



Code of Conduct for the Indiana Department of Child Services



Protecting our children, families and future

DCS VISION, MISSION & VALUES

VISION

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

MISSION

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

VALUES

- We believe every child has the right to be free from abuse and neglect.
- We believe every child has the right to appropriate care and a permanent home.
- We believe parents have the primary responsibility for the care and safety of their children.
- We believe the most desirable place for children to grow up is with their own families, when these families are able to provide safe, nurturing and stable homes.
- We believe in personal accountability for outcomes, including one's growth and development.
- We believe every person has value, worth, and dignity.



Protecting our children, families and future

Purpose of the Code of Conduct

The power to intervene in the lives of families and children comes with extraordinary responsibility. Children, families and the Indiana public must be able to trust that DCS staff make decisions in the best interest of each child and family we serve. As such, every DCS staff member must act with the utmost level of professionalism, honesty and integrity. The DCS Code of Conduct is designed to support the Vision, Mission and Values of DCS. It sets forth the value and behavioral expectations DCS has for its staff and demonstrates the commitment to high quality services that best meet the needs of the child. The Code of Conduct is the commitment of DCS to every child and family in the State of Indiana.

DCS expects that all employees will act in a manner consistent with this code and in accordance with all applicable laws, policies and procedures. Failure to follow the Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Concerns about employee conduct should be reported to the appropriate Supervisor or the DCS Ethics Officer at ethics@dcs.in.gov

James W. Payne, Director
May 1, 2010



Protecting our children, families and future

DCS Code of Conduct

I. Guidelines for all DCS employees

- **Competency:** Staff will provide services only within the parameters of their education, training, licensure¹, professional experience and job duties. Furthermore, all staff will represent their qualifications, education and credentials accurately.
- **Accuracy and Documentation of Work:** DCS staff will complete all assignments timely to the best of their ability. Staff members are expected to recognize training needs for both themselves and their colleagues and obtain the necessary training to improve job performance and outcomes. Obstacles to completion of assignments must be immediately discussed with a Supervisor or work unit manager so barriers can be overcome and solutions can be identified and implemented. Under no circumstances will an employee falsely document his or her activities, actions or decisions.
- **Minimizing Trauma:** DCS staff will work in a manner that protects and serves the children and families from further abuse and/or neglect. Potential risk for further abuse and/or neglect should be discussed with the staff Supervisor to discuss strategies to minimize trauma, and determine the necessary and most appropriate course of action.
- **Client Self-Determination:** While the child and/or family members may not have full decision-making authority due to the nature of involvement with DCS, self-determination will be respected to the greatest extent possible, -i.e. Child and Family Team (CFT) Meetings. Staff will ensure that the child and/or family members are aware of all options available to them and the consequences of each decision. Staff will not threaten, coerce or manipulate the child and/or family members into making decisions, nor will any staff express his or her personal opinions or preferences in any communications within the scope of employment with DCS.

¹ For example, FCMs do not provide legal services or give legal advice because they are not licensed to practice law and it is not within the scope of their job responsibilities.



- **Confidentiality:** Staff will protect the confidentiality of the child and/or family members, child abuse and/or neglect reporters, and all others as required by law. If staff have questions surrounding confidentiality they should contact their DCS Local Office Attorney for guidance. Upon a formal request for information, DCS will promptly advise the requesting party, of relevant confidentiality requirements and limitations regarding the requested information.
- **Conflict of Interest:** DCS staff will follow all applicable laws, policies and rules governing the ethical obligations of state employees² as well as any applicable professional Rules of Conduct. Employees may not serve as employee, officer, director, or consultant for any child, family or service provider with a contract with DCS. Employees may not borrow money from or lend money to any client or service provider. Employees may not accept gifts, entertainment, or any other items/services of value from any child, family or service provider. DCS staff will not allow private or personal interests or relationships, financial or otherwise, to conflict with or influence their professional duties and responsibilities; this includes behavior that would lead a reasonable person to believe that private or personal interest has motivated an action or decision. If a situation arises where a real or perceived personal or private conflict may exist, the staff member shall consult with his or her Supervisor or work unit manager to resolve. Staff cannot foster or adopt children with whom they have or had a working relationship with.
- **Diversity:** DCS staff will be respectful, understanding of and sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds of all individuals with whom DCS interacts. This includes but is not limited to, social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, religion, and mental and physical disability.
- **Integrity:** The acts of all DCS staff will reflect a dedication to the DCS Vision, Mission and Values. Staff will carry out their duties and responsibilities in an objective manner in accordance with federal and state laws, rules, policies, and established procedures. Furthermore, staff will treat all children and their families, colleagues and members of the general public in a respectful, honest and fair manner.
- **Obligation to Report:** Staff will report issues and concerns, including staff misconduct, to their immediate Supervisor, unless the issue or concern is with

² 42 IAC 1-5 et. seq. sets forth these obligations.



their direct Supervisor. If the issue or concern regards the staff member's direct Supervisor, the concern must be reported to the Supervisor's manager and/or DCS Human Resources. See the State of Indiana Employee Handbook³, Prevention of Workplace Violence⁴ and Workplace Harassment Prevention⁵ policies for more information.

- **Non-Discrimination:** DCS staff will not condone or engage in any discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, or mental or physical disability. All reports of discrimination must be reported to DCS Human Resources or the State Personnel Department (SPD).
- **Personal Conduct:** DCS respects the privacy and interests of its staff and recognizes their right to conduct their personal lives free from involvement or interference from the Department. Nonetheless, staff should keep in mind that they represent DCS to the public even while off duty, and should strive to preserve the agency's reputation. In addition, certain types of off-duty conduct may reflect poorly upon an employee's character and judgment and thereby influence his or her status as a DCS employee. Furthermore, employees who engage in unprofessional or criminal conduct or other serious misconduct off-duty may be subject to disciplinary action by the Department. If such conduct is determined to be harmful to the DCS image, to be inconsistent with the agency's expectations of its staff members, to impact and/or disrupt business operations, bring the agency into disrepute or to jeopardize the agency or employee's standing within the community, the staff member may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.
- **Personal Health:** DCS staff shall take personal responsibility for his or her own health. Staff shall not perform professional activities if they know that their physical or mental health may be compromised or interfere with their professional judgment or job performance. Employees are encouraged to use the state-sponsored Employee Assistance Program (EASY) if the need arises.

Staff shall not use or be under the influence of alcohol while performing any duties on behalf of DCS. No employee shall report for duty or remain on duty while having any measurable amount of alcohol in his/her system or while

³ <http://intranet.spd.state.in.us/files/eehandbook.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.in.gov/spd/2409.htm>

⁵ <http://www.in.gov/spd/files/harasspol.pdf>
<http://www.in.gov/spd/files/harassrandp.pdf>



having any measurable trace of a controlled substance in his/her system for which the employee does not have an authorized prescription. Staff are encouraged to consult with a health care provider or pharmacist regarding any medications that may impact their ability to perform the responsibilities of their respective position.

- **Personal Relationships:** DCS staff will refrain from having on-going personal relationships with children and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS; relatives of children and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS; resource parents caring for children within the same DCS Region as the employee works; contractors or employees of partner agencies providing services within the same DCS region as the staff member works; or with any staff that he or she supervises. Examples of such relationships include, but are not limited to, sexual, financial, volunteer or business relationships. If staff has a familial relationship with someone in one of these group categories, it is his or her responsibility to notify his or her Supervisor. In the event a personal relationship is pre-existing, the staff member shall consult with his or her Supervisor or work unit manager to resolve any real, potential or perceived issues.
- **Workplace Harassment:** DCS staff will strive to maintain an environment free from sexual harassment and harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, or physical or mental disability. Workplace harassment whether verbal, physical or environmental is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. DCS will not tolerate workplace harassment whether engaged in by fellow staff, supervisors, officers, or by outside clients or other non-staff who conduct business with DCS. DCS encourages reporting of all incidences of alleged harassment regardless of the offender's status, position with, or relationship to DCS. All reports of workplace harassment must be reported to DCS Human Resources or the State Personnel Department (SPD).
- **Sexual Relations:** DCS staff will not engage in any type of sexual relationship with individuals and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS, relatives of individuals and/or families who are or have been involved with DCS, resource parents caring for children within the same DCS region as the staff member works, contractors or employees of partner agencies providing services within the same DCS region as the staff member works, or with any person that he or she supervises. If a situation arises where a real or perceived conflict exists, a staff member shall consult with his or her Supervisor or work unit manager to resolve any potential issues that may result.



II. Guidelines for Child Services

- **Responsibilities to the Child:** Child welfare staff will perform all job duties in a manner that protects the best interest of the child. Consistent with the child's age and level of understanding, child welfare staff will explain the child's rights, decisions made and actions taken. Additionally, child welfare staff will be accessible to the child; this includes, but is not limited to, responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as appropriate, given the child's age and level of understanding. Child welfare staff will acknowledge the physical and emotional stress that the child may be facing.
- **Responsibility to the Parent:** Child welfare staff will treat parents as valued individuals and caregivers in the child's life. Child welfare staff will engage and team with the parent to clearly explain all actions and processes as well as the rights of both the parent and the child. Child welfare staff will refrain from bias or judgment, and treat each with genuineness, empathy and respect. Child welfare staff will be accessible to the parent; this includes, but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as appropriate. Child welfare staff will acknowledge the physical and emotional stress that the parent may be facing.
- **Responsibilities to Other Family Members:** Child welfare staff will treat other family members as valued individuals and partners in the child's life. Child welfare staff will engage and team with other family members and provide as much information on the case as allowable. Additionally, child welfare staff will be accessible to other family members; this includes, but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as appropriate. Child welfare staff will be respectful in dealing with other family members, acknowledging that they may be under emotional stress.
- **Responsibilities to Resource Families:** Child welfare staff will treat resource (foster/relative) families as valued individuals and partners in the child's life. Staff will engage resource families, and team with these families, in planning and decision-making on the case, as appropriate. Resource families will be provided with detailed information on each child in their care. DCS will offer ongoing support and training to resource families; this includes but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information



on the case as appropriate. Child welfare staff will acknowledge the valuable service that the resource family provides and the challenges they may be facing.

- **Responsibilities to the Courts:** Child welfare staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner while in Court, when working with Court representatives and while executing court orders. Child welfare staff will testify honestly be mindful of their body language and reactions while in Court, respect the authority of the Court, and follow the directives of the Courts, respecting that the Court can approve or disapprove the decisions and recommendations of the Child and Family Team (CFT).
- **Responsibilities to Partner Agencies:** Child welfare staff will conduct themselves in a professional manner while working with partner agencies. Additionally, child welfare staff will be accessible to partner agencies (this includes the Guardian ad Litem and Court Appointed Special Advocate); this includes, but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as appropriate. Child welfare staff will present information to the partner agencies in a truthful and factual manner, acknowledging that the provider is a valuable member of the team with critical information.

III. Guidelines for Child Support

- **Responsibilities to Indiana Children:** Child support staff will work to protect every child's right to the care and support of both parents, regardless of their marital status. Decisions will be made to ensure the child's best interest is protected.
- **Responsibilities to Custodial Parent:** Child support staff will assist custodial parents in obtaining the appropriate support from the non-custodial parent. Staff will be professional in their dealings with custodial parents. Child support staff will clearly explain all actions and processes, as well as the rights of both the custodial and the non-custodial parent. Additionally, child support staff will be accessible to the custodial parent; this includes, but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as allowable.
- **Responsibilities to Non-Custodial Parent:** Child support staff will be professional in their dealings with non-custodial parents. Child support staff



will clearly explain all actions and processes, as well as the rights of both the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent. Additionally, child support staff will be accessible to the non-custodial parent; this includes but is not limited to responding to questions quickly and providing as much information on the case as allowable.

- **Responsibilities to County Partners:** Child support staff will team with county partners to administer the child support program effectively. Child support staff will be respectful and professional when working with county partners. Additionally, child support staff will approach working with county partners with a true spirit of collaboration.
- **Responsibilities to Employers:** Child support staff will provide a streamlined collection system to employers. Additionally, child support staff will assist employers navigating the child support system with professionalism and respect.

IV. Guidelines for Management and Executive Staff

- **Supervision of Employees:** Management and executive staff will model the practice and skills expected to achieve improved outcomes for children and families. Managers and executive staff will engage staff and recognize all agency staff as key team members. Managers and executive staff will provide a positive work environment for all staff, encouraging professional growth and development. Additionally, managers and executive staff will give feedback, both positive and constructive, to staff on an ongoing basis. Managers and executive staff will model and promote a safe working environment.
- **Organizational Planning:** Managers and executive staff will work to continually develop and improve DCS to serve its staff, children and/or families and the public more effectively. Managers and executive staff will provide an environment conducive to growth by partnering with staff and community partners. Managers and executive staff will continually assess for quality improvement opportunities.

