

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 4: Assessment Section 38: Assessment Initiation	
	Effective Date: August 1, 2024	Version: 10

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POLICY OVERVIEW

Indiana Code (IC) specifies required initiation timeframes for assessments which are based upon the allegations in the Preliminary Report of Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect (310). Timely initiation of an assessment of Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) is crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of a child.

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PROCEDURE

Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) assessments will be initiated regardless of the time of day, weekends, or holidays. The assessment response time begins at the time the DCS local office receives notification of the intake report. DCS will initiate every CA/N assessment within the following timeframes:

1. Two (2) hours if the allegations would cause a reasonable person to believe the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm;
2. Twenty-four (24) hours if the allegations involve abuse but the conditions in item one (1) above do not apply; or
3. Five (5) days if the allegations involve neglect and none of the conditions in items one (1) or two (2) above apply.

DCS will respond within two (2) hours of receiving a report from a hospital when the alleged child victim is currently in the hospital and a same-day release is anticipated. DCS will provide the requesting hospital with the Hospital Release Authorization form when it has been determined that the child is safe to be released.

Note: Face-to-face contact with a child who is in the hospital should occur within the initiation timeframe unless the child is unavailable due to current medical intervention.

For an assessment involving alleged domestic violence (DV), DCS will initiate the assessment immediately, but no later than 24 hours, following receipt of the report if the following conditions apply (see policy 2.30 Domestic Violence):

1. The alleged DV occurred in the past 48 hours (regardless of the report source) and the allegations would not cause a reasonable person to believe the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm; or
2. The alleged DV incident involved a deadly weapon; or

3. The parent, guardian, or custodian or the child calls to report alleged DV and the allegations would not cause a reasonable person to believe the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm.

All new allegations of CA/N must be reported to the Hotline, per state reporting statutes, and may not be handled as a part of the current assessment or permanency case. If the allegations meet the statutory definition of CA/N, these reports will be assessed separately and not screened out. DCS will ensure new allegations of CA/N observed by or reported directly to a DCS employee, who is on the scene and immediately initiates an assessment (by ensuring safety through face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims), are reported to the DCS Child Abuse Hotline (Hotline) within 24 hours of leaving the scene. The FCM must report to the Hotline the exact time of initiation and the exact date and time the FCM became aware of the allegations (see policy 4.36 Linking Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) Reports to Open Assessments).

Note: If the FCM is at the scene and discovers new allegations of CA/N but is unable to ensure safety through face-to-face contact with one (1) or more victims prior to leaving the scene, the FCM must report the allegations to the Hotline immediately.

DCS must conduct an assessment within 24 hours of receiving a report concerning a child who voluntarily enters an emergency shelter or a shelter care facility without the presence or consent of a parent, guardian, or custodian. DCS must notify the parent, guardian, or custodian that the child is at an emergency shelter or shelter care facility within 72 hours of the child entering the facility. However, if DCS has reason to believe the child is a victim of CA/N and the child's parent, guardian, or custodian is an alleged perpetrator, the parent, guardian, or custodian may not be informed of the specific shelter or facility the child has entered.

Exception: If allegations would cause a reasonable person to believe the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm, DCS must initiate the response within two (2) hours.

The FCM will:

1. Consider all known information about the CA/N allegations;
2. Staff with the FCM Supervisor, as needed, to determine if Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) assistance should be requested or if LEA should be notified of the assessment. LEA assistance should be requested when:
 - a. The report requires a two (2) hour response time, unless the report is for hospital release authorization, and
 - b. There are extenuating circumstances preventing DCS from initiating a two (2) hour response assessment timely (see Practice Guidance for extenuating circumstances which may be approved).

Note: In situations where LEA is on the scene and remains on the scene with all alleged child victims until DCS arrives, as part of a two (2) hour assessment, the assessment will be considered initiated timely. When LEA agrees to respond with DCS, make contact with the responding LEA officer to advise of the allegations and obtain any information LEA may have regarding the child or family (see policy 4.28 Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians if a decision is made to remove the child and policy 4.29 Joint Assessments when the assessment will be conducted jointly with LEA).

3. Ensure the assessment has been initiated by making face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims. When extenuating circumstances exist, make contact with a person (other than the alleged perpetrator) who is able to provide information about the condition and safety of the alleged child victim and make face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim as soon as possible (see practice guidance);

Note: When a FCM responds within the initiation timeframe but is unsuccessful in making face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims, the assessment is not considered initiated.

4. Notify the parent, guardian, or custodian in person or by phone of the face-to-face contact with the alleged victim (see policy 4.05 Consent to Interview Child);
5. Report all new allegations to the Hotline by emailing or faxing the completed 310, emailing equivalent information (e.g., time initiated, parent names, child victim names, description of concerns), or by calling to report equivalent information. The 310 or equivalent information may be submitted to the Hotline via email, fax, or phone; and

Note: When the FCM has initiated the assessment, the FCM must specify in the report to the Hotline the exact time of initiation and the exact date and time the FCM became aware of the allegations (see policy 4.36 Linking Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N) Reports to Open Assessments).

6. Document the following in the case management system:
 - a. The face-to-face contact with each alleged child victim,
 - b. Notification to the child's parent, guardian, or custodian of the contact with the child, including any exigent circumstances (see policy 4.06 Exigent Circumstances for Interviewing Alleged Child Victims),
 - c. Whether the assessment was initiated timely,
 - d. LEAs response for assistance and presence on the scene (if applicable), and
 - e. Any extenuating circumstances in initiating the assessment.

Note: If any reports are linked to the assessment, see policy 4.36 Linking CA/N Reports.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Staff with the FCM to determine if LEA assistance should be requested or if LEA should be notified of the assessment;
2. Discuss details of the assessment and review information gathered during regular case staffing with the FCM; and
3. Guide the FCM to ensure all duties of the assessment have been completed.

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RELEVANT INFORMATION

Definitions

Case Staffing

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

Forms and Tools

- DCS Hotline email - dcshotlinereports@dcs.in.gov
- DCS Hotline fax: 317-234-7595 or 317-234-7596

- DCS Hotline number: 1-800-800-5556
- [Hospital Release Authorization \(SF 54337\)](#)
- [Preliminary Report of Alleged Child Abuse or Neglect \(SF 114\) \(310\)](#)

Related Policies

- [2.30 Domestic Violence](#)
- [4.05 Consent to Interview Child](#)
- [4.06 Exigent Circumstances for Interviewing Alleged Child Victims](#)
- [4.28 Removals from Parents, Guardians, or Custodians](#)
- [4.29 Joint Assessments](#)
- [4.36 Linking CAN Reports](#)

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LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 31-33-8-1: Investigations by local child protection service; time of initiation; investigations of child care ministries](#)
- [IC 31-33-8-6: Investigatory duties of local child protection service; purpose](#)
- [IC 31-36-3-3: Notification to department; investigation of a child; notification to parents](#)
- [IC 34-6-2-34.5: "Domestic or family violence"](#)

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PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 4.38

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.

Extenuating Circumstances for Assessment Initiation

When initiating an assessment, extenuating circumstances may occur that prevent the family case manager (FCM) from completing face-to-face contact with a child within the initiation timeframe. Extenuating circumstances which may be approved include but are not limited to:

1. The child victim is not at the location stated on the report (e.g., school trip, out of town/state);
2. The victim is unknown or the child does not exist;
3. There is an inclement weather emergency;
4. There is a traffic accident or traffic delays;
5. A new child victim is added to the report after the initial family contact was made;
6. The child is deceased;
7. The parent refused to allow access to the child (motion to compel is needed);
8. The report is linked to an open assessment and additional face-to-face contact is not required;
9. The report is assigned after the initiation timeframe; or
10. The child is in a hospital setting and not available due to critical illness or a traumatic incident.

Note: Contact with a child who is in the hospital should occur within the initiation timeframe unless the child is unavailable due to current medical intervention.

Initiation Timeframes

A two (2) hour response time begins when the DCS Hotline (Hotline) calls the DCS local office. Examples of a two (2) hour response may include, but are not limited to, allegations regarding:

1. A child fatality or near fatality;
2. Shaken infants;
3. A child who has suffered from serious physical injury to any part of the body due to suspected CA/N (e.g., fractures, broken bones, head injuries, extensive and serious bruising, or internal injuries);
4. A child is intentionally burned or scalded;
5. A child is too young or disabled to ensure the child's own safety and is actively unsupervised. Disabilities include but are not limited to sight or hearing impairments, limited mental capabilities, or other severe debilitating conditions;
6. A child who has been abandoned or deserted;
7. A child has failure to thrive, which has resulted in the immediate need for medical attention;
8. A child is sexually abused or human trafficking is suspected and the alleged perpetrator has access to the child;
9. A child or the child's parent, guardian, or custodian is actively attempting suicide;
10. There is an active domestic violence (DV) incident in the home or a child has been injured as a result of the active DV incident;
11. An active contaminating, controlled substance is present; and/or

12. Specific allegations that a parent, guardian, or custodian is actively using illicit drugs or abusing prescription medications.

A 24-hour response time begins when the DCS local office receives the email that a report is in the county queue. Examples of a 24-hour response may include, but are not limited to, allegations regarding:

1. Reported bruising, scratches, and/or welts;
2. Suspected inflicted injury to a child;
3. Serious injury is threatened; and/or
4. A child, parent, guardian, or custodian has previously attempted suicide;
5. DV incidents when:
 - a. Parent, guardian, custodian or child calls in the incident,
 - b. The incident involves a deadly weapon, or
 - c. The incident occurred within the last 48 hours.

A five (5) day response time begins when the DCS local office receives the email that a report is in the county queue. Examples of a five (5) day response may include, but are not limited to, allegations regarding:

1. Supervision concerns;
2. Insufficient food, shelter, or clothing;
3. Unsanitary living conditions; and/or
4. Educational neglect.

Response Time Versus Initiation of an Assessment

It is important to make the distinction between initiating an assessment and response times. If an FCM has responded in the appropriate timeframe, it does not necessarily mean that the assessment has been initiated. For example, when an FCM responds within the initiation timeframe but is unsuccessful in making face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims, the assessment has not been initiated.

Response times are measured from the time a local office receives notification of the intake report until the FCM makes face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims. For example, this means for two (2) hour assessments, the FCM must make face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims within two (2) hours of notification. The parent, guardian, or custodian will be notified in person or via phone, of the face-to-face contact with all alleged child victims.

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