



Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., Governor
James W. Payne, Director
Indiana Department of Child Services
Room E306 – MS47
302 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2738

317-234-KIDS
FAX: 317-232-4497

www.in.gov/dcs

Child Support Hotline: 800-840-8757
Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 800-800-5556

November 2, 2011

To: Regional Managers
Directors, Local Offices, Department of Child Services

From: James W. Payne, Director
Melissa Norman, Deputy Director of Practice Support
David Judkins, Deputy Director of Field Operations
Department of Child Services

Subject: Change in Household Composition
DCS- 11-04

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) is dedicated to the renewed and heightened effort to provide for the safety and well-being of our children by identifying those protective factors that will help keep a child at home safely. Partnering with families and communities to provide safe, nurturing, and stable homes is an important part of the DCS mission. Safely Home—Families First is a natural evolution of the DCS Practice Model and supports the ideals of best practice for our agency. Therefore, a change is being made to our practice and policy regarding Changes in Household Composition.

Currently, policy states that DCS must file a Child In Need of Services (CHINS) Petition when a change in household composition occurs during an assessment. Effective December 1, 2011, a new policy will reflect the following:

If, during the assessment, it is determined by DCS that a temporary change in household composition will provide the opportunity to address the safety and risk issues and that change is in the best interest of the child,

The Family and Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Ask the family what their plan is to remedy the immediate concern and keep the child safe;
2. Identify resources and/or informal supports that will help the family address the concern so that the child can be maintained safely in the home; and
3. Discuss the family's plan and how the plan demonstrates the parent or caregiver's intent to ensure the child's safety.



Protecting our children, families and future

The FCM will:

1. Ensure the safety of the child(ren);
2. Ensure that the family's plan demonstrates their intent to maintain the safety of the child;
3. Suggest a Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting as a tool to allow the family to address the safety issues and develop informal supports;
4. Document the family's agreed upon plan by using the [Family Support Community Services Plan](#) or outlining the plan in the CFTM notes. This should include the family discussing the recommended course of action that will correct the situation including but not limited to the child(ren) and/or parent moving to a safe location; (See separate policy [4.19 Family Support Community Services Plan](#))
5. Perform a home visit if the plan is to move the child to a safer location;
6. Perform a CPS Check and Sex Offender Check on all possible temporary caregivers;
7. Work with the family to identify resources to immediately assist the family, if needed;
8. Partner with the family to develop a plan for the timely return of the children to the family's household; and
9. Complete a Subsequent Safety Assessment in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System.

If the child or the child and parent temporarily move to an alternative location:

1. That location must be safe for the child; and
2. If there is another caregiver for the child, that caregiver must agree to provide a safe environment for the child.

It is important to understand that changes within a family's household will impact the child's well-being. Therefore the circumstances resulting in the temporary change of household shall be rectified within 5 days or court action will be initiated. See separate policies [5.9 Informal Adjustment](#) and [6.2 Filing a CHINS Petition](#).

At any time during an assessment when there is a restriction placed on any parent regarding contact with a child and/or his or her parent, a CHINS Petition will be filed.

If the restriction is placed on another adult in the household, for example a boyfriend or girlfriend of a parent, the FCM will ensure that contact will not occur between that person and the child until the safety circumstance has been remedied. The non-biological household member does not have the same right of access to a child as the biological parent.

Some flexibility in the filing of CHINS will allow those we serve to have the primary responsibility for the care and safety of their children. When there is an identified correctable situation, the partnership between our agency, families and the community will work together for the best outcome.

Updates will be made to the DCS Policy Manual to reflect these changes. If you have any questions regarding the information presented in this administrative letter, please address them to the DCS policy mailbox at DCSPolicy@dcs.in.gov.

Sincerely,
James W. Payne, Director
Department of Child Services