

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES</b> <b>CHILD WELFARE POLICY</b>	
	<b>Chapter 8:</b> Out-of-Home Services <b>Section 39:</b> Trial Home Visits (THV)	
	<b>Effective Date:</b> July 1, 2023	<b>Version:</b> 9

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## POLICY OVERVIEW

A Trial Home Visit (THV) facilitates reunification and permanency for a child by transitioning the child from out-of-home care to the care of the child’s parent, guardian, or custodian.

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## PROCEDURE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will obtain a court order approving the THV for up to three (3) months. DCS will maintain placement and care responsibilities for the child while on the THV. DCS will seek a court order for approval of an extension of the THV, for an additional three (3) months, if needed, prior to the end of the initial three (3) months, when the safety and well-being of the child can be reasonably ensured, and the following conditions have been met:

1. The child’s permanency goal is reunification;
2. There is documented progress toward Case Plan/Prevention Plan goals;
3. Safety concerns have been addressed; and
4. The service level of the case can be decreased at least one (1) level (see policy 4.26 Determining Service Levels and Transitioning to Permanency Services).

**Note:** If DCS recommends the THV last longer than the current court order, a hearing, notice, and court order authorizing each three (3) month extension is required prior to the expiration of the current order.

DCS will make contact with the child and family within 24 hours of receiving notice of a critical episode involving the child and/or family (e.g., potential risk of removal, new CA/N allegations, potential runaway situations, pregnancy of the child, lack of parental contact). DCS will monitor and evaluate the situation and convene a Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting and/or a Case Plan Conference to assess whether the situation warrants additional services or supports for the family. See policies 5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings and 5.10 Family Services.

Prior to the THV, the Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Complete the Reunification Assessment and a new Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment, and review the results of the assessments with the FCM Supervisor (see policies 8.44 Reunification Assessment and 5.19 Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths [CANS] Assessment);

**Note:** The Reunification Assessment must be completed on paper and uploaded to the case management system.

2. Determine the family's current service level and discuss with the CFT whether the service level should be decreased;
3. Complete a home visit and examine every room of the home, paying attention to areas where the child may eat, sleep, play, and bathe;
4. Convene a CFT Meeting and/or Case Plan Conference monthly to review the case progress, assessments, and current service level to determine if a THV is appropriate and, if applicable, consider whether separating the child from the child's sibling is in the child's best interests (see policies 5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings and 5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan);
5. Review and update the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care (see policies 4.42 Plan of Safe Care and 5.21 Safety Planning) to address and include:
  - a. Current service referrals,
  - b. Services recommended as preventive measures,
  - c. Actions the family intends to take (e.g., continue family counseling),
  - d. Community resources (e.g., support groups, child care referral services),
  - e. Established informal family supports, and
  - f. Safe Sleep, when appropriate (see Forms and Tools for applicable resources).
6. Obtain approval from the FCM Supervisor of the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care and a recommendation for THV to submit to the court;
7. Provide information to the DCS Staff Attorney at least 10 days prior to the start of the Trial Home Visit for submission of written notice to the court and abide by all requirements of notice to the child's current placement; and

**Note:** The requirements of notice are different depending on the length of time the child has been in the current placement and the type of the child's current placement. See Policy 8.38 Placement Changes for requirements.

8. Document all actions and outcomes in the case management system.

If the THV is approved by the court, the FCM will:

1. Ensure the parent, guardian, or custodian understands the child is still under the care and custody of DCS during the THV;
2. Ensure the THV is appropriately documented in the case management system;
3. Complete face-to-face contact with the child and the parent, guardian, or custodian weekly during the first 30 days of the THV, then every other week for the remainder of the THV. Contact may be announced and unannounced and some may be delegated to service providers, where appropriate (see policy 8.10 Minimum Contact);

**Note:** The start of a THV is a case juncture and during case junctures, face-to-face contact with the child and the parent, guardian, or custodian must be made weekly. See policy 8.10 Minimum Contact.

4. Provide continued services to the family and ensure the family has access to appropriate services to preserve the family and rehabilitative services throughout the THV (see policy 5.10 Family Services);
5. Discuss the appropriateness of delegating some face-to-face contacts to a service provider with the FCM Supervisor and create or modify any referrals needed for this purpose;
6. Facilitate a CFT Meeting or Case Plan Conference to update the Case Plan/Prevention Plan and have the plan signed by the child's parent, guardian, or custodian and the child, if 14 years of age or older;

**Note:** The CFT should discuss with the child and the parent, guardian, or custodian; and resource parents the expectations, responsibilities, and safeguards that will be in place to protect the child. This should include the services, supports, and the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care.

7. Provide the parent, guardian, or custodian with a copy of the Case Plan/Prevention Plan and upload to the case management system;
8. Ensure the child's current school personnel is verbally notified of the child's THV within 24 hours of the child's change in placement and complete a referral to the Education Services Team to initiate completion of the School Notification and Best Interests Determination (BID) form (see policy 8.22 School Notifications and Legal Settlement);
9. Continue to monitor the family's progress, update the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care as needed, staff case specifics with the FCM Supervisor during regular case staffing, and assess any need to extend the THV, **prior** to exceeding the three (3) months (see policy 8.43 Meaningful Contacts);
10. Complete a new Reunification Assessment and CANS Assessment if it is determined at the CFT Meeting or Case Plan Conference that an extension of the THV is necessary and the child's safety and well-being may reasonably be ensured;

**Note:** The Reunification Assessment must be completed on paper and uploaded to the case management system.

11. Staff with the DCS Staff Attorney to discuss what is necessary to request a court hearing or to obtain a court order to extend the THV or request closure of the Child in Need of Services (CHINS) case **prior** to exceeding three (3) months;
12. Remove the child from the THV and return the child to out-of-home care if the child's safety and/or well-being are at risk and the provision of additional services to preserve the family has not reduced the risk to allow the child to remain in the home safely. DCS will return the child to the most recent placement whenever possible; and

**Note:** Court approval with the appropriate IV-E findings of best interest and reasonable efforts will be requested to change placement from a THV to out-of-home placement. Any new allegations of CA/N must be reported to the DCS Child Abuse or Neglect Hotline (Hotline) and cannot be handled as a part of the case (see policy 4.38 Assessment Initiation).

13. Document all actions and outcomes in the case management system.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Review assessment results (e.g., Reunification Assessment and CANS Assessment), the family's recommended service level, the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care, input from the CFT or Case Plan Conference members, and other case specifics during regular case staffing with the FCM;
2. Approve or deny the recommendation for the THV and any request for delegation of face-to-face contact to a service provider, THV extension, removal of the child, or dismissal of the CHINS case; and
3. Ensure information is documented in the case management system, including any deviation from best practice.

The DCS Staff Attorney will:

1. Work with the FCM to make a recommendation to the court and seek court approval for the THV if it is determined a THV is appropriate; and

**Note:** The court order approving the THV must state DCS has placement and care responsibility.

2. Seek court approval of an extension of the THV, for an additional three (3) months, if needed, prior to the end of the three (3) month period and before the expiration of any extension.

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## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### Definitions

#### Case Juncture

A case juncture is defined as a new awareness of significant information regarding the child or family's strengths or needs, which may impact the Case Plan/Prevention Plan, Safety Plan, and/or the Plan of Safe Care. Case junctures may include, but are not limited to, transition planning and/or positive or negative changes in:

1. Placement;
2. Formal or informal supports;
3. Family involvement;
4. Visitation;
5. Behavior;
6. Diagnosis (mental or physical);
7. Sobriety;
8. Skills acquisition;
9. Education;
10. Court; and
11. Trial Home Visit (THV).

#### Case Staffing

Case staffing is a systematic and frequent review of all case information with safety, stability, permanency, and well-being as driving forces for case activities.

### Forms and Tools

- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- Case Plan/Prevention Plan (SF 2956)- Available in the case management system
- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment- Available in the case management system
- [DCS Safe Sleep](#)
- [Healthy Children.org](#)
- [Indiana Safe Sleep Program](#)
- [National Institute of Health](#)
- [Plan of Safe Care \(SF 56565\)](#)
- Reunification Assessment- Available in the case management system
- [Riley Children's Health Sleep Safety](#)
- [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#)
- [The New Crib Standard: Questions and Answers](#)

### Related Policies

- [4.26 Determining Service Levels and Transitioning to Permanency Services](#)
- [4.38 Assessment Initiation](#)

- [4.42 Plan of Safe Care](#)
- [5.07 Child and Family Team Meetings](#)
- [5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan](#)
- [5.10 Family Services](#)
- [5.19 Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths \(CANS\) Assessment](#)
- [5.21 Safety Planning](#)
- [8.10 Minimum Contact](#)
- [8.22 School Notifications and Legal Settlement](#)
- [8.38 Placement Changes](#)
- [8.43 Meaningful Contacts](#)
- [8.44 Reunification Assessment](#)

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## LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 31-34-3-4.7: Notice to the child's school](#)
- [IC 31-34-4-8: Change in temporary out-of-home placement; consideration of separation of siblings](#)
- [IC 31-34-23-3: Notice and hearing requirements; change in out of home placement; temporary order for emergency change of placement](#)
- [IC 31-34-23-5: Placement of a child with a previous placement](#)
- [IC 31-34-23-6: Notice and hearing requirements; change in out-of-home placement](#)
- [45 CFR 1356.21 \(e\): Trial home visits](#)

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## PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 8.39

*Practice Guidance is designed to assist DCS staff with thoughtful and practical direction on how to effectively integrate tools and social work practice into daily case management in an effort to achieve positive family and child outcomes. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.*

### **Preparing the Child for a Trial Home Visit (THV)**

The necessary preparation for a THV will vary for each child. Factors impacting the preparation include, but are not limited to the child's age, length of time in out-of-home care, and quality of the child's relationships with the parent, guardian, or custodian and resource parent. The child's feelings will also play a role in the child's adjustment to returning home. A child may worry about being subjected to abuse and/or neglect again. Some children may experience feelings of disloyalty to their resource parent for wanting to return home, while others may feel disloyal to their parents for missing their resource parent. It is important that the child's FCM; parent, guardian, or custodian; resource parent, or another trusted member of the CFT acknowledge the child's feelings and address any fears expressed by the child.

### **Preparing the Parent, Guardian, or Custodian for a THV**

The parent, guardian, or custodian may feel uncertain about being able to adequately meet the child's needs. To prepare for a THV, the FCM and parent, guardian, or custodian should discuss anticipated issues and develop plans to address those issues. In addition, the FCM should discuss the positive changes that have occurred and the strengths of the family with the parent, guardian, or custodian.

### **Preparing the Resource Parent for a THV**

The bond between some resource parents and children are so significant that both the child and adult may grieve the loss when the child returns home for a THV. The attitude of the resource parent will influence the child's view. It is important that the resource parent be involved in, and aware of, the plans to reunify the family from the beginning. The goal of reunification should never come as a surprise to the resource parent.

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