

# Handle with Care

## Technical Assistance Guide



March 2023

### Overview

The [Handle with Care \(HWC\)](#) program is a [notification system](#) that enables law enforcement and other first responders to notify schools when a child has been at the scene of a potentially traumatic event, allowing schools and mental health partners to provide trauma-sensitive support.



### Starting a HWC Program

**Anyone can initiate contact to start the conversation about implementing Handle with Care in their community.** The Indiana Department of Health, [Division of Fatality Review and Prevention](#) is here to act as a guide and support system for communities throughout implementation.

Organizations or individuals interested in starting an HWC program in their community should take the following steps to organize their activities and ensure that the program is implemented with fidelity. Follow along and assign action items using the [HWC Implementation Plan](#).

#### 1. Identify Key Stakeholders

Each stakeholder agency must designate a person who will serve as the team lead or point of contact for their agency. The team leader acts as a liaison between their greater agency and other stakeholders.

##### Required Stakeholders:

- Law enforcement (police chief, county sheriff)
- Schools and/or school districts (superintendents, principals)
- Mental health providers

##### Recommended Stakeholders:

- EMS
- Fire departments
- Childcare agencies
- Child protective services
- Victim advocacy programs
- Community programs
- Parent organizations

##### Action Items:

- Key stakeholders should develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) or Letters of Support (LOS), dictating their partnership with the HWC program.
  - [Sample MOU for Law Enforcement and Schools](#)
- Team leaders must routinely meet to assess gaps/barriers in the program and needed improvements.

## 2. Establish Notification Protocol

### Sending Notifications

Establish a process for how HWC notifications will be delivered from law enforcement and participating organizations to school districts and individual schools.

**Option One:** Utilize Microsoft Forms (HIPAA/FERPA compliant).

Reporting individuals fill out a Microsoft Form that is accessible by the school district or an individual school's HWC point of contact (POC) that provides the name, age, and school of the student who is the subject of the notification. Notifications for all identified students should be made every morning by 6:30 a.m. (reporting takes place seven days per week).

**Option Two:** Utilize law enforcement's internal CAD system (HIPAA/FERPA compliant).

Reports that include a student's name, age, and school are incorporated automatically into law enforcement agencies' internal reporting systems. These reports are then automatically distributed to HWC POC(s) every morning at 6:30 a.m.

**This option requires collaboration with law enforcement IT teams.**

### Processing Notifications

Establish how HWC notifications are processed by school districts and individual schools.

Identify the point of contact for HWC notifications for each school and/or school district. The point of contact will disseminate HWC notifications to the staff members who will be interacting with the affected student. At a minimum, HWC notifications should be delivered to all appropriate administrative personnel. This includes any teacher, support staff and counselor who will interact with the affected student at each participating school.



**Option One:**

Arrange for a centralized school district counselor or administrative team member to serve as a HWC point of contact. This individual is responsible for overseeing all daily HWC reports and arranging for the distribution of all HWC notifications to administrators, counselors, and teachers at each school.

**Option Two:**

Arrange for a school counselor, school resource officer, or administrator from each school to serve as a HWC point of contact. This individual is responsible for overseeing all daily HWC reports and arranging for the distribution of all HWC notifications to administrators, counselors, and teachers at their school.

### 3. Determine Reporting Criteria

Key stakeholders must identify when law enforcement and participating organizations should send a HWC notification to a school district. If a reporter is undecided on whether to make a report for a specific case, always err on the side of reporting.

#### *Option One:*

Reporting consists of every call directly involving a child in the HWC school district regardless of whether the child is the victim, witness or perpetrator of an event.

**There is no potential for negative consequences for over-reporting, only for underreporting.**

#### *Option Two:*

Reporting is based on the judgement of the HWC reporter. Reporters should provide a notification when the following criteria is met for a student: "The observance or experiencing of an event that is marked by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury or the threat of serious injury or death; or, the witnessing or experiencing of violence, abuse, or neglect, suicide or attempted suicide, the commission of a crime or incidents of substance misuse, mental health problems and/or parental or household instability."

### 4. Train Stakeholders

Educate contacts, local community members and key community stakeholders about the HWC program and how it supports educational outcomes, decreases classroom disruptions and increases classroom and school safety while maintaining student confidentiality and anonymity.

#### Law Enforcement & First Responders

- Watch nine-minute [HWC Roll Call Video](#).
- Provide training to officers and other reporting entities on notification platform and reporting process. This is provided either by the reporting agency leadership or the [Indiana HWC Coordinator](#).
- Agency supervisors must provide training to partners on department policies to identify, document and report children encountered at the scene of calls. All partners must be familiar with the appropriate on-scene response when children are present to mitigate potential further traumatization.

#### School Personnel

- Every school employee must participate in a free, one-hour HWC training session (in-person or virtual provided by the [Indiana HWC coordinator](#)). This training will provide instructions on how to manage HWC notifications and how to employ trauma-informed approaches when interacting with student recipients.
- Recommended: Every school employee should participate in a free Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) training. Trainings are available virtually or in-person and can be completed in 20-minute, one-hour or two-hour intervals through the [ACEs Indiana Coalition](#).

## Mental Health Providers

- A one-hour Handle with Care training presentation is required. The training provides an overview of the impacts of trauma on children, the impact of trauma on learning, key elements of the program and strategies for successful implementation.
- Mental health providers working with children identified through the Handle with Care program must be trained and certified in [Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(TF-CBT\)](#).

## 5. Collect Program Data

Schools should collect HWC data to monitor program implementation and student outcomes; however, data collection is currently up to the discretion of individual HWC programs.

HWC notices should never be stored within a student's permanent educational record. It is best practice to ensure any workbook containing HWC data is stored in a secure location and is password protected. A centralized HWC reporting system is currently in development by IDOH.

Anticipated **monthly reports** following the completion of the reporting system will likely include:

- The number of total student notifications received by each school and/or school district each month.
- The number of referrals made by each school and/or school district for outside mental health services for students who were identified in a HWC notification each month.
- The number of on-site service appointments provided by each school and/or school district for students who were identified in a HWC notification.

**HWC data should not include specific student information, such as the student's name or date of birth, and HWC notices should be deleted routinely to ensure student anonymity.**

## Resources

- [HWC Data Lead Workbook](#)
- [HWC School Counselor Workbook](#)
- [Using Data to Support Program Improvement: A Guide for Monitoring HWC in Schools](#)

This document was created in collaboration with the Ball State Center for Substance Use Research and Community Initiatives (SURCI) and references materials developed by the West Virginia Center for Children's Justice in partnership with the West Virginia Department of Education and REL Appalachia at SRI International.

For additional information on Handle with Care, visit:

[in.gov/health/cfr/handle-with-care](https://in.gov/health/cfr/handle-with-care)

