

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL
	Chapter 1: Introduction to the DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual

OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS), through its Child Welfare Division, provides services to children and their families to prevent problems that lead to child abuse and neglect and ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. DCS also investigates allegations of child abuse and/or neglect and oversees the licensing service for resource families and child caring institutions. The DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual is designed to be a reference guide for DCS staff members, relative to the policies, procedures and rules required by laws and administered or supervised by DCS Central Office.

This DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual provides:

- Legal cites to both federal and state laws, rules and regulations which establish the authority of the agency, mandate the creation of specific service areas, and set statutory parameters of agency authority within those areas;
- A clear description of each service administered;
- The policies governing each service;
- The procedures to be followed in carrying out each service;
- Practice guidance which assists with implementing policies; and
- Case management information, including reference to Indiana’s automated child welfare information system, Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS).

The DCS Child Welfare Policy Manual is comprised of various chapters that contain information directly related to the duties of DCS staff members. The Table of Contents for each chapter contains direct links to all forms approved for public release.

THE PRACTICE OF CHILD WELFARE

Child welfare services is a field of practice within social work where workers carry out the statutory and legal charge to prevent and remedy problems within a family unit. Only when such problems result in a conflict between parents and children, or when the law authorizes other reasons for intervention, should service intervention occur.

The preservation of family and community ties is essential to the safety, well-being, and permanency for children. DCS recognizes and supports the preservation of the family and continuity of community connections through our mission, vision, and values.

MISSION

The Indiana Department of Child Services protects children from abuse and neglect. DCS does this by partnering with families and communities to provide safe, nurturing, and stable homes.

VISION

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

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Children:

- Every child has the right to a safe and nurturing home free from abuse and neglect.
- The most desirable place for children to grow is with their own families when these families are able to provide safe, nurturing, and stable home.
- Vigorous early intervention services should be offered to at-risk families to enable a child to remain safely in their own home.
- A timely, thorough, and thoughtful response to child safety concerns is critical in effectively protecting children.
- 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. Siblings shall be placed together. Children under the age of 6 should never be placed in congregate care (i.e. group home, shelter care, and institutions).
- 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/her own home.
- When children cannot live safely with their families, the first consideration for placement will be with an appropriate relative in order to provide a familiar, safe, and nurturing environment to minimize loss.
- 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.
- 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.
- Reunification and permanency is accelerated when visitation between parents and children is frequent and in the most normalized environment possible.
- 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.

Families:

- 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.
- Every person has value and worth and will be treated with honest 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.
- 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 a change.
- Families will receive ongoing supports that will enable them to safely sustain their children in their homes.
- Families are core members of the decision-making team, therefore decisions about child and family team interventions shall be relevant, comprehensive, and effective.
- 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.
- When children require out-of-home placement, safety must be ensured through regular and frequent contact with those children and caregivers.

Communities

- Families and communities are responsible for ensuring that children thrive.

- DCS will work jointly with service providers who adhere to effective social work practices in the delivery of services and providers will be held responsible for demonstrating expected outcomes.
- Developing effective services is a shared responsibility best achieved by families, community partners, and public agencies working collaboratively.
- The Department of Child Services will assist families in this community/ family collaboration to find resources that make children and families safe.
- 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.
- 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.
- Services 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. Plan should be needs based and should specify steps to be taken by each member of the team, time frames for accomplishment of goals, and concrete measurements to monitor the progress of the child and family.

LEGAL BASE

The direct delivery of child welfare services by DCS local offices is under the administration or supervision of the Central Office of DCS is based upon federal and state laws, rules and regulations. One of the foundations 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 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, which deal with non-discrimination in services delivery to clients. All local offices must comply with the mandate that no one, based on race, color, sex, national origin, or handicap, shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any service or activity for which the federal government provides funding.

SUMMARY

The Indiana child welfare system is outcome driven by consideration for a child's need for safety, permanency, and well-being. A child's health and safety are always the paramount concern.

DCS recognizes and supports the importance and necessity for the involvement and partnership with all family members, extended family members, informal support networks and a broad array, and the strengthening of the social service network for family support. DCS supports and strives for a system that is community-based, quality-driven, and accountable to clients, community partners, and other stakeholders to be successful.

An effective system of care also requires the active participation of a broad range of professionals working as a team with and/or on behalf of children and their families. DCS recognizes that families and children need timely access to a broad range of services to assist the family with safely caring for its children.

The DCS child welfare policy manual is updated frequently to reflect new policies, legislative changes, and revisions to existing policies. Please review the manual periodically to stay informed about current DCS policies.