

VISITS TO CHILDREN “SEEN ALONE” PRACTICE STANDARDS

It is essential, in terms of safeguarding children and evidencing that they are safe, that they are seen alone and that this is recorded correctly.

There will be regular auditing to ensure that this guidance is being followed and performance reports will monitor the completion rate.

This guidance is to be read in conjunction with [Halton Children’s Services online policies and procedures](#) and the [Pan-Cheshire safeguarding policies and procedures](#).

This guidance applies to ALL visits including during assessment, Child in Need (including private fostering), Child Protection and Children in Care.

All statutory visits must be undertaken face to face and in person and not virtually (unless there are specific Covid restrictions for that child at that time).

What is meant by Seen Alone?

A child is seen on their own and not in the presence of their parent(s), family member, other adults, teacher or support worker or siblings. The social worker should be able to talk to the child without being overheard by others.

Where can I see a child on their own?

A child should be seen at their home or placement wherever possible so their home environment can be reviewed as part of the statutory visit; in some circumstances this may not be possible or safe and can take place at school, college or another venue where a confidential discussion can take place. The reason for the visit not taking place at home must be recorded and a further visit undertaken to the home/placement so their home environment can be reviewed.

Ages of children

Children under 4 because of their age, development and care needs are exempted from being seen on their own unless they are able to engage in a meaningful interaction with the social worker. From the age of 3, it is expected to see more children being seen on their own than not but this depends on their level of development.

As part of the statutory visit, the social worker should observe and record the level of care and attention the child receives, the level and nature of communication and interaction with parents, other adults and siblings. The child should be awake and alert – if they are not, this will not count as a statutory visit and arrangements to re-visit must be made within a maximum of 5 working days.

All children and young people over 4 must be seen on their own as part of their plan.

The level and frequency of visiting must be in their plan and agreed and reviewed regularly in supervision. Statutory visits can only be undertaken and recorded by the lead social worker or duty social worker.

- **Assessment** – at least one visit should be made to a child on their own to gather their views, and more visits may be required as part of the assessment dependant on the individual needs.
- **Children in Need (CiN)** – children with a CiN plan must have a statutory visit **as a minimum every 28 days**, and should be seen on their own on alternate visits. Visits may take place more frequently than this and the level and frequency must be recorded in the CiN plan which must specify the reasons for a child being seen on their own and the contingency plan if this does not happen.
- **Child Protection (CP)** – children with a CP plan must have a statutory visit **as a minimum every 28 days**, and should be seen on their own on alternate visits. The CP plan must specify the requirement to see the child on their own and the contingency plan if this does not take place. The schedule of visits and the nature (announced/unannounced) must be outlined in the plan and as a minimum the child must be seen on their own on every alternate visit in line with the [Pan-Cheshire Safeguarding procedures](#).
- **Children in Care (CiC)** – children must be seen on their own on each statutory visit without exception and the frequency in line with the procedures.

Can I see sibling groups on their own and record this as a statutory visit for all of them?

It is important to see siblings together and their relationship with each other and record this on a case note or as part of an assessment. However, each child should have their own individual statutory visit where they are spoken to on their own and not as part of a group. Individual children can be easily lost in group statutory visits; some children may not be present for a number of visits but the group statutory visit is recorded on their record – this means their individual experience is not tracked and recorded and some individual children may not be seen on their own for some time but this is not picked up by the worker or their manager. This is a key lesson from serious case reviews where children in sibling groups have become invisible.

Planning for seen alone visits

It is essential to be open and transparent with parents, children and young people as part of their assessment/plan why children need to be seen on their own. It is also essential to be open and transparent with them about why you would be worried if this did not happen and what the contingency plan is if you were not able to see the children.

I have not been able to see the child on their own as planned

If you do not see the child on their own as part of a planned statutory visit, then you must record why on the statutory visit form. There may be valid reasons (the child is ill, they have gone out) but **you must re-arrange that statutory visit within 5 working days**, and not leave until the next planned statutory visit date.

If you have still not been able to see the child on their own, you must formally raise this with your supervisor and consider the reasons why. If it is non engagement or lack of co-operation from the parent/adult care giver, then consider the possible reasons and what can be done to improve, and refer to your contingency plan and the level of risk and if there are grounds to escalate the level of intervention. Update your plan as a result and ensure all partners are informed of any changes. This must be recorded on the case record as a management consultation.

If a child or young person is refusing to see you, consider why this may be (they don't understand your role, the parent may have primed them to not co-operate, they may be scared and worried about the consequences for their family). Formally escalate to your manager and agree what you can do to improve and refer to your contingency plan and the level of risk. Update your plan as a result and ensure all partners are informed of any changes. This must be recorded on the case record as a management consultation.

Children on CP Plans that become a Child in Care

- When a child on CP plan becomes a Child in Care, the visiting frequency as a child in care until the first review should be followed and will be for both the CP plan and CIC until the CP plan is ended.

Monitoring and oversight

The weekly PIMMS report for the duty and assessment and CiN teams detail the child seen alone performance reporting. The manager must review each week and where there is a gap or delay, they must formally raise with the social worker to resolve recording and address any issues or difficulties as outlined above.

Managers must also review in their monthly supervision with the social worker. The Children in Care monthly PIMMS report will also report on children seen alone and the manager in their monthly reviews must formally raise with the social worker.