

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES CHILD WELFARE MANUAL</b>	
	<b>Chapter 8:</b> Out-of-Home Services	<b>Effective Date:</b> March 1, 2011
	<b>Section 39:</b> Trial Home Visits	<b>Version:</b> 3

<b>POLICY</b>
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The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will utilize Trial Home Visits (THV) for a period of three (3) months. It shall then be dismissed but can be extended for an additional three (3) months, when the safety and well-being of the child can reasonably be assured and the following conditions have been met:

1. The child's permanency goal is reunification; and
2. There is documented progress, any safety concerns are identified and addressed, and the service level of the case can be decreased at least one (1) level. See separate policy, [4.26 Determining Service Levels and Transitioning to Ongoing Services](#).

DCS will ensure that a [Safety Plan \(SF51445/CW0440\)](#) is completed for all children returning to the care of their parent, guardian, or custodian on a THV.

The DCS local office maintains placement and care responsibilities for the child while on THV.

**Note:** DCS will remove a child from a THV and return a child to substitute care, if the child's safety and/or well-being are at risk, and the provision of additional family preservation services has not reduced the risk to allow the child to remain in the home safely. DCS will return the child to the same placement whenever possible. See separate policy, [8.37 Holding a Placement during a Temporary Absence](#).

**[NEW]** If the THV fails, the Case Plan (SF 2956/ DCS 0046) and/or alternate permanency plan may need to be revised. See separate policies, [5.8 Developing the Case Plan](#) and [5.15 Concurrent Planning](#).

Code References

[45 CFR 1356.21 \(e\)](#)

<b>PROCEDURE</b>
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Prior to the THV, the Family Case Manager (FCM) will:

1. Offer to convene a Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting to review case progress and determine if a THV is appropriate. See separate policy, [5.7 Family Team Meetings](#);
2. Complete a new [Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) and a new Risk Assessment. See separate policies, [4.24 Strengths and Needs Assessment](#) and [4.23 Risk Assessment](#);
3. Redetermine the service level. See separate policy, [4.26 Determining Service Levels and Transitioning to Ongoing Services](#);
4. Complete a [Safety Plan \(SF51445/CW0440\)](#);
5. Obtain supervisory approval to recommend the THV visit to the court.

6. Work with the DCS Local Office Attorney to make a recommendation to the court and seek court approval for the THV, if it is determined that a THV is appropriate; and
7. Obtain a court order prior to the start of the THV. **[NEW]** The court order should state that DCS continues to have placement and care responsibility.

If the THV is approved by the court, the FCM will:

1. Continue to provide the family with services during the THV period;
2. Update the [Case Plan \(SF 2956/ DCS0046\)](#) and have the plan signed by the child's parent, guardian, or custodian;
3. Provide the parent, guardian, or custodian with a copy of the THV plan and place the original, signed copy in the child's file;
4. Assure that the parent, guardian, or custodian understands that the child is still under the care and custody of DCS during the THV;
5. Assure contact with the family is maintained in accordance with separate policy, [8.10 Minimum Contact](#);
6. Assure that the family has access to appropriate family preservation, family support and rehabilitative services; and
7. Continue to monitor the family's progress. See separate policy, [8.10 Minimum Contact](#).

The Supervisor will:

1. Review the assessments, service level, and input from the CFT; and
2. Approve or deny the recommendation for the THV.

**[NEW]** If the child is removed from THV, the FCM will:

1. Convene the CFT to discuss changes regarding the [Case Plan \(SF 2956/ DCS 0046\)](#) and/or alternate permanency plan. See separate policies, [5.8 Developing the Case Plan](#) and [5.15 Concurrent Planning](#);
2. Seek court approval; and
3. Revise the [Case Plan \(SF 2956/ DCS 0046\)](#) and/or alternate permanency plan, if applicable.

## PRACTICE GUIDANCE

N/A

## FORMS AND TOOLS

1. [Indiana Family Assessment of Strengths and Needs](#) – Available in Indiana Child Welfare Information System (ICWIS)
2. [Family Risk Assessment](#) – Available in ICWIS
3. [Case Plan \(SF 2956/ DCS 0046\)](#) – Available in ICWIS
4. [Safety Plan \(SF51445/CW0440\)](#)

## RELATED INFORMATION

### **Preparing the Child for a Trial Home Visit**

The amount and kind of preparation necessary will vary for each child. Some factors that will impact the need for preparation include the child's age, the length of time in out-of-home care,

and the quality of the child's relationships with his or her parent, guardian, or custodian and resource parent. The child's feelings will also play a major role in his or her adjustment to returning home. Many children worry that they will again be subject to abuse and/or neglect. Some children may experience feelings of disloyalty to their resource family for wanting to return home; some may feel disloyal to their parents for missing the resource family. Regardless of how the child feels, it is very important that the FCM, child's parent, the resource parent, or another trusted adult from the CFT acknowledge the child's feelings and address any fears expressed by the child. Additionally, the FCM and the family team should discuss with the child the expectations, responsibilities, and safeguards that will be in place to protect the child.

### **Preparing the Parent, Guardian, or Custodian**

The parent, guardian, or custodian may feel uncertain about his or her ability to adequately meet the child's needs. The FCM and parent should discuss anticipated issues and develop plans for coping with those issues. In addition, they should address the positive changes that have occurred and the strengths of the family.

### **Preparing the Resource Parent**

The bonds that develop between some resource parents and children are so significant that both the child and the adult may grieve the loss. Additionally, the attitude of the resource parent will influence the child's view of return. For this reason, it is important that the resource parent be involved in, and aware of, the plans to reunify the family from the beginning. The goal of reunification should never come as a surprise to the resource parent.

### **Trial Home Visit Situations**

The following are examples of THV situations:

1. Child returns to foster care anytime during the first three (3) months of a THV, no new findings of Placement and Care, Best Interest and Reasonable Efforts are required if the judge had not dismissed the case previously;
2. Child returns to foster care in month seven (7) or later and no court order is obtained to extend the visit, new findings of Best Interest, Reasonable Efforts and Placement and Care must be made; and
3. THV is extended by the court beyond the first three (3) months and the child returns to foster care anytime prior to the end of the court ordered extension, no new findings of Best Interest, Reasonable Efforts and Placement and Care are required.

### **Trial Home Visit and Permanency Requirements**

The time the child spends at home on THV **does not count** towards the child's 15 months (of the previous 22 months) from removal, at which time the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) rules require DCS to file (or join in) a petition to Terminate Parental Rights (TPR). For more information on TPR, see separate policy, [6.11 Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights](#).

### **The Safety Plan for Reunification**

The [Safety Plan \(SF51445/CW0440\)](#) should include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Referrals that have been made;
2. Services recommended to continue preventive measures;
3. Actions that the family intends to take, i.e. continue family counseling;
4. Community resources, (i.e., support groups, child care referral services); and
5. Established family support systems.

**[REVISED] Documenting the Trial Home Visit**

The reason for the change in placement should be noted as a THV and not shown as reunification; the Change Tab and THV tab should both be completed as well to reflect the THV. Reunification is only used when the court has dismissed ward ship and the child is returned home permanently. The THV should be noted in the child's placements in ICWIS to assure that the residence of the child are accurately documented.

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