



## INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY

### Chapter 4: Assessment

#### Section 18: Establishing Initial Child Safety

**Effective Date:** January 1, 2024

**Version:** 9

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### POLICY OVERVIEW

Establishing initial safety of a child is a critical step in every Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) assessment. The Safety Assessment and participation in daily safety staffing are completed to evaluate the safety, risk, and needs of each child and to plan for the next steps to address any needs of the child and family.

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### PROCEDURE

#### Safety Assessment

A Safety Assessment is completed during an assessment to:

1. Determine whether a child is likely to be in immediate danger of serious harm/maltreatment which requires further intervention; and
2. Determine which interventions should be initiated or maintained to provide appropriate protection to ensure the child's safety.

#### Daily Safety Staffing

DCS will ensure every assessment is staffed by the assigned Family Case Manager (FCM) and the assigned FCM Supervisor or a Safe Assessment Closure Team (SafeACT) Supervisor during daily safety staffing until the following criteria are met:

1. Each child listed as an alleged victim has been interviewed (see policies 4.04 Required Interviews and 4.09 Interviewing Children);

**Note:** When consent of the parent, guardian, or custodian is not obtained prior to interviewing the child due to exigent circumstances, contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian should occur as soon as possible following the interview, but no later than the same day on which the interview occurred (see policy 4.06 Exigent Circumstances for Interviewing Alleged Child Victims).

2. All parents, guardians, or custodians, including each non-custodial parent, have been interviewed (see policy 4.04 Required Interviews);
3. A Safety Plan is developed and approved by the FCM Supervisor (see policy 4.19 Safety Planning);
4. A Plan of Safe Care is developed (if needed) and approved by the FCM Supervisor (see policy 4.42 Plan of Safe Care).
5. Contact notes that support the safety decision are entered in the case management system;

6. The Safety Assessment is completed within 24 hours of assessment initiation to determine if there are any safety threats present; **and**

**Note:** For an assessment completed through the Safe Assessment Closure Team (SafeACT) within 24 hours of initiation, the Safety Assessment may be completed during the call with the SafeACT Supervisor. If all children involved in the assessment are safe and the assessment outcome is unsubstantiated, the assessment should be staffed with a SafeACT Supervisor and procedural steps should be followed in policy 4.22 Making an Assessment Finding.

7. The FCM Supervisor determines the daily safety staffing is no longer warranted.

**Note:** Discussion of an assessment during the daily safety staffing may continue beyond completion of the above requirements when deemed appropriate for ensuring child safety.

The FCM will:

1. Participate in the daily safety staffing with an FCM Supervisor to discuss the safety of each child until all above listed criteria have been met;

**Note:** Continuous assessment of the child's initial and subsequent safety should be monitored throughout the duration of the assessment and documented in the case management system (see policy 4.03 Conducting the Assessment - Overview).

2. Identify protective factors to help mitigate the safety threats;
3. Identify the appropriate safety decision in the Safety Assessment;
4. Work with the family and Child and Family Team (CFT) to identify responses to safety threats (see policy 5.07 Child and Family Team [CFT] Meetings);

**Note:** If DCS determines that a temporary change in household composition will allow the family an opportunity to address the safety and risk issues present during the time of the assessment, a change in household composition may occur if it is in the best interest of the child (see Change of Household Composition below).

5. Consider the appropriateness of filing an Informal Adjustment (IA) or In-Home Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition only when the child's safety can be ensured and the child and family's service needs can be met in the home;
6. Take necessary action to remove the child from the home if the child cannot remain safely in the home (see policy 4.28 Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians);

**Note:** Any new allegations of Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) must be reported to the DCS Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (Hotline), per State reporting statutes, and may not be handled as part of the current case. If the allegations meet the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect, these reports will be assessed separately and not screened out. Seek supervisory approval to initiate emergency removal if the child is in immediate danger. See policy 4.38 Assessment Initiation.

7. Document the results of the Safety Assessment, all safety responses and decisions, and actions taken in the case management system within one (1) business day.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Conduct a daily safety staffing to discuss every assessment for which requirements to ensure child safety have not been met and create a plan with the FCM for ensuring child safety;

**Note:** The FCM Supervisor should communicate the expectation and requirements of the daily safety staffing to the FCM.

2. Review the Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care, discuss any needed revisions to ensure the child's safety, and sign the approved Safety Plan and/or Plan of Safe Care;
3. Review the Safety Assessment and decision;
4. Make a determination regarding whether the daily safety staffing should continue following the completion of all requirements and notify the FCM of the decision; and

**Note:** The FCM Supervisor should consider the safety of each alleged child victim, as well as other household children and other children who were present when the incident occurred prior to making a determination regarding the continuation of daily safety staffing.

5. Ensure information is documented within three (3) business days in the case management system.

### **Change of Household Composition**

When it is determined a change of household composition is in the best interest of a child, the FCM will:

1. Ensure the safety of the child;

**Note:** Consider the family's protective factors when evaluating their ability to ensure the safety of their child.

2. Partner with the family and recommend a CFT meeting, including their informal supports, to develop a plan to address the safety issues that led to DCS involvement;
3. Document the family's agreed-upon plan by using the Safety Plan or outlining the plan in the CFT meeting notes;

**Note:** The Safety Plan should include a discussion with the family regarding the recommended course of action to remedy the immediate concerns and allow for the child's return to the family's household (e.g., the child or parent moving to a safe location until the safety concerns in the home are rectified) (see policy 4.19 Safety Planning). If there is a restriction regarding contact with a child placed on an adult household member other than a parent, guardian, or custodian (e.g., a parent, guardian, or custodian's significant other), the FCM will ensure contact will not occur between that individual and the child until the safety concerns are remedied.

4. Ensure other identified caregivers for the child are in agreement to provide a safe environment for the child;
5. Complete a Child Protective Services (CPS) History Check and a National Sex Offender Registry Check on all possible temporary caregivers and ensure the caregivers are in agreement to provide a safe environment for the child;
6. Work with the family to identify resources to provide immediate assistance, if needed; and

7. Complete a subsequent Safety Assessment in the case management system.

If the child or the child and parent temporarily move to an alternative location, the FCM will complete these additional steps:

1. Perform a home visit and ensure the location is safe for the child; and
2. Ensure the issues causing a change in household composition are remedied within five (5) business days.

**Note:** At any time during an assessment when there is a restriction placed by DCS on any parent, guardian, or custodian regarding contact with the child, a determination must be made at the time the restriction is put in place as to whether the restriction may last longer than 48 hours (excluding state holidays and weekends). If there is a possibility the restriction may last longer than 48 hours, DCS must file a CHINS petition and schedule a detention hearing with the court. A detention hearing must take place within 48 hours of the restriction being initiated (see policies 4.28 Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians, 5.09 Informal Adjustment/Prevention Plan [IA], and 6.02 Filing a Child in Need of Services [CHINS] Petition).

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## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### Definitions

#### Protective Factors

Protective Factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, and communities that promote the safety, stability, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

#### Risk

Risk is the likelihood that a child may experience abuse and/or neglect based on vulnerabilities and exposure to harm (see Risk and Safety Visual Aid).

#### Safety

Safety is protection from immediate harm due to caregiver's abilities to address all known threats (see Risk and Safety Visual Aid).

#### Safety Plan

A Safety Plan is a voluntary, non-legally binding written agreement with the family, which identifies interventions to address the safety of the child and specifies family supports and/or community services that will be utilized.

#### Temporary Caregiver

A temporary caregiver is someone providing short-term care for a child who is the alleged victim in a DCS assessment. Temporary care for the child is arranged by the custodial parent and should provide a safe, nurturing, and stable environment for the child while the parent remedies the concern for child safety.

### Forms and Tools

- Plan of Safe Care (SF 56565) - available in the case management system
- [Risk and Safety Visual Aid](#)
- [SafeACT SharePoint](#)
- Safety Assessment - available in the case management system
- [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#)

- [Six Protective Factors & Tips to Highlight](#)

#### **Related Policies**

- [4.03 Conducting the Assessment - Overview](#)
- [4.04 Required Interviews](#)
- [4.06 Exigent Circumstances for Interviewing Alleged Child Victims](#)
- [4.09 Interviewing Children](#)
- [4.19 Safety Planning](#)
- [4.22 Making an Assessment Finding](#)
- [4.28 Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians](#)
- [4.38 Assessment Initiation](#)
- [4.42 Plan of Safe Care](#)
- [5.07 Child and Family Team \(CFT\) Meetings](#)
- [5.09 Informal Adjustment/Prevention Plan \(IA\)](#)
- [6.02 Filing a Child in Need of Services \(CHINS\) Petition](#)
- [13.05 Conducting Background Checks for Non-Emergency Unlicensed Placements](#)
- [13.11 Conducting Background Checks for Emergency Unlicensed Placements](#)

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#### **LEGAL REFERENCES**

N/A

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## PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 4.18

*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.*

### **Consideration of Protective Factors To Ensure Safety**

Protective Factors are directly connected to the strengths of the family and may be used as a resource to learn new skills and solve problems. By using a protective factors approach, child welfare professionals and others can help parents find resources and supports that emphasize their strengths while also identifying areas where they need assistance, thereby mitigating the chances of child abuse and neglect. When completing a Safety Plan, consider the protective factors listed on the Six (6) Protective Factors & Tips to Highlight document (see Forms and Tools) as part of an evaluation of the family's ability to ensure the safety of the child.

### **Contact versus Interview**

A contact may 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. Best practice is that children are not interviewed in the presence of family members or other witnesses. An interview is one (1) type of contact. A contact includes, but is not limited to the following types of communication:

1. Face-to-face at the home, office, or other location;
2. Telephone;
3. Fax;
4. Email;
5. Voicemail;
6. Written correspondence; and/or
7. Virtual correspondence (e.g., video conferencing and Facebook).

### **Including Children in the Safety Planning Process**

During the initial interview, the FCM determines whether the child understands the difference between safe and unsafe and assesses the child's communication skills and ability to remember and follow instructions. If the child is unable to identify who to call or where to go in an emergency, a basic plan for safety may be developed with the child. Examples include, but are not limited to:

1. Finding a safe adult and asking for help whenever the child experiences violence. This may involve calling supportive family members, friends, or community agencies for help;
2. Escaping from the house if an assault is imminent or in progress and where to meet an identified safe adult. If the child is not able to escape, discuss where the child may go in the house to be safe;
3. Not intervening, in any circumstance, in moments of violence between parents/caregivers;
4. Finding a place to go in an emergency and the steps to take to find safety; and
5. Calling the police or 911 when violence begins.

### **Parental and Responsible Parties Involvement in Safety Planning**

Empowering the family to develop their Safety Plan with the FCM promotes greater family participation and more ownership of their plan, allowing for a more successful outcome. For this reason, it is critical that the FCM focus the discussion on the safety of the child and not on the

allegation. When developing the Safety Plan with the family, it is important to develop a common understanding that the safety of the child is contingent on the family's ability and willingness to follow the terms of the plan. If the family is hesitant or unwilling to create a plan and/or commit to abiding by the plan's terms, remind the family that the child may not be safe under present circumstances.

Sharing Safety Plans with all responsible parties allows for transparency among all parties of the Safety Plan and increases accountability for everyone. This fosters an environment where safety concerns are addressed timely and specifically.

#### **SafeACT**

SafeACT is a process for closing out assessments of CA/N when it is determined all children are safe and the assessment finding is "unsubstantiated". FCMs are eligible to independently call SafeACT upon completion of an assessment. Specially trained SafeACT Supervisors are available from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM (local time), Monday through Friday (excluding holidays) to staff the assessment and assist with documentation to close the assessment immediately. See the SafeACT SharePoint for more information.

#### **Safety Planning**

The Safety Plan should contain action steps and these action steps should have deadlines for completion that do not extend beyond the end of the assessment. All actions should relate directly to the child's immediate safety. The Safety Plan is a voluntary, non-legally binding agreement with the family that cannot contradict any existing court orders including, but not limited to, child support and child custody orders (see policy 4.19 Safety Planning).

#### **Safety versus Risk Assessment**

The Safety Assessment assesses the child's present danger and the interventions currently needed to protect the child. In contrast, the Risk Assessment looks at the likelihood of future maltreatment.

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