

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL</b>	
	<b>Chapter 4:</b> Assessment	<b>Effective Date:</b> January 1, 2012
	<b>Section 9:</b> Interviewing Children	<b>Version:</b> 3

<b>POLICY</b>
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**[REVISED]** The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will conduct or arrange an **individual** face-to-face interview<sup>1</sup> with the alleged child victim(s), all other children living 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(s).

**[NEW]** The Family Case Manager (FCM) will distinguish between making a “contact” with a child and when that child is “interviewed” by accurately documenting what occurred in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System. See Related Information for additional information on Contacts vs. Interviews.

**[NEW] Note: 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 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;
6. Correspondence.

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

1. Impact of what they saw and/or heard and how they understand the violence;
2. Impact of witnessing the violence; and
3. Child’s worries about safety.

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

an additional interview if unable to assess child safety and well-being during the joint LEA interview.

DCS will make reasonable efforts to audio and/or video record all interviews with alleged victims of Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N).

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

#### 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. Get consent from a parent, guardian, or custodian prior to interviewing the child, unless exigent circumstances exist. (See separate policies, [4.5 Consent to Interview Child](#) and [4.6 Exigent Circumstances](#).);
2. Conduct the interview in a location and/or setting that assures privacy for the child;
3. 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;
4. Use appropriate technology to audio and/or videotape an interview with an alleged victim. Document good cause exceptions in notes;
5. Develop rapport with the child prior to asking questions about the alleged CA/N;
6. Explain to the child(ren) 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);
7. Document in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS) any possible behavioral signs of domestic violence in the child(ren), especially statements that they are afraid of the alleged domestic violence offender;
8. Not disclose any information learned from the non-offending parent with the child(ren). The purpose of the interview with the child(ren) is to find out about what the child experienced, not inform them about the CA/N or domestic violence that may have occurred;

**Note:** The FCM may share information gained from the interview with the child(ren) with the non-offending parent. This information will often help the non-offending parent better understand the effects of domestic violence on the child(ren). The FCM should evaluate the potential benefits of sharing this information prior to disclosure.

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](#).
10. **[NEW]** Document in the Indiana Child Welfare Information System that the child was contacted and/or individually interviewed or why an individual interview was not possible.

### **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. Children(ren) overly protective of one (1) parent; and/or
12. Child may be withdrawn, apathetic, or feel insecure and powerless.

## **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 one interview to assess child safety and well-being.

### **Joint Interviews with LEA**

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

### **Recording Interviews**

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 if 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 is to make reasonable efforts to use audio and/or video equipment to record the interview with the child. Recording in this way 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.

Some DCS local offices do not have audio and/or video recording equipment; however, a DCS local office may have an agreement with a provider in the community (e.g. - a local community mental health center) that allows use of equipment and meeting space. The FCM should check with his or her Supervisor to learn what equipment is available and/or what agreements exist.

### **Availability of Audio and Video Tapes**

Audio or video tapes are a part of the assessment record and are available on request to a parent, guardian, or custodian or other person named in the report. **Their request must be in writing and documented thoroughly in interview notes. Written request must be placed in the assessment file.** Those persons may listen to or view the tapes in the DCS office or may request a copy.

### **[REVISED] Location and Presence of Others**

In planning for an interview of a child, the FCM should assure that the location of the interview, whenever possible, is a neutral, non-threatening one where the child can feel safe. The child should be interviewed separately from other family members or witnesses. If necessary, the FCM should allow the interview to begin with the non-offending parent present. The parent should gradually be eased out of the interview when the child feels comfortable discussing the incident without their presence. The interview with the child should never be conducted in the presence of or within hearing distance of the alleged perpetrator.

### **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.

### **Child Advocacy Centers (CAC's)**

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. To find the CAC nearest you, visit the following page of the National Children's Alliance web site:

<http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/index.php>