



Code of Conduct for the Indiana Department of Child Services

Effective September 1, 2024

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Protecting our children, families, and future

DCS VISION, MISSION & VALUES

VISION

Children will live in safe, healthy, and supportive families and communities.

MISSION

The Indiana Department of Child Services leads the state's response to allegations of child abuse and neglect and facilitates child support payments. We consider the needs and values of all we serve in our efforts to protect children while keeping families together whenever possible.

VALUES

We at the Indiana Department of Child Services empower our team, in collaboration with state and local partners, to make decisions in the best interest of every child in our care by embracing:

- Child Safety;
- Permanency;
- Collaborative partnerships with foster and adoptive families;
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- A culture of safety and transparency; and
- Continuous improvement.



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Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The power to intervene in the lives of families and children comes with extraordinary responsibility. Children, families, and the Indiana public must be able to trust that DCS staff make decisions in the best interest of each child and family we serve. As such, every DCS staff member must act with the utmost level of professionalism, honesty, and integrity. The DCS Code of Conduct is designed to support the Vision, Mission, and Values of DCS. It sets forth the value and behavioral expectations DCS has for its staff and demonstrates the commitment to high quality services that best meet the needs of the child. The Code of Conduct is the commitment of DCS to every child and family in the State of Indiana.

DCS will strive to continually develop and improve services to its staff, children and/or families, and the public. DCS will provide an environment conducive to growth by collaborating with staff and community partners and continually assessing for quality improvement opportunities.

All DCS employees will act in a professional manner consistent with this code and in accordance with the DCS Practice Model, all applicable laws, rules, policies, and procedures. Failure to follow the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Concerns about employee conduct should be reported to the appropriate Supervisor, DCS Human Resources at dcshr@dcs.in.gov, or the DCS Ethics Officer at ethics@dcs.in.gov.



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DCS Code of Conduct

Responsibilities

I. Guidelines for all DCS employees

- A. Competency:** Staff will provide services only within the parameters of their education, training, licensure¹, professional experience, and job duties. Furthermore, all staff will represent their qualifications, education, and credentials accurately.
- B. Integrity:** The acts of all DCS staff will reflect a dedication to the DCS Practice Model, Vision, Mission, and Values. Staff will carry out their duties and responsibilities in an objective manner in accordance with federal and state laws, rules, policies, and established procedures. Furthermore, staff will treat all children and their families, colleagues, and members of the general public in a respectful, honest, and fair manner.
- C. Duty to Report Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N):** All DCS staff are mandated by state law to report any suspicion of child abuse and/or neglect (CA/N). A person who makes a CA/N report is protected from any civil or criminal liability that might otherwise be imposed because of such actions if the report is made in good faith.
- D. Accuracy and Documentation of Work:** DCS staff will complete all assignments timely. Staff members are expected to recognize training needs for both themselves and their colleagues and obtain the necessary training to improve job performance and outcomes. Obstacles to completion of assignments must be immediately discussed with a Supervisor or work unit manager so barriers can be overcome and solutions can be identified and implemented. Under no circumstances will an employee falsely document activities, actions, or decisions.
- E. Conflict of Interest:** DCS staff will follow all applicable laws, policies, and rules governing the ethical obligations of state employees², as described in the [Indiana Code of Ethics](#). Employees may not serve as an employee, officer, director, or consultant for any child, family, or service provider with involvement or under contract with DCS. Employees may not borrow money from or lend money to any

¹ FCMs do not provide legal services or give legal advice because they are not licensed to practice law and it is not within the scope of their job responsibilities.

² 42 IAC 1-5 et. seq. sets forth these obligations.



client or service provider. Employees may not accept gifts, entertainment, or any other items/services of value from any child, family, resource family, or service provider. DCS staff will not allow private or personal interests or relationships, financial or otherwise, to conflict with or influence their professional duties and responsibilities; this includes behavior that would lead a reasonable person to believe that private or personal interest has motivated an action or decision. If a situation arises where a real or perceived personal or private conflict may exist, the staff member shall consult with staff member's Supervisor or work unit manager to resolve. Staff cannot foster or adopt children with whom they have or had a working relationship.

- F. Diversity and Non-Discrimination:** DCS staff will be respectful, understanding of, and sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds of all individuals employed or served by DCS. Diversity encompasses a group or individual's unique qualities, including but not limited to: age; creed; religion; ethnicity; color; physical features; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; language of choice; nationality; family or marital status; physical, mental, and developmental abilities; socioeconomic status; education; work and behavioral styles; and political affiliation. Diversity may also refer to differences in thinking and ways of working. DCS will foster an atmosphere of inclusion to ensure employees and the individuals it serves have equality of opportunity in the workplace, without any impediments due to diversity characteristics as stated above.

DCS staff will not condone or engage in any discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability. All reports of discrimination must be reported to DCS Human Resources or the [State Personnel Department \(SPD\)](#).

- G. Personal Conduct:** DCS respects the privacy and interests of its staff and recognizes their right to conduct their personal lives free from involvement or interference from DCS. Nonetheless, staff should keep in mind that they represent DCS to the public even while off duty, and should strive to preserve the agency's reputation and represent its values. In addition, certain types of off-duty conduct may reflect poorly upon an employee's character and judgment and thereby influence the employee's status as a DCS employee.

Employees who engage in unprofessional or criminal conduct or other serious misconduct off-duty may be subject to disciplinary action by DCS. If such conduct is determined to be harmful to the DCS image, to be inconsistent with the agency's expectations of its staff members, to impact and/or disrupt business



operations, bring the agency into disrepute or to jeopardize the agency's or employee's standing within the community, the staff member may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Per the [State of Indiana Employee Handbook](#), employees must notify their supervisors of any of the following within five (5) calendar days: "disposition of criminal charges against the employee, citation for an infraction occurring while the employee is on duty, citation for an infraction occurring off duty that impacts the employee's ability to perform assigned duties (e.g., loss/suspension of driving privileges), and arrest for any misdemeanor or felony". In addition, employees must notify their Local Office Director (LOD) or work unit manager within one (1) business day of learning that they are being assessed as an alleged perpetrator of Child Abuse and/or Neglect (CA/N). See policy [4.45 Assessment of DCS Staff Alleged Perpetrators](#) for additional information.

- H. Personal Health:** DCS staff shall take personal responsibility for their own health. Staff shall not perform professional activities if they know that their physical or mental health may be compromised or interfere with their professional judgment or job performance. Employees are encouraged to use the state-sponsored [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) if the need arises.
- I. Personal/Sexual Relationships:** DCS staff will refrain from having on-going personal and/or sexual relationships with family members or any other stakeholders involved with DCS if the relationship creates or has the potential to create a conflict of interest. Examples of such relationships include, but are not limited to, relationships with children and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS; relatives of children and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS; resource parents caring for children within the same DCS Region as the employee works; contractors or employees of partner agencies providing services within the same DCS region as the staff member works; or with any employee the staff member supervises. Examples of prohibited relationships include, but are not limited to, sexual, financial, volunteer, or business relationships. DCS staff will also refrain from nepotism, as defined in [IC 4-2-6-16](#). If staff has a familial relationship with someone in one (1) of these group categories, it is their responsibility to notify their Supervisor. In the event a personal relationship is pre-existing, the staff member shall consult with the staff member's Supervisor or work unit manager to resolve any real, potential, or perceived conflicts.
- J. Solicitation and Selling on Agency Property:** Solicitation of staff for funds, membership, or individual commitment to outside organizations or causes within any facility or the physical confines of any DCS office during the staff person's



working hours shall be permitted only with the approval of the DCS Director or designee. Such approval shall be granted only if the activity does not disrupt the security or efficiency of the facility.

Staff shall not supplement any state salary through activities engaged in within a DCS office, such as selling items for profit, collecting commissions, owning or operating concessions, rendering service to other staff, clients, or the public. With the approval of the agency director or designee, staff may sell items for not-for-profit organizations, such as schools or the Girl Scouts, in a DCS office. In such cases, the staff person must ensure that the ordering and delivery of any items sold occurs during non-working hours and that these activities do not interfere with agency operations.

With the approval of the DCS Director or designee, staff may be allowed to post items for sale on a bulletin board, either electronic or otherwise. If such a bulletin board is approved, staff shall indicate that he/she may be contacted at home during off-duty hours. In such cases, the staff person must ensure that the posting, ordering, and delivery of any items are not done during working hours and that these activities do not interfere with agency operations.

K. Information, Records, and Documents: DCS staff will not improperly use, access, copy, or destroy DCS records. Please refer to the [Information Resources Use Agreement \(IRUA\)](#) and the [DCS Records Retention Schedule](#) for further information.

DCS staff shall return all information, records, or documents of DCS, a staff person, a client, a member of the public, and/or the State when they retire, resign, or otherwise leave DCS, and shall return all information, records, or documents of DCS, a staff person, a client, a member of the public, and/or the State when ordered to do so because of suspension, dismissal, or other absence from work.

L. Property, Equipment, and Resources: DCS staff will comply with the terms and conditions of the [Information Resources Use Agreement \(IRUA\)](#) and any other standard, rule, regulation, policy, procedure, directive, written or verbal order, agreement, responsibility, or condition of employment relating to DCS and/or State property, equipment, or resources.

M. Supervision of Employees: DCS staff with supervisory responsibilities will model the practice and skills expected to achieve improved outcomes for children and families. All staff will be engaged and recognized as key team members. All staff will be provided with a positive work environment, which encourages



professional growth and development. Staff with supervisory responsibilities will give feedback, both positive and constructive, to staff on an ongoing basis while modeling DCS values and promote a safe working environment.

- N. State Personnel Department (SPD) and DCS Policies:** DCS staff will follow all SPD and DCS policies and procedures. The SPD [Standardized State Personnel Policies](#) cover topics that include, but are not limited to: Arrests and Convictions, Discipline, Drug and Alcohol Free Workplace, Leave Time, and Workplace Harassment Prevention. See [SPD Policies and Procedures](#) for additional SPD policies. See [Child Welfare Policies](#) and [DCS Administrative Policies](#) to review the DCS policies.

II. Guidelines for Working Directly with Children, Families, and Partners

- A. Minimizing Trauma:** DCS staff will work in a manner that protects the children and families from further abuse and/or neglect in a non-discriminatory manner.
- B. Client Self-Determination:** DCS staff will ensure the child and/or family members are aware of all options available to them and the consequences of each decision. Staff will not threaten, coerce or manipulate the child and/or family members into making decisions, nor will any staff express their personal opinions or preferences in any communications within the scope of employment with DCS.
- C. Confidentiality:** DCS staff will protect the confidentiality of the child, family members, child abuse and/or neglect reporters, and all others as required by law. Per state statute, it is a Class A Misdemeanor for a public employee to knowingly and intentionally disclose information classified as confidential. Please refer to policies [2.06 Sharing Confidential Information](#) and [2.07 Confidentiality of Social Security Numbers](#) for further guidance regarding maintaining confidentiality. If staff have questions surrounding confidentiality, they should contact their DCS attorney or legal team for guidance. Upon a formal request for information, DCS will promptly advise the requesting party of relevant confidentiality requirements and limitations regarding the requested information.
- D. Responsibilities to Indiana Children:** DCS staff will perform all job duties in a manner that protects the best interest of the child demonstrating respect, understanding, and sensitivity to the child's diverse background. Consistent with the child's age and level of understanding, child welfare staff will explain the child's rights, decisions made and actions taken. Additionally, staff will be accessible to the child; this includes, but is not limited to, responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as appropriate, given the



child's age and level of understanding. Staff will acknowledge the physical and emotional stress that the child may be facing.

E. Responsibilities to External Customers:

- 1. Child's Parents and Other Family Members:** DCS staff will treat parents and other family members as valued individuals in the child's life and will demonstrate respect, understanding, sensitivity to the diverse background of all individuals. DCS will engage and team with the parent to explain clearly all actions and processes as well as the rights of both the parent and the child. DCS will refrain from bias or judgment, and treat each with genuineness, empathy, and respect. DCS will be accessible to the parent or primary caregiver by responding to questions quickly and providing appropriate information on the case.

Child support staff will assist case participants in establishing paternity, establishing court ordered child support, as well as collecting and distributing the court ordered child support obligation. Staff will be professional in their dealings with all case participants. Child support staff will clearly explain all actions and processes, as well as the rights of both the custodial party and the non-custodial parent.

- 2. Resource Parents:** DCS will treat resource parents as valued individuals and partners in the child's life. Staff will engage resource families, and team with these families, in planning and decision-making on the case, as appropriate. Resource parents will be provided with detailed information on each child in their care. DCS will offer ongoing support and training to resource parents by responding to questions quickly and providing appropriate information on the case.
- 3. Courts, County Partners, and Other Partners/Stakeholders:** DCS will conduct themselves in a professional manner while working with all external customers and partners involved in a child or family's case. DCS team members will speak honestly and with integrity at all times. Appropriate information will be provided to external customers and partners in a timely manner.





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

State Form 54116 (11-09)
INDIANA STATE PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Reset Form

Name of Agency:

Policy	Initials	Policy	Initials
DCS Code of Conduct			

By my initials above and signature below, I acknowledge and agree that I am responsible for reading and complying with the above policies and procedures. I further acknowledge that my failure to adhere to these policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from employment.

Printed Name of Employee:

Date: (month, day, year)

Signature of Employee:

Date: (month, day, year)



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