



Administration for  
Children's Services

John B. Mattingly  
Commissioner

150 William Street  
18<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10038

212-341-0903 tel  
212-341-0916 fax

December 22, 2010

To Foster Care Agency Staff:

Parents who have experienced child welfare intervention firsthand can offer a unique type of support to others whose children are in foster care, in the role of parent advocates. Parent advocates possess a wealth of knowledge and understanding and can serve as positive role models to families trying to achieve reunification and permanency. This memorandum informs foster care provider agency staff of recent State regulatory amendments that pertain to and encourage the inclusion of parent advocates in foster care programs. Effective August 11, 2010, these amendments:

- 1) create a formal definition of parent advocates, and
- 2) offer flexibility to foster care provider agencies by allowing parent advocates to fulfill a portion of the required casework contacts *with parents or relatives* of children currently in foster care under certain circumstances.

Parent Advocate: Defined:

Parent advocates are persons who have previously received child welfare services, have successfully addressed the issue(s) which brought their families to the attention of the child welfare system, have been reunified with their children, if applicable, and subsequently have been trained as parent advocates to work within the child welfare system.<sup>1</sup> Parent advocates are employed by or under contract with an authorized foster care agency and provide support and advocacy to parents or relatives of children in care through a variety of activities. As part of their training, parent advocates should be advised that confidentiality requirements regarding case information apply, as they do for other child welfare staff,<sup>2</sup> and that parent advocates are mandated reporters. If an agency does hire a parent advocate, s/he may complete a limited number of casework contacts (as described below).

Parent Advocate Casework Contacts:

Initial casework contacts within 30 days of placement **must** be made by the case manager/case planner or caseworker assigned to the case, as directed by the case planner. After the first 30 days of placement, parent advocates are permitted to make up to two of the monthly required casework contacts with parents or relatives in any six-month period, with the exception of the assessment of safety and the potential risk for future abuse or maltreatment if a child were to return home. Such safety and risk assessments must be made by the case planner.

Only two of the monthly required casework contacts made by a parent advocate with parents or relatives in any six-month period after the first 30 days of placement can count toward the monthly required casework contacts. Parent advocates can make additional casework contacts, **however**, these additional casework contacts **cannot** be counted toward the monthly required casework contacts.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See NYCRR 441.2 (o) for a full description of "Parent Advocate".

<sup>2</sup> 08-OCFS-INF-14 Parent Advocate Programs.

<sup>3</sup> 10-OCFS-INF-09 Guidelines for Casework Contacts with Parents or Relatives by Parent Advocates.

**Case Planner Continued Responsibility for Safety and Risk Assessments:**

If a parent advocate observes or discovers anything of concern during his/her casework contacts, this information should be provided to the case manager/case planner so that s/he can follow-up on any noted issues of safety or risk. Finally, when a child is on trial discharge, the regulations surrounding visits by the parent advocate and the case planner are the same as those stated above in the previous section.<sup>4</sup>

Consistent with the recent amendments, ACS will update Guidance #2007/02, *Revised Casework Contacts for Families with Children in Foster Care* (revised 3/30/10) and its accompanying chart. In addition, we recommend that agencies give careful consideration to the best practice guidelines outlined in the attached OCFS issuance regarding parent advocates conducting casework contacts.

If you have any further questions on the role of parent advocates in making casework contacts, please contact either Melody Grissom, Deputy Director of the Policies and Procedures Unit at [Melody.Grissom@dfa.state.ny.us](mailto:Melody.Grissom@dfa.state.ny.us) , or Dana Guyet, Director, Office of Advocacy at [Dana.Guyet@dfa.state.ny.us](mailto:Dana.Guyet@dfa.state.ny.us)

Sincerely,



John B. Mattingly, Commissioner

---

<sup>4</sup> NYCRR 441.21 (b)(1) and (2)