



**Series 100:** Case Management

**Policy Name**     Comfort Calls

**Policy Number**   147

**Origination Date**  10/1/2021

**Revision Date:** NA

Regulation: F.A.C 65C-16; CF-FSP 5071, Section 39 F.S.

**Policy:** In an effort to reduce the overall trauma associated with family separations, comfort calls encourage and support relationships between caregivers and birth/ legal parents involved in a removal.

#### **A.     The Comfort Call**

The comfort call is a phone call facilitated by a qualified child welfare professional (foster care support worker, intake and placement representative, Child Protective Investigator (CPI), residential program caregiver, or other) and caregiver or kin or fictive kin to the birth parent(s) after a child is removed from their home, or after a change in placement setting (not including temporary respite). The purpose of these calls is to:

- Comfort the child;
- Provide assurance to the parent;
- Take the first step in establishing a positive co-parenting relationship between the caregiver and birth parent(s); and to
- Discuss vital information needed to meet the child's needs.

This call also provides an opportunity for the child and parent to speak to each other after removal, or change in placement setting, which can help both to feel more comfortable with the placement. This call should always occur within 12 hours, if at all possible, after the child is removed from their home. Otherwise, no later than 48 hours after removal. During the call, the caregiver should allow the birth parent(s) to be the expert on their child by discussing information needed to meet the child's needs such as:

- a. Medical – allergies, medications, upcoming or needed appointments, immunizations, etc.;
- b. Behavioral – past trauma, placement history, therapeutic history;
- c. Educational and Developmental – school attended, teachers, academic performance, special services, etc.;
- d. Family/Fictive Kin/Peer support systems – Who else can the child call/visit for support?;
- e. Routines – extracurricular activities, schedules, bedtimes, etc.;
- f. Establish plans for a first meeting between caregiver and birth parent (icebreaker meeting/family transfer staffing); and
- g. Let the child speak with their parent(s) when developmentally appropriate and the child desires to do so. The child is not required to participate if they do not care to or if there are other



reasons not to speak with the parent. The caregiver and facilitator will make the best decision possible based on case-specific information and the child's wishes.

- At the time of removal, the Child Protective Investigator must obtain from the parent a method of contacting them and educate the parent about the comfort call.
- At the time of a change in placement, the Child's Case Manager must obtain from the parent a method of contacting them and educate the parent about the comfort call.
- The Child Protective Investigator must share all known Child Health/ Social History information with the caregiver with all information previously gathered – the caregiver can then fill in any blanks based on the information gathered during the comfort call.

## **B. General Guidelines**

- Calls will be facilitated by a qualified professional, which may be one of the following:
  - Child Placing Agency representative
  - Community Based Care representative
  - Dependency Case Manager
  - Child Protective Investigator
  - Residential Group Home representative
- The comfort call can be made in a variety of ways:
  - From the staff member's work cell phone;
  - If the caregiver is comfortable with it, from the caregiver's phone; or
  - Through a temporary/disposable phone (trac-phone or similar)
  - Through Google Voice
  - Through a virtual meeting platform (Zoom, Teams, Etc.)
  - Other platforms that allow multiple parties to participate
- Begin the call by reminding the birth parent and caregiver that the purpose is to provide important information that may only be known by the birth parent to make sure the caregiver can provide the best care possible, and to provide the birth parent with information about the family the child is living with. The call is not to address the reason for removal or concerns from the parent or caregiver.
- Introduce birth and caregiver by providing at least first names. First and last names may be shared depending on the discretion of the participants. If safety issues exist only first names will be used.
- Encourage caregivers to acknowledge positive attributes, appearance, manners, etc. of the child.
- When appropriate, and if they want to, the child may participate.
- The call facilitator should actively monitor information shared and the nature of the conversation and be prepared to intervene, if necessary. The facilitator can assist in re-directing conversations as needed to support continuation of the call and to maintain focus on the child and not on removal or other issues. If the call becomes inappropriate and the facilitator is unable to redirect, the call should be terminated. The facilitator has the discretion to redirect or end the call as needed.
- In concluding the call, acknowledge with each the difficulty they may have experienced but, by participating, they were able to share important information, alleviate some of their fears and anxieties, and their first meeting will be much easier having had this conversation. Thank each for their participation and their commitment focusing on their child.

**C. Facilitators:**

- If a child is placed with a licensed foster parent, the facilitator will be a CPA representative or designee.
- If a child is placed with a relative/non-relative, the facilitator will be the CPI. In cases where there is no CPI involved and there is a change in placement setting to a relative/non-relative, the facilitator will be the Child's Case Manager.
- If a child is placed in a residential group home, the facilitator will be a group home representative.
  - If the facilitator is a residential group home representative there must be at least two group home representatives on the call. (One cannot facilitate their own call.)
  - The facilitator will provide written documentation of the comfort call to the CBC placement unit who will document the call in FSFN.
- The facilitator will document the comfort call in a case note attached to the child's case in FSFN, including the following:
  - date and time of the call
  - who participated
  - what was discussed
  - whether all parties were appropriate
- The notation will be placed in the FSFN Case as a "Caregiver-Parent Introduction" note type.
- If more than one facilitator participates in the comfort call (e.g. CPI and foster care licensing staff) they will establish between themselves who is responsible for documentation of the comfort call.
- If a call is attempted, but a parent does not answer/respond, a second attempt must be made within the initial 48-hour window. If there is still no contact, both attempts must be documented in the FSFN case. This is the minimum requirement at the time of placement, additional attempts should persist until contact is established.
- If there are two custodial parents that do not reside together, comfort calls must be attempted with both parents. If there are two parents but only one is considered custodial, the call may be limited to the one custodial parent.
- An initial comfort call may be held with another caring adult connected to the child if one can be identified.
- If the comfort call did not occur for any reason, this must be documented in the case as well with an explanation as to why it did not occur.

**D. Unique Circumstances:**

Hospitalized or Incarcerated Birth Parent(s):

- Depending upon the hospital, treatment center, detention facility, criminal charges, etc., contact with and explanation of the purpose and procedures of the initial call with the physician, nurse, social worker, jail staff etc. may allow for a brief or modified call.
- If the call cannot be conducted immediately due to hospitalization or incarceration, the initial call should be made as soon as possible once the birth parent is released or able to have such a call.
- An initial comfort call may be held with another caring adult connected to the child if one can be identified.



Parent's Whereabouts Unknown:

- An initial comfort call may be held with another caring adult connected to the child if one can be identified.
- When parent(s) are located, the initial call with the caregivers should be done as soon as possible.

Safety Concerns:

- Unfortunately, there may be rare situations where there are confirmed significant safety issues and risks which may preclude the initial call or require modification to the call procedures. These might include no contact orders or orders of protection. When such situations exist, the specialist shall discuss with the CPI and his/her supervisor the specific safety concerns, jointly assessing options and possible procedural modifications which would allow the call to occur safely.

Language Barriers:

- The Child Protective Investigator and Facilitator will use existing policies and procedures to establish translation services to ensure all parties can effectively communicate.

Approved: Carol Deloach

Carol Deloach, CEO

October 26, 2021