

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL</b>	
	<b>Chapter 1:</b> Introduction	<b>Effective Date:</b> August 1, 2014
	<b>Section 0:</b> Introduction to the Department of Child Services (DCS) Manual	<b>Version:</b> 4

### OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) partners with children and families to provide services in order to address issues that lead to child abuse and neglect and ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. DCS also assesses and investigates allegations of child abuse and/or neglect and oversees the licensing services for resource families and child caring institutions. In addition, DCS is responsible for child support services and partners with county Prosecuting Attorneys, county Clerks of the Court, and various other local, state, and federal agencies to assist families with child support services under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act.

**Note:** The DCS Policy Manual does not address child support policy except to the extent that it intersects with child welfare policy.

The DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual provides:

- Current policies that govern child welfare practice in Indiana;
- Legal cites to both federal and state laws, rules, and regulations which establish the authority of the agency and set statutory parameters of agency authority within those areas;
- Procedures for policy implementation;
- Practice Guidance to assist with the application and execution of policies; and
- Related Information to provide further explanation and clarification of the policies and procedures.

The DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual is comprised of various chapters that contain information directly related to the duties of DCS staff members. Policies are directives that define and guide child welfare practice.

Procedures are a series of steps to be taken by the agency in partnership with families in order to accomplish the directives established in policy. Procedures provide case management information, including directions regarding information to be documented in the Management Gateway for Indiana's Kids (MaGIK).

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.

Related Information gives further clarification about the policy and procedure by providing definitions, explanations of federal and state statutes, and links to sites that offer additional information regarding the topics addressed in the policy.

## **THE PRACTICE OF CHILD WELFARE**

Child welfare services is a field of practice within social work where a partnership is developed with families in order to protect children who may be victims of abuse or neglect and address the issues that lead to abuse or neglect. When involvement is necessary, the least restrictive interventions are utilized, as DCS recognizes that the preservation of family and community ties is essential to safety, well-being, and permanency for children. DCS recognizes and supports the preservation of family and community connections through our mission, vision, and values.

### **MISSION**

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) protects children from abuse and neglect, and works to ensure their financial support.

### **VISION**

Children thrive in safe, caring, supportive families and communities.

### **VALUES AND PRINCIPLES**

We believe every child has the right to be free from abuse and neglect.

- Every child has the right to a safe and nurturing home free from abuse and neglect.
- A timely, thorough, and thoughtful response to child safety concerns is critical in effectively protecting children.
- When children require out-of-home placement, safety must be ensured through regular and frequent contact with those children and caregivers.

We believe every child has the right to appropriate care and a permanent home.

- Every child has the right to appropriate care and a permanent home. The ultimate goal in permanency shall be to provide a safe and nurturing home, and for a child to develop and sustain meaningful relationships.
- Children should be in family settings. When possible, siblings shall be placed together. Children under the age of 10 should never be placed in congregate care (i.e. group homes, shelter care, and institutions) without the signature of DCS executive leadership. Then, only if this option is proven to be in the best interest of the children.
- When children require out-of-home placements, careful assessment and evaluation shall be utilized when making placement decisions in an effort to promote a single placement for children.

We believe parents have the primary responsibility for the care and safety of their children.

- If a child is determined to be unsafe, DCS and the family will develop a timely plan to keep the child safe, with all efforts toward services to protect the child in his or her own home.
- When children cannot live safely with their families, the first consideration for placement will be with appropriate relatives in order to provide a familiar, safe, and nurturing environment to minimize loss.
- To facilitate reunification, parents must be involved in treatment planning and service plan delivery, because when the strengths and voices of children and families are recognized, respected and affirmed, they are more likely to use them for change.
- Families will receive ongoing supports that will enable them to safely sustain their children in their homes.
- Families and communities are responsible for ensuring that children thrive.

- Developing effective services is a shared responsibility best achieved by families, community partners, and public agencies working collaboratively.
- DCS will assist families in this community/family collaboration to find resources that make children and families safe.
- Parents must be supported in accessing services and understand that incorporating those services is necessary to improve outcomes for children.
- The family's network is essential to supporting and sustaining change. Families shall meet their needs through their own strengths and with the support of their networks.
- Coordination of the family team and accomplishment of its goal is essential and works most effectively when it occurs via regular face-to-face meetings that ensure more successful and positive outcomes.

We believe the best place for children to grow up is with their own families.

- The most desirable place for children to grow up is with their own families when these families are able to provide a safe, nurturing, and stable home.
- Vigorous early intervention services should be offered to at-risk families to enable a child to remain safely in his or her own home.
- Reunification and permanency is accelerated when visitation between parents and children is frequent and in the most normalized environment possible.
- Service planning implementation should be built on a comprehensive array of services designed to create the opportunity for children and families to achieve the goals of safety, well-being, and permanency.
- Strengths-based service plans are developed using a family team and a comprehensive assessment of the child and family's needs. Plans should be needs-based and should specify steps to be taken by each member of the team, timeframes for accomplishment of goals, and concrete measurements to monitor the progress of the child and family.
- DCS will work jointly with service providers who adhere to effective social work practices in the delivery of services and these providers will be held responsible for demonstrating expected outcomes.

We believe children and older youth have the right to permanent and lifelong connections.

- When children require out-of-home placements, they should maintain essential connections through frequent and meaningful contact with significant persons in their lives.
- All efforts should be made for children to remain in their own neighborhoods and maintain existing connections with families, schools, and friends.
- Success in school is more likely to occur when planning for safety, stability, and permanency is fully integrated with a child's educational plan.
- While transitioning to adulthood, children in foster care are most successful in achieving independence when they have established relationships with caring adults.

We believe in personal accountability for outcomes, including one's own growth and development.

- Parents should be empowered and given the opportunity to take responsibility for their children and resolve issues of abuse and neglect.
- Families will be engaged with honesty, empathy, and openness. Through listening and helping, families will develop their strengths to meet current and future needs.
- Children and families will receive prompt and individualized service planning.

- Services to children and families shall be planned and delivered through a straightforward, flexible individualized service plan developed by the child, family, and service team.

We believe every person has value, worth, and dignity.

- Every person has value and worth and will be treated with respect and dignity.
- Every family has strengths that can be developed.
- Family members are experts of their own families. Service planning will consider the family rules, traditions, history, and culture.
- Family perspectives, goals and values will be regarded as critical to creating and maintaining child safety.
- Families are core members of the decision-making team, therefore decisions about child and family team interventions shall be relevant, comprehensive, and effective.
- Services provided to children and families will respect their cultural, ethnic, and religious heritage.
- DCS staff relationships and communications with community partners will be conducted with empathy, honesty, and openness.

### LEGAL BASE

The direct delivery of child welfare services by DCS local offices under the administration or supervision of the Central Office of DCS is based upon federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. The foundation for public welfare is found in the 1935 federal Social Security Act, as amended.

The Indiana Juvenile Code became effective October 1, 1979. In its “General Policy and Provisions,” Indiana Code 31-10-2-1 affirms that it is the policy of this state “to ensure that children within the juvenile justice system are treated as persons in need of care, protection, treatment and rehabilitation.” Further, the Code states that it is Indiana’s policy to “strengthen family life by assisting parents to fulfill their parental obligations;” and “to remove children from their families only when it is in the child’s best interest or in the best interest of public safety.”

The federal Social Security Act, Title IV, Part B, Section 425(a)(1) [42 United States Code (U.S.C.) 625] offers this further definition:

For purposes of this title, the term “child welfare services” means public social services which are directed toward the accomplishment of the following purposes: (A) protecting and promoting the welfare of all children, including handicapped, homeless, dependent, or neglected children; (B) preventing or remedying, or assisting in the solution of problems which may result in, the neglect, abuse, exploitation, or delinquency of children; (C) preventing the unnecessary separation of children from their families by identifying family problems, assisting families in resolving their problems, and preventing the breakup of the family where the prevention of child removal is desirable and possible; (D) restoring to their families children who have been removed, by the provision of services to the child and the families; (E) placing children in suitable adoptive homes, in cases where restoration to the biological family is not possible or appropriate; and (F) assuring adequate care of children away from their homes, in cases where the child cannot be returned home or cannot be placed for adoption.

Information regarding other federal and state laws that influence public child welfare services can be found in the related sections of the DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual.

### **NON-DISCRIMINATION IN SERVICE DELIVERY TO CLIENTS**

Title IV of the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 [42 U.S.C. 2000d], Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794), Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12132), and all regulations related to these Acts address non-discrimination in service delivery to clients. All local offices must ensure that no one, based on race, color, sex, national origin, or handicap, is excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any service or activity for which the federal government provides funding.

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