



INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES

CHILD WELFARE POLICY

Chapter 5: General Case Management

Section 06: Locating Absent Parents

Effective Date: April 1, 2022

Version: 7

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POLICY OVERVIEW

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) recognizes the role and responsibility of the parent as the primary caregiver for the child and when a parent is absent from a child's life, DCS makes diligent efforts to identify and locate the absent parent for any child under the care and custody of DCS. Locating an absent parent facilitates providing required notification regarding court proceedings and allows for engaging the parent in case planning and services. It may also aid in establishing a relationship or connection between the child and parent or other relatives, which may lead to an expedited permanency outcome.

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PROCEDURE

When the identity and/or whereabouts of a parent of a child under DCS care and custody is unknown, DCS will attempt to identify and locate the parent, using various means, including but not limited to the Putative Father Registry and Federal Parent Locator Services (FPLS). A diligent search to locate each parent will begin at the earliest possible time and continue throughout the life of the case or until termination of parental rights (TPR) has been granted by the court. See policy 5.23 Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants for additional information.

When the identity and/or whereabouts of a parent of a child under DCS care and custody is unknown the FCM will:

1. Obtain and review a copy of the child's birth certificate to ascertain the date of birth and the names of parents listed;
2. Gather information regarding the identity and/or location of the parent of a child under DCS care from all available resources. The information that may be gathered for each parent may include, but is not limited to the following:
 - a. Full name and any known aliases,
 - b. Social Security Number (SSN),
 - c. Date of birth,
 - d. Current and previous address and/or telephone number,
 - e. Current or past employer,
 - f. Name, address, and telephone number for any known relatives or kin, and
 - g. Any benefits received (e.g., Social Security Disability [SSDI], and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF]).

Note: When the parent is located, gather information regarding income and resources during the removal month. See policy 15.01 Title IV-E Eligibility Overview for Field and Legal Staff for additional information.

3. Check police records, protective order registry, and other sources to obtain additional information about the parent;

Note: If there is a history of domestic violence (DV), the search for the absent parent must still be completed. The information obtained will help the FCM be more prepared when the parent is located and while assessing permanency alternatives.

4. Ask the child, if age-appropriate, about the absent parent and extended family;
5. Inquire as to who is listed as the emergency contact at school and with medical providers;
6. Review the child's health records for the names of the child's parents;
7. Request that the DCS Staff Attorney complete a search of the Putative Father Registry, if needed;
8. Complete the Kinship Connections Diagram; and present a copy to the court. A hard copy of the diagram should be kept in the case file and uploaded to the case management system;
9. Make a referral to the DCS Investigator, if necessary, to assist in identifying or searching for the absent parent. For additional information see the Investigation Services on the DCS Community Services website for more information;

Note: FCMs may make a referral for this assistance in situations where all procedural steps have been completed and their efforts have been unsuccessful. Additional information regarding how to make a referral, when to make a referral, and other helpful information may be found under Investigation Services.

10. Ask service providers to share any information obtained about the absent parent with DCS;
11. Ensure the following database and institutional searches are completed during the development of each Case Plan/Prevention Plan and throughout the life of the case, until the absent parent is located:
 - a. DCS case management system,
 - b. Indiana Support Enforcement Tracking System (ISETS),
 - c. White pages website,
 - d. Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV),
 - e. County jails,
 - f. Department of Corrections (DOC), and
 - g. Other state offender locator services, as available.
12. Continue making diligent efforts to identify and/or locate the absent parent throughout the life of the case until the absent parent is located by:
 - a. Attempting to contact the absent parent at the last known address until there is verification that the absent parent is no longer living at the address on record,
 - b. Attempting to contact the absent parent at any new address that may be identified,
 - c. Attempting to make contact with other individuals (e.g., extended family) who may assist in locating the absent parent,
 - d. Advising the Child and Family Team (CFT) of efforts made to identify and locate the absent parent, and

- e. Providing a completed and/or updated Affidavit of Diligent Inquiry (ADI) to the DCS Staff Attorney.

Note: When the identity and location of the absent or alleged parent is known, the FCM will provide the address of the parent to the DCS Staff Attorney so the parent may receive notices of court proceedings and may be considered for placement and services.

13. Document all efforts made to locate the absent parent and the results of those efforts in the case management system within three (3) business days; and
14. Provide an update on the diligent efforts to identify and/or locate the absent parent in each report to the court.

Upon the receipt of a referral the DCS Investigator will complete a search for the absent parent. This search will include but is not limited to the FPLS.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Ensure all resources have been used to identify and locate absent parents and offer guidance to the FCM during regular case staffing, as needed;
2. Assist with any searches that may be necessary; and
3. Ensure all efforts to locate an absent parent are documented in the case management system within three (3) business days.

The DCS Staff Attorney will:

1. Respond to any request from the FCM to complete a search of the Putative Father Registry;
2. Review the ADI and ensure notice of proceedings is published as to the absent parent;
3. Provide notice to the court of any established identity and/or locations for the absent parent so notices of court proceedings may be provided; and
4. Request the judge place the custodial parent or other individuals under oath to answer questions regarding the absent parent and extended family at the first court hearing the parent attends and any subsequent hearings, if needed.

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RELEVANT INFORMATION

Definitions

Case Staffing

Case staffing is a systematic and frequent review of all case information with safety, stability, permanency, and well-being as driving forces for case activities.

DCS Investigators

DCS Investigators are employees of DCS who are responsible for assisting FCMs in locating absent parents, relatives, and/or other identified persons of interest to the case and/or assessment.

Diligent Search

Efforts made to locate or identify the parents, relatives, non-relative kin, and case participants of a child, initiated at the outset of a case, with updates provided in court reports until the permanency goal is achieved or the court excuses further search.

Forms and Tools

- Affidavit of Diligent Inquiry (SF 54778) – available in the case management system
- [Department of Corrections website](#)
- [Investigation Services](#)
- [Kinship Connections Diagram](#)
- [White pages website](#)

Related Policies

- [5.23 Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants](#)
- [15.01 Title IV-E Eligibility Overview for Field and Legal Staff](#)

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LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 31-34-3-2: Procedures for notice; custodial parent, guardian, or custodian who cannot be located](#)

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PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 5.06

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. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.

Importance of Conducting a Diligent Search and Engaging Absent Parents

Failure to complete a diligent search for the absent parent may delay appropriate permanency options for a child under the care and custody of DCS. It is necessary to demonstrate to the court that a diligent search has been made to locate and engage an absent parent before a court may involuntarily terminate that person's parental rights. Locating and engaging an absent parent may lead to several positive outcomes. See policy 5.23 Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants for additional guidance.

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