

	INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY	
	Chapter 4: Assessment	Effective Date: May 1, 2014
	Section 37: Change in Household Composition	Version: 2

STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

If it is determined by DCS that a temporary change in household composition will provide the family with an opportunity to address the safety and risk issues present during the time of the assessment; a change in the household can occur if it is in the best interest of the child.

The Family and Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Consider the family’s protective factors (nurturing and attachment to the child, knowledge of parenting and of child and youth development, parental resilience, social connections and concrete supports for parents) when evaluating their ability to ensure the safety of their child;
2. Assist the family in identifying resources and/or informal supports that will help them address the concern so that the child can be maintained safely in the home; and
3. Ask the family what their plan is to remedy the immediate concerns and how the plan demonstrates the parent or caregiver’s intent and ability to ensure the safety of the child.

Circumstances resulting in the temporary change of household shall be rectified within five (5) business days or court action will be initiated. At any time during an assessment when there is a restriction placed by DCS on any parent regarding contact with his/her child, a CHINS Petition will be filed. See policies [5.9 Informal Adjustment](#) and [6.2 Filing a CHINS Petition](#) for additional information.

Code References

N/A

PROCEDURE

The FCM will:

1. Ensure the safety of the child;
2. Ensure that the family’s plan demonstrates their intent and ability to maintain the safety of the child;
3. Meet with the family to identify their family strengths, concrete supports and informal supports who can assist them in ensuring the safety of the child;
4. Suggest a Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting to include their informal supports, as a tool to allow the family to address the safety issues that led to DCS involvement;
5. Document the family’s agreed-upon plan by using the [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#) or outlining the plan in the CFTM notes. This should include a family discussion regarding the recommended course of action that will correct the situation including, but not limited to, the child and/or parent moving to a safe location (See separate policy [4.19 Family Support/Community Services for Conditionally Safe Children](#));
6. Perform a home visit if the plan is to move the child to a safer location;

7. Perform a CPS Check and Sex Offender Check on all possible temporary caregivers;
8. Work with the family to identify resources to immediately assist the family, if needed;
9. Partner with the family to develop a plan for the timely return of the child to the family's household; and
10. Complete a subsequent Safety Assessment in the case management system

If the child or the child and parent temporarily move to an alternative location, the FCM will:

1. Ensure the location is safe for the child;
2. Ensure other caregivers for the child identified are in agreement to provide a safe environment for the child; and
3. Ensure the issues causing a change in household composition are remedied within five (5) days.

Note: Court action will be initiated if issues are not remedied within the five (5) day timeframe. At any time during an assessment when there is a restriction placed by DCS on any parent regarding contact with his or her child, a CHINS Petition will be filed.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

If there is a restriction regarding contact with a child placed on an adult in the household (other than a parent), for example a boyfriend or girlfriend of a parent, the FCM will ensure that contact will not occur between that person and the child until the safety circumstance has been remedied. The non-biological household member does not have the same right of access to a child as the biological parent/guardian.

Parents have the primary responsibility for the care and safety of their children. This may be accomplished by empowering parents to have a significant role, voice and influence in decisions made about child/family change strategies.

Consideration of Protective Factors to Ensure Safety

Protective Factors are directly connected to the strengths of the family and may be used as a resource to learn new skills and solve problems. By using a protective factors approach, child welfare professionals and others can help parents find resources and supports that emphasize their strengths while also identifying areas where they need assistance, thereby mitigating the chances of child abuse and neglect. When completing a Safety Plan, consider the protective factors listed on the Protective Factors to Promote Well-Being and Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect webpage (linked below) as part of an evaluation of the family's ability to ensure the safety of the child.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Protective Factors to Promote Well-Being and Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#) – Available in the case management system

RELATED INFORMATION

General

The [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#) is a written agreement between DCS and the parent(s), guardian, or custodian(s) specifying what extended family supports or community services will be utilized

and how those will ensure the immediate safety of the child. The plan should contain action steps and these action steps should have deadlines for completion that do not extend beyond the end of the assessment. All actions should relate directly to the child's immediate safety. The extended [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#) is a voluntary, non-legally binding agreement with the family that cannot contradict any existing court orders including, but not limited to, child support and child custody orders.

Parental Involvement in Family Support/Community Services Plan Development

Involvement of the family in the development of a [Safety Plan \(SF 53243\)](#) is imperative. The greater the family's participation in this process, the more ownership they will have in a successful outcome. For this reason, it is critical that the FCM focus the discussion on the safety of the child and not on the allegation(s). When developing the plan with the family, the FCM should speak in such a way as to develop a common understanding that the safety of the child is contingent on their ability and willingness to follow the terms of the plan. If the family is hesitant or unwilling to create a plan and/or commit to abiding by the plan's terms, remind the parent that the child may not be safe under present circumstances.

Protective Factors

Protective Factors are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, and communities that promote the safety, stability, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

Temporary Caregiver

A temporary caregiver is defined as someone providing short-term care (not to exceed 5 business days) for a child who is the alleged victim in a CA/N report. Temporary care for the child is arranged by the custodial parent and should provide a safe, nurturing, stable environment for a child who must be out of their own home for the brief period of time needed by the parents to remedy risky conditions (i.e. living conditions that would do not meet legal sufficiency) that would prevent the child from continuing to safely reside in their own home.