideally occur in person at a neutral location. Video conferencing technology can be used if needed.
- Include the caseworker, parents, resource parents, and if appropriate, the child.
- The caseworker is responsible for facilitating the conversation between the participants and actively managing the meeting to keep it productive and child-focused.
- Forms include:
 - All About Me forms
 - Icebreaker Report
 - Co-Parenting and Sharing of Information Agreement



Icebreakers

Preparation

- Preparation is critical for all members (Case worker, Resource Parent, Parent and TFC) to ensure a successful icebreaker
- Resource parents shall be educated about Icebreakers during pre-service training and during annual reconsiderations.



Icebreakers

Benefits

- Provides the parents and resource parents with an opportunity to meet in person to share information and to discuss the child's specific needs.
- Helps create an authentic co-parenting partnership between the parents and resource parents.
- Creates an opportunity for shared goals and collaborative parenting.
- Reinforces that the parents are the experts on their child.
- Demonstrates to the child that both families are working together with the same goals.



Icebreakers

Special Circumstances

- Hospitalization and incarceration
- Unknown whereabouts
- Safety issues

Remember: Parents may be uncomfortable and unwilling to meet the resource parents right after separation, but they may feel differently after a few weeks or months. Additionally, some parents may refuse to participate in an in-person Icebreaker but may be willing to participate in a virtual one.



Continuum of Contact

Step by step decision made in partnership with the worker

The Continuum of Contact is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between Parents and Resource Parents with the goal of supporting reunification or another permanency plan.

Caseworkers and Resource Parents must be knowledgeable about the variety of ways in which Resource Parents can work with Parents.

When a child enters out-of-home care, the Resource Parents should be expected and encouraged to start taking steps to develop a Continuum of Contact.

The type of contact and communication between Resource Parents and Parents will evolve over time.



Continuum of Contact

- Participate in Comfort Calls and Icebreakers with a non-threatening and non-judgmental attitude.
- Attend court hearings and family team meetings and show your support of the parents by talking to them, sharing pictures or updates about their child, or asking to sit near them as opposed to across from them.
- Refer to the child as “your child” when communicating with the parents.
- Request pictures of the parents to display in the child’s room and to include in their lifebook.
- Ask about, learn about, and respect the parent’s culture.
- Exchange contact information and maintain communication with parents through telephone calls, video calls, text messages, emails, journals, and by sending pictures, cards and letters.
- Share copies of the child’s school pictures, artwork, homework, and report cards with their parents.
- Talk to the child about their parents in a positive way and acknowledge their accomplishments.
- Support family time by being on time, talking positively about it, packing a diaper or activity bag with snacks, and sharing pictures and updates with the parents in a journal.
- Arrange and host sibling time.



Continuum of Contact

- Encourage parents to remain in contact with their child through family time, phone calls, letters, and emails.
- Initiate and maintain contact with parents who are incarcerated, or hospitalized, or live out of state.
- Invite the parents to their child's extracurricular activities, school plays, and birthday celebrations.
- Keep parents updated regarding their child's medical and school appointments and encourage them to participate in these meetings.
- Participate in trainings about supporting parents, the plan of reunification, and the parent/child relationship.
- Offer to drive parents to a meeting or appointment.
- Volunteer to attend parenting classes with the parents or ask about other ways you can support their progress toward reunification.
- Serve as a support to the parents after reunification through mentoring or by providing respite care.
- Welcome parents into your home.



Technical Information

Documentation Requirements

- All attempted and completed Comfort Calls and Icebreakers shall be documented in a contact note in the child's case in CJAMS. When a Comfort Call or Icebreaker does not occur, the caseworker shall document the reason and the steps that were taken to address the barriers.
- The completed Icebreaker Meeting Report and the Co-Parenting and Sharing of Information Agreement shall be scanned into the file cabinet in the child's case in CJAMS.

Forms

- Things to Know if Your Child Is in Foster Care Brochure
- Icebreaker Meeting Report
- Co-Parenting Agreement
- About Me forms for the parents, resource parents, and child



Related Information and Additional Resources

- Icebreaker Meetings: A Tool for Building Relationships Between Birth and Foster Parents; Annie E. Casey, Karrie Biechle, Denise Goodman, Ph.D 2012
- Bridging the Gap; Continuum of Contact: Denise A. Goodman, PhD
- Comfort Calls: National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds, the Youth Law Center’s Quality Parenting Initiative, and Casey Family Programs
- Reunification Spotlight - Icebreakers: Tapping into the Power of Families Supporting Families; ABA Center on Children and the Law
- Louisiana QPI Initial Calls Practice Guide
- Ice Breaker Video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k2U7_rjOWo
- Comfort Calls Video Clip: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1huC56p5Sj9rvnV2g-5Nbu59Fku83ieX_/view
- QPI Training Video on comfort calls & ice breakers:
<http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/video/qpi/cuyahoga/comforticebreakers/start.html>



Q&A Session: July 20, 2021 8:00pm-9:30pm
FAQ Sheets
PRIDE training
Ongoing trainings

