

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES		
Tool: HR-3-A	Effective Date: April 1, 2021	Version: 2.0
TOOL TITLE: WORKER SAFETY PROTOCOL		
OVERVIEW: This protocol is for use by all Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) staff when conducting any type of home visits.		

A. Prior to leaving for a home visit, a DCS employee will:

1. Assess the case record information and other information sources, as appropriate, to determine whether there are any risk factors associated with the family, home, or neighborhood. If a DCS employee is unable to safely complete the home visit, the employee should consult with the employee’s supervisor to determine how to proceed. If a visit cannot be made safely, the local Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) should be contacted for assistance. Specific risks to consider when making a decision include:
 - a. Is there a history of violence, either reported or unreported to law enforcement, in the home?
 - b. Are any household members using illegal drugs or drinking alcohol in excess?
 - c. Are any household members mentally ill?
 - d. Are firearms present in the home?
 - e. Are there any dogs or other animals present in the home?
 - f. Are there any known safety hazards in the home or on the property?
 - g. Do any household members have a criminal history?

Note: Due to limited resources, DCS cannot require a two (2)-person response for all contacts with clients and families. If the Family Case Manager (FCM) feels that a two (2)-person response or contacting LEA is warranted, seek supervisory assistance for approval.

2. Make initial or questionable visits during normal business hours, when possible;
3. Notify a member of management by following the local office procedure (e.g., in/out board, call sheet, and Outlook Calendar). If the employee’s schedule changes while in the field or the employee plans to go home after the last field visit, notify the DCS local office or a designated FCM Supervisor via e-mail, phone call, or text message after the last visit is finished;
4. Be aware of attire choices when making home visits. For example, wear shoes that allow for quick movement, if necessary. Be cautious when wearing items such as jewelry, scarves, and ties that could potentially be grabbed. Always wear DCS issued identification (ID) clipped to clothing or on a break-away lanyard; and
5. Keep the agency issued cellular phone powered on at all times while working in the field. Management should keep cellular phones powered on and with them during regular business hours. Each local office will develop a plan for after hour management availability.

Note: Phones should be kept with the employee during all home visits.

6. Field Staff will and Legal Staff may activate the SafeSignal app prior to face-to-face interactions with clients by entering the location of the meeting and selecting the timer option or inserting the tether (or headphones if the tether is not compatible with the employee's phone). In an emergency situation, the employee will activate the alarm by pulling the tether (or headphones) or entering the panic code (see SafeSignal Instruction Video for further instruction). An employee may press the "Panic Button" on the SafeSignal app to signal for LEA when not in a session.

Note: After the SafeSignal Monitoring Center confirms officers are onsite, an Incident Summary will be sent via text and e-mail to the employee and the SafeSignal Notification Team (i.e., local management team and the chain of command).

B. To ensure safety when operating a vehicle, a DCS employee:

1. Must hold a valid driver's license; an independent, reliable automobile; and appropriate automobile insurance coverage (i.e., at least state legal minimum coverage) at all times. Any employee who transports children may be subject to a Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) records check to ensure the employee's driver's license is valid;
2. May not engage in the use of and/or be under the influence of substances that may impair judgment and/or driving ability while working;
3. Will ensure that all individuals (including the driver) follow applicable seat belt and child restraint seat laws; and

Note: According to IC 9-19-11-2, all children under age eight (8) must be in a child restraint seat. According to IC 9-19-10-2, all occupants of a motor vehicle must utilize seat belts.

4. Refrain from engaging in illegal, unsafe, or reckless driving practices while working.

C. When parking and exiting the vehicle, a DCS employee should:

1. Become aware of the areas in the neighborhood where help could be obtained if an emergency occurs (e.g., 24-hour stores, gas stations, restaurants, and other public facilities) prior to parking the vehicle, if the home is in an unfamiliar area;
2. Have enough gas in the car at all times;
3. Park in a well-lit area with the vehicle facing the direction to which the employee intends to leave;
4. Park in the street rather than the driveway, when possible;
5. Park with the driver's side door easily accessible;
6. Locate the client's building prior to exiting the vehicle if the residence is in an apartment complex;
7. Scan the area for potential safety risks prior to exiting the vehicle;
8. Take only the items necessary to complete the home visit. Purses or wallets should be concealed if they are left in the vehicle;

9. Keep keys in a place where they are easily accessible (e.g., coat pocket or clipped to a clipboard); and
10. Keep vehicle doors locked.

D. When approaching a home, a DCS employee will:

1. Visually inspect the outside of the home and surrounding residences to become aware of people, animals, or unfamiliar vehicles. If animals are present and unsecured, do not attempt to approach the home until someone in the home can secure the animal or assure it is not dangerous;
2. Not walk around the residence looking in windows if no one answers the door;
3. Look and listen for signs of disturbance involving or affecting people inside or outside of the residence (e.g., fighting, crying, or dog barking);
4. Take note of any smells associated with substance use or manufacturing. Follow appropriate Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Response Protocol if methamphetamine use, dealing, or manufacturing is suspected; and
5. Ask for assistance from a supervisor, LEA, or co-worker if there are safety concerns.

E. When entering a home, a DCS employee will:

1. Seek permission to enter the home from an adult living in the home prior to entering (see policy 4.08 Entry into Home or Facility);
2. Seek entrance through a door that is in plain sight of the street, when possible, and knock while standing to the side of the doorway;
3. Complete a visual inspection when the door is opened to assess any potential hazards which may be present;
4. Not enter the home if summoned into the residence by an unseen person, but rather wait for the person to present oneself;
5. Refrain from entering the residence if an adult living in the home is not present. Contact LEA if children requiring adult supervision are unattended in the home;

Note: If accompanied by LEA, do not enter the home unless or until LEA has entered and determined the residence to be safe.

6. Refrain from attempting to coerce or becoming aggressive with a client who is refusing to give access to the home or children in question. Leave the home and consult with a supervisor immediately regarding how to proceed;
7. Continue to evaluate the client's attitude, demeanor, and behavior to assess for signs of aggression, violence, substance use, or unusual or suspicious behavior throughout the home visit; and
8. Leave the home if feeling unsafe, activate SafeSignal (if needed), and find a safe location from which to contact the employee's supervisor.

F. While in the home, a DCS employee will:

1. Be aware of all people who are present in the home during the visit, inquiring about any unseen people believed to be in other rooms or unfamiliar people arriving during the visit;

2. Obtain permission from the client before entering any part of the home, and remain cautious and observant upon entry to any room;
3. Sit in an area near or with easy access to an exit. Do not sit near sharp objects or on wet furniture/items;
4. Remain alert and observant of the environment and the behaviors of those present;
5. Note any unusual smells, such as gas, electrical, or fire hazards, as well as those which may be associated with the manufacturing of substances (follow appropriate DEC Response Protocol if warranted);
6. Use Universal Precautions at all times (see Universal Precautions); and
7. In an emergency situation and/or if there is a perceived safety risk, if the employee has SafeSignal, activate the alarm on the SafeSignal app by pulling the tether (or headphones), allowing the timer to expire, or entering the panic code and leave the home immediately. An employee may press the “Panic Button” on the SafeSignal app to signal for LEA when not in a session. Once activated, SafeSignal will notify LEA. (see SafeSignal Instruction Video for further guidance).

Note: After the SafeSignal Monitoring Center confirms officers are onsite, an Incident Summary will be sent via text and e-mail to the employee and the SafeSignal Notification Team (i.e., local management team and the chain of command).

G. When interacting with an agitated or angry individual, a DCS employee should:

1. Attempt to remain calm and be aware of tone of voice;
2. Keep a safe distance and stand to the side of the individual, instead of directly in front of the person;
3. Show respect and sincerity;
4. Refrain from telling the individual what to do or how to handle a situation; and
5. Remove oneself from the situation as soon as possible if feeling threatened, and activate the SafeSignal alarm by pulling the tether (or headphones) or entering the panic code.

H. When leaving the home, a DCS employee should:

1. Have car keys out and ready upon approaching the vehicle;
2. Observe any people or activities taking place in relative proximity to the residence, the exit route, or the vehicle;

Note: Leave the car and contact someone for alternative transportation, if unable to return to or enter the vehicle without risk of harm.

3. Look under the vehicle as you approach and observe the back seat before entering the vehicle;
4. Leave the area immediately. Do not remain outside the residence or in the vehicle to make phone calls or take notes; these activities should be completed when a safe or familiar destination is reached;
5. Always wash hands or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after completing a home visit; and
6. Write notes about everything that happened during the visit as soon as possible.

I. When in the office, a DCS employee will:

1. Ensure designated office staff are aware of clients who are in the building, the purpose of their visit, and the worker with whom they are meeting at all times;
2. Arrange office or meeting space in order to have easy and unrestricted access to an exit door. Do not have paperweights, scissors, or other items that could be used as a weapon available in rooms used for meetings with clients;
3. Observe the client's attitude, demeanor, and behavior to assess for signs of aggression, violence, substance use, or unusual or suspicious behavior. End the visit or seek assistance from other employees if necessary to de-escalate a situation;
4. Keep clients' waiting time to a minimum;
5. Close all doors after entering/exiting the office (do not prop open doors);
6. Ensure at least one (1) other employee is in the office or is aware that you are in the office during meetings; and
7. Refrain from opening suspicious packages or those with no return address. Report these items to a supervisor, Local Office Director (LOD), or Deputy Director immediately.

J. Employees who routinely make home visits may want to consider keeping the following items in their vehicles:

1. A second (personal) cellular phone with 911 programmed or on speed dial;

Note: The agency issued cellular phone should be on the employee with the SafeSignal app activated.

2. A change of clothing;
3. Clean towels for clean-up or decontamination;
4. Latex, nitrile, or surgical gloves for handling children who are injured or ill;
5. Disinfectant hand wipes;
6. Plastic trash bags for covering car seats and floorboards and for carrying contaminated items;
7. Hand sanitizer;
8. Blanket; and
9. Backpack or bag child could use in case of emergency removal (many offices have received these as donations).

K. A DCS employee will follow the special considerations below for cases where domestic violence is suspected or identified:

1. Leave the home and contact LEA if there is an active protective order or no contact order and the alleged domestic violence offender is in or is suspected to be in the victim's home during the visit;
2. Do not meet with the alleged domestic violence offender alone in a home. Take a co-worker, supervisor, or LEA to the meeting or request that the alleged domestic violence offender come to the DCS local office to meet;

3. Notify co-workers and a supervisor when an alleged domestic violence offender will be visiting the office. Try to have a building security officer nearby (if available) or request that a co-worker sit in on the interview;
4. Ensure there are accessible exits when meeting with the alleged domestic violence offender;
5. Inform the non-offending parent if the alleged domestic violence offender's anger has escalated during an interview or visit. This behavior may indicate heightened risk for the safety of the non-offending parent and child; and
6. Be aware that certain situations may threaten the alleged domestic violence offender's power and control and may cause him or her to react violently toward DCS employees. The employee should work with the employee's supervisor to determine how to handle these situations, should they arise. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - a. The non-offending parent is preparing to leave or has left the relationship,
 - b. Receipt by the alleged domestic violence offender of agency documentation with allegations of child abuse and/or neglect (CA/N) or information about how DCS will continue to be involved with the family,
 - c. Allegations made directly to the alleged domestic violence offender regarding domestic violence or CA/N,
 - d. Requests for information regarding the location of the non-offending parent and/or child,
 - e. Removal of the child from the home,
 - f. Filing or finalizing Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), and
 - g. Release of the alleged domestic violence offender from a period of incarceration.

REFERENCES

- A. [IC 9-19-10-2: Use of safety belt by motor vehicle occupants; safety belt standards](#)
- B. [IC 9-19-11-2: Child less than eight years of age; child restraint system; penalty; medical exceptions; child restraint system account](#)
- C. [4.08 Entry into Home or Facility](#)
- D. [Drug Endangered Children \(DEC\) Response Protocol](#)
- E. [SafeSignal Instruction Video](#)
- F. [State of Indiana Employee Handbook](#)
- G. [Universal Precautions](#)

DATE: March 5, 2021
Terry Stigdon, Director
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A signed copy is on file.