

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL	
	Chapter 4: Assessment	Effective Date: October 1, 2012
	Section 9: Interviewing Children	Version: 4

POLICY [REVISED]

[REVISED] The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will conduct or arrange an individual face-to-face interview¹ with the alleged child victim, all other children living in the home (including children who live in the home part time due to a custody arrangement or have visitation in the home), and any children not living in the home who were present at the time of the alleged incident regardless of the allegation. The Family Case Manager (FCM) will always inquire about the household composition and if any other children live in the home part time or have visitation.

[NEW] If a child who lives in the home part time or has visitation is listed as a *victim*, the child's custodial parent can be advised of the allegations by receiving a copy of the [Preliminary Report of Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect \(SF 114\)](#) and the [Assessment of Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect Report \(SF 113/CW0311\)](#). If the child is not listed as a victim, the child should be interviewed as a witness. (See Practice Guidance)

The FCM will distinguish between making a "contact" with a child and when that child is "interviewed" by accurately documenting what occurred in Management Gateway for Indiana's Kids (MaGIK).

Contact vs. Interview

A contact can be any communication or an in-person observation. An interview occurs when a person is individually questioned about the allegations of a Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) report not in the presence of family members or witnesses. A contact is not always considered an interview. A contact includes but is not limited to:

1. Face-to-Face home, other office;
2. Telephone;
3. Fax;
4. Email;
5. Voice Mail; and
6. Correspondence.

[REVISED] When interviewing children who are alleged to have been exposed to domestic violence, DCS will focus interviews with children on the:

1. Result of witnessing what they saw and/or heard (are there any signs of behavioral, cognitive or emotional impact);
2. Child's understanding and/or interpretation of the violence (how does the child explain what happened or what lead to the domestic violence); and
3. Child's concerns about safety.

¹ For children who are too young or unable to communicate, an interview will consist of face-to-face interaction with the child at a level that is appropriate given the child's developmental status.

Note: It is critical to assess the unique impact of domestic violence on each child, not just what they were exposed to or observed.

A trained forensic interviewer may conduct an interview if the child is an alleged victim of sexual abuse; however, DCS will be present during the interview.

Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) may conduct an interview if LEA and DCS are participating in a joint assessment, however, DCS will be present during the interview. Further, DCS will conduct an additional interview if unable to assess child safety and well-being during the joint LEA interview.

[NEW] FCMs will consider all relevant factors regarding the assessment in determining when to utilize video and/or audio equipment to record interviews with children. Video and/or audio taping should be utilized in situations when allegations of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, or other complex cases could lead to criminal charges being filed. (See Practice Guidance)

Code References

1. [IC 31-34-13: Child videotape testimony in child in need of services proceedings](#)
2. [IC 5-26.5-1-3: Domestic violence](#)
3. [IC 34-6-2-34.5: Domestic or family violence](#)

PROCEDURE

The Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. **[NEW]** Determine which children require a face to face interview by asking if additional children live in the home part time or have visitation;
2. Obtain consent from a parent, guardian, or custodian prior to interviewing any child, unless exigent circumstances exist. (See separate policies, [4.5 Consent to Interview Child](#) and [4.6 Exigent Circumstances](#).);
3. Conduct the interview in a location and/or setting that assures privacy for the child;
4. Honor a parent, guardian, or custodian's request to be present during the interview **if** his or her presence will not impede or influence the interview in any way;
5. **[REVISED]** Determine when to video and/or audio tape the interview with an alleged victim by staffing with a Supervisor if possible;

[NEW] Note: Video and/or audio taping should be utilized in situations when allegations of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, or other complex cases could lead to criminal charges being filed.

6. Develop rapport with the child prior to asking questions about the alleged CA/N;
7. Explain to the child at the beginning of the interview what will happen with the information obtained during the interview (i.e., who will this information be shared with);
8. **[REVISED]** Document in MaGIK any possible behavioral signs of domestic violence in the child, especially statements that they are afraid of the alleged perpetrator or domestic violence offender;
9. Engage the child(ren) in the development of the [Family Support/Community Services Plan \(SF53243/CW3425\)](#), if age appropriate. See separate policy, [4.19 Family Support/Community Services Plan](#).

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Indicators of Domestic Violence

If any of the following indicators of domestic violence are observed during the course of an assessment, carefully consider how to proceed with the interview (i.e., if the alleged domestic violence offender is present, the interview may need to be handled differently than if the parent, guardian, custodian, or child were alone).

Child Indicators:

1. Child may blame self for the abuse;
2. Child may identify with the alleged domestic violence offender by “acting out” aggressively toward the non-offending parent;
3. Child may be depressed, confused, or exhibit animosity, anger, or sadness;
4. Infants may be moody, restless, sleepless, or lack responsiveness;
5. Regression, such as bed wetting or thumb sucking;
6. School phobia- a manifestation of leaving the non-offending parent alone in the home;
7. Guilt or the inability to establish trusting relationships;
8. Child tries to hide the fact that domestic violence is present in the home;
9. Child may take on the “mothering” role;
10. Child may demonstrate fear when the alleged domestic violence offender is around;
11. Child overly protective of one (1) parent; and/or
12. Child may be withdrawn, apathetic, or feel insecure and powerless.

[NEW] Interviewing Children that Live in the Home Part Time or Have Visitation

If a child is determined to live in the home part time or has visitation as the result of a custody arrangement, the child requires a face to face interview. If it is determined that the child is *not* a victim, the FCM should proceed with setting up an interview with the child but is not permitted to disclose any details regarding the allegations of abuse or neglect to the child’s custodial parent. The FCM should stress the importance of the interview by advising the parent that the child may have witnessed an incident or have information that has been disclosed to them by another child that can affect child safety. The FCM should also advise the child’s parent that they can be present during the interview with their child.

[REVISED] Video/Audio Taping Interviews

The FCM is to make reasonable efforts to use audio and/or video equipment to record the interview with the child. Recording interviews may reduce the number of times an alleged child victim must be interviewed. It may also reduce the necessity for the alleged victim to provide further testimony if the case goes to court.

Decisions regarding how to record an interview should be made based on the circumstances of the report and the location of the interview. Written notes should always be taken during the interview (preferably by someone other than the assigned FCM when possible, such as LEA or another FCM). All information should be reviewed and clarified with the child to assure an accurate understanding of what the child said. The FCM should explain to the extent possible to the child that they are being recorded.

FCMs should use critical thinking skills to consider all factors when deciding to utilize video and/or audio equipment to record interviews with children. Video and/or audio taping should be utilized in situations when allegations of sexual abuse, severe physical abuse, or other complex cases could lead to criminal charges being filed.

[REVISED] Location and Presence of Others

In planning for an interview of a child, the FCM should ensure that the location of the interview is non-threatening and neutral so the child can feel safe. When circumstances allow, the child should be interviewed separately from other family members. The FCM should allow the interview to begin with the non-offending parent present and work towards separate interviews. The interview with the child should never be conducted in the presence of or within hearing distance of the alleged perpetrator.

Types of Questions to Ask During an Interview

Open-ended questions should be used as much as possible. Multiple-choice or yes and no questions should only be used if the FCM is unable to elicit any information from the child. The more open-ended the question the greater confidence one can have in the child's response. The following open-ended questions are to provide guidance on gathering information regarding the who, what, when, where and how of the alleged CA/N:

Who questions: These questions are important in identifying the parties involved and who is aware of what has happened.

Who did this? Who was there? Who knows about this besides you?

When questions: These questions are used to determine the most recent occurrence as well as the duration of the abuse or neglect. In physical abuse cases, "When" questions are used, for instance, to determine if the degree of healing of the injury is consistent with the time frame the child is describing.

When mommy left, what was on TV? When mommy came home, what was on TV?

Where questions: These questions are used to determine the location of the CA/N as well as the whereabouts of other family members at the time of the occurrence.

Where were you hit? Where were mommy and daddy at the time you were hit?

How questions: These questions help children expand their responses. For instance, when a child says, "He hit me," the worker might say, "*How did he hit you?*" or "*Tell me about that.*"

What questions: These questions ask for descriptive statements or observations. The worker may need to ascertain whether the child was threatened, tricked, bribed or otherwise coerced to cooperate with a perpetrator (e.g., in a sexual abuse incident) or to maintain secrecy after any incident of abuse or neglect. For instance, a child who has divulged that the perpetrator "told me not to tell" should be asked, "*What did he say?*"

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Family Support/Community Services Plan \(SF53243\)](#)

RELATED INFORMATION

Number of Interviews

While it is best practice to conduct only one interview with a child, an FCM may have to conduct additional interviews with a child if the FCM was unable to gather sufficient information in the initial interview to assess child safety and well-being.

Joint Interviews with LEA

See separate policy, [4.29 Joint Assessments](#), for more information.

Forensic Interviews for Children who are Alleged Victims of Sexual Abuse

It is best for a child who is an alleged victim of sexual abuse to be interviewed by a professional who is trained and experienced in forensic interviewing. DCS offers specialized trainings on this topic. If DCS and LEA are present for an interview, the determination of who will lead the interview should be based on who has the proper training and is able to develop rapport with the child.

Using means other than verbal communication is often a critical component of interviewing alleged victims of sexual abuse. In many cases what a child will demonstrate with objects or drawings is far more compelling than what they may say. The interviewer may ask the child to draw pictures of the home, the family, etc., or to communicate using blank figure drawings or anatomically detailed dolls and doll houses.

[REVISED] Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)

At CAC's, the various members of the Child Protection, Law Enforcement, Prosecution, Victim Advocacy, Medical and Mental Health Communities are able to provide children and their families comprehensive services within a child-friendly environment designed to meet the child's needs.