

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 5: General Case Management	Effective Date: October 1, 2014
	Section 3: Engaging the Family	Version: 3

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will build trust-based relationships with families by demonstrating sensitivity, empathy, and cultural competence. See [Related Information](#).

DCS will encourage parental involvement in all cases, including cases involving domestic violence. DCS will, to the extent possible, engage both maternal and paternal family members equally in the case planning process from the first point of intervention. DCS will engage the alleged father and his family, even before paternity is established. See policy [5.5 Alleged Fathers](#).

DCS will utilize the Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting as a primary means for discussing the strengths and needs of the child and family that have been assessed through the ongoing conversations with the family and their supports in order to determine services and develop case plans. DCS will explain the benefits of this process to the family and encourage the parent, guardian, or custodian to utilize the CFT Meeting process to help build a support system or strengthen a pre-existing support system. See Related Information and separate policies, [5.7 Child and Family Team Meetings](#) and [5.8 Developing the Case Plan](#).

DCS will communicate and engage in planning with the parent, guardian or custodian of the child(ren) involved with DCS regarding current events occurring in the child's life. These events may include but are not limited to:

1. DCS receiving allegations pertaining to the child(ren) while child is in care;
2. The child is involved in an accident, injured (i.e. car accident or injured while playing or during a school activity, etc.), becomes seriously ill or prescribed psychotropic medication; and/or
3. Extracurricular activities in which the child participates (sports, church, scouts or attendance at birthday parties, etc.).

Code References

[IC 5-26.5-1-3: "Domestic violence"](#)

PROCEDURE

The Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Utilize CFT Meetings to encourage and support parental involvement;
2. Clearly communicate DCS expectations to the parent, guardian, or custodian, to:
 - a. Actively participate in CFT Meetings;
 - b. Keep appointments;
 - c. Actively participate by organizing and facilitating recommended services; and

- d. Communicate openly and honestly.
3. Communicate updates regarding all aspects of the case in a timely manner to the court, CFT, parent, guardian, custodian, and service providers;
4. Ensure visits with the child and family are meaningful, with open communication regarding the case and/or other relevant factors pertaining to the child and family; and
5. Utilize CFT or Case Plan Conference to discuss the family's strengths and [protective factors](#) and how they can be used to provide for the child's safety and well-being;

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Engagement

Engagement is the skill of effectively establishing a relationship with children, parents, and essential individuals for the purpose of sustaining the work that is to be accomplished together. Engagement between a child, family, and FCM is critical in creating trust-based relationships and assessing family strengths and [underlying needs](#). When families are engaged in collaborative decision making and case planning, they understand their roles and are more empowered and motivated to make the long-lasting changes necessary to protect the children in their care.

Meaningful Contacts with the Family

1. Recognize that family members, new and experienced participants in the child welfare and juvenile court system may be uninformed, confused and/or concerned because of this involvement and that the completion of the following tasks may reduce these issues:
 - a. Take the time to explain how these systems work and answer any questions asked by the family, and
 - b. Inform the family that events may occur at certain times during the life of the case (e.g. filing of termination petition at 15 months of child being in out-of-home care).
 - c. Continually ask family members if there are any questions or concerns that they may have and address these concerns with honesty and urgency.
2. Recognize the value of the family members and value their expertise on the family history; and

Note: Convey the importance of each and every contact and do not rush conversations with the family.

Incarcerated Parents

DCS providers, including the fatherhood program providers, may enter Indiana Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities to provide services and meet with parents; provided that, in each case, the incarcerated parent has signed a release of information allowing DCS to share the information collected by such providers with DOC.

FORMS AND TOOLS

N/A

RELATED INFORMATION

Underlying Needs

Underlying needs are the root source of an individual and/or family's challenges, which determines the appropriate use of services or interventions. In order to identify the underlying need, the question of what the family needs or what needs to change in order to achieve the family's outcomes should be answered. The FCM will assist the family and the team to identify these needs.

The ability to identify an underlying need is a crucial step in engaging a family and promoting safety, permanency, and well-being. Addressing underlying needs allows DCS and the CFT understand the root of the problem and provide accurate/effective services to address the needs. This method supports safe sustainable case closure.

Protective Factors

Protective factors are characteristics in families that, when present, increase the safety, stability, permanency, and well-being of children and families. Protective factors are directly connected to the strengths of the family and can be used as a resource to learn new skills and solve problems. The FCM should consider the following protective factors when working with children and families:

1. Nurturing and attachment;
2. Knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development;
3. Parental resilience;
4. Social connections;
5. Concrete supports for the parents; and
6. Social and emotional competence of children.

See <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/protectfactors/> for additional information.

Potential Benefits of the CFT Process to the Child(ren) and Family

Child and Family Team Meetings are the best way for DCS to assist families in making positive changes in children and families' lives. In utilizing a team meeting process, DCS will:

1. Learn what the family hopes to accomplish;
2. Set reasonable and meaningful goals;
3. Recognize and affirm family strengths
4. Assess family needs and find solutions; and
5. Organize tasks to accomplish goals

According to [The Child Welfare Policy & Practice Group \(CWPPG\)](#)¹, gathering family members, friends, members of the family's faith community and professionals together to jointly develop individualized plans to strengthen the family's capacity to ensure safety, stability, and permanency. This process will build natural supports that will sustain a family over time. Bringing a family together with a solution focused team of supports contributes to a variety of potential benefits such as:

1. Preventing abuse and neglect and speeding up permanency;
2. Preventing removal and placement disruptions;
3. Strengthening engagement with families and older youth;
4. Improving the quality of assessments about strengths and needs;
5. Increasing the likelihood of matching the appropriate service to needs;
6. Identifying kinship placement opportunities;
7. Increasing the varieties of options for solutions;
8. Increasing the capacity to overcome barriers; and

9. Creating a system of supports that will sustain the family over time and provide a safety net after agency involvement ends.

Cultural Competence & Family-Centered Practice

In family-centered practice, the family is involved in all aspects of the planning and decision making processes. The child welfare agency and its staff strive to understand the family and encourage their participation by being culturally competent and by ensuring that services provided to children and families are respectful of and compatible with their cultural strengths and needs. Culture is defined by the family and includes elements such as history, traditions, values, family systems, spirituality, language and artistic expression. Culturally competent agencies and practitioners are able to view a family's strengths and needs within a cultural context and integrate culturally relevant information in helping the family develop a meaningful plan of action. Cultural competence is a skill learned by the individual and the organization, fostered by a commitment to provide services that are culturally appropriate and that make a positive difference for children and families.

The culturally competent FCM is guided by the following principles:

1. The family remains in charge of their own lives while the FCM motivates, facilitates, and creates a climate of respect and caring.²

¹ [The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group](#) is a private, non-profit organization developed to assist child welfare, mental health and juvenile justice systems to create, design and manage organizational change that results in improved practice and outcomes for children and their families.

² <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>

2. Careful work in establishing the role of the FCM as a partner in helping is essential to establishing trust; and
3. Respect for the client's family and home is of utmost concern when engaging families. All people, regardless of their race, national origin, economic status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, and HIV status deserve to be respected, cared for and supported by field staff, foster families, residential care staff and/or providers; and
4. Local etiquette should prevail in the FCM's behavior as he or she enters the family's environment;

Becoming culturally competent is considered a lifelong process that requires continual study and effort.

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