

# In-Home Policy

## Interval Policy:

Assessing and managing a child's safety as part of the casework process is done throughout the life of the case, at each and every contact. Safety must be assessed at each and every contact, regardless of the type of contact, since every contact has the potential to reveal safety related information. If the contact does not include the child or family members, careful attention must be made to determine if circumstances or new information suggests a change to the child's safety. Safety related information gathered at each contact must be documented in the structured case note. In addition, documenting safety assessment information using the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet is required at specific intervals. All workers that carry cases are responsible for completing safety assessments at every contact and completing the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet at the designated intervals below. As prescribed in Sections 3490.55 and 3490.232 of the Protective Services Regulations, documentation of safety related information shall be completed using the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet, with a minimum of one visit in the child's home, as per the intervals below.

NOTE: Regardless of whether the child is in an informal or formal placement, In-Home Safety Assessments must continue to be completed on the caregiver(s) of origin. The In-Home Safety Assessment would be conducted as if the family were intact to determine whether or not reunification is possible.

Note: In accordance with OCYF Policy Clarification regarding older youth and Safety Assessment 3130-08-01/3140-08-01 CCYAs are responsible for assuring the safety of those youth who are still in the care and custody of the CCYA. The safety assessment would be conducted within the foster home setting as would the risk assessment and although these may not show any safety or risk concerns, they must be conducted at the required intervals.

## During the Assessment/Investigation (This applies to the assessments or investigations that occur prior to a case being open for ongoing services):

- Within three business days of the agency's first face-to-face contact with the identified child and/or caregiver(s) of origin;
- Within three business days of the identification of additional evidence, circumstances, or information that suggests a change in the child's safety. Note: a change in safety refers to a positive or negative change to Safety Threats and/or the Safety Decision;
- At the conclusion of the investigation/assessment, if there is not a change in the safety of the child, an additional worksheet does not need to be

completed. However, information regarding the child's safety must be documented in the case record through a structured case note.

If during the assessment or investigation period 30 consecutive days have passed since the child was last seen, it is required under the Safety Assessment and Management Process that face-to-face contact be made with the child and caregiver(s) of origin at least one additional time. This is necessary to determine whether the child remains safe or whether the circumstances have changed and additional efforts are needed to protect the child. The Department strongly recommends that this contact be made in the home, however the determination as to whether this contact can occur somewhere other than the home must be made based on the analysis of the information gathered throughout the assessment/investigation including, but not limited to, the Six Assessment Domains, Safety Threats and Protective Capacities.

Note: When conducting the Preliminary Safety Assessment, if all household members are unable to be seen within the first three business days of the initial face-to-face contact, it will be necessary to document the reason they were not seen when completing the worksheet. Any subsequent information related to those household members should be documented in the structured case note unless the information gathered suggests a change in safety, either positive or negative, at which time a new worksheet must be completed according to the established intervals.

Note: Please refer to page 21 of the Manual for direction regarding Bogus Referrals.

Note: Information regarding the child's safety must be documented in the case record through a structured case note following each contact with the child. When considering the additional evidence, circumstances, or information that suggests a change in child safety interval, there may be times when a newly assigned child welfare professional would complete a new In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet without additional evidence, circumstances, or information. This situation would arise when the newly assigned worker, after viewing a family through a different lens or considering information that the previous worker might not have considered, believes that different, fewer, or more threats should have been identified or through analysis concludes that the Safety Decision should be changed.

### Cases Accepted for Services

Once the case has been accepted for ongoing services, documentation of safety related information shall be completed using the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet by the county agency at designated intervals. This would include new referrals that are received for cases that have already been accepted for services. The safety plan must also be continually reviewed and amended, if necessary, based on

the gathered safety related information. The intervals for completing the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet are as follows:

- Within three business days of the identification of additional evidence, circumstances, or information that suggests a change in the child's safety. Note: a change in safety refers to a positive or negative change to Safety Threats and/or the Safety Decision;
- Within three business days of any unplanned return home from an informal or formal placement, along with risk assessment in accordance with 3490.321(h)(3)(ii).
- Within 30 days prior to case closure, along with risk assessment, in accordance with 3490.321(h)(4).

Note: Information regarding the child's safety must be documented in the case record through a structured case note following each contact with the child. When considering the additional evidence, circumstances, or information that suggests a change in child safety interval, there may be times when a newly assigned child welfare professional would complete a new In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet without additional evidence, circumstances, or information. This situation would arise when the newly assigned worker, after viewing a family through a different lens or considering information that the previous worker might not have considered, believes that different, fewer, or more threats should have been identified or through analysis concludes that the Safety Decision should be changed.

### **Exceptions:**

#### Goal Changes:

The exceptions outlined below pertain to the permanency goals established for each child that are approved by the Court.

- **Adoption:** When there has been a court approved goal change from reunification to adoption or parental rights are terminated, an In-Home Safety Assessment on the caregiver(s) of origin does not have to be completed. The Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) Safety Assessment Worksheet would need to be completed on the home in which the child is placed, as per the intervals established in the OOHC process.
- **Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC):** When there has been a court approved goal change or when legal and physical custody of the child has formally been transferred to the permanent caregivers, an In-Home Safety Assessment on the caregiver(s) of origin no longer has to be completed.
- **Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative:** When there has been a court approved goal change from reunification to Placement with a Fit and Willing

Relative, an In-Home Safety Assessment on the caregiver(s) of origin no longer has to be completed. For the period of time the case remains open, the Out-of- Home Care Safety Assessment Worksheet would need to be completed on the home in which the child is placed, as per the intervals established in the OOHC process.

- **Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA):** When there has been a court approved goal change from reunification to APPLA, an In-Home Safety Assessment on the caregiver(s) of origin no longer has to be completed. For the period of time the case remains open, the Out-of-Home Care Safety Assessment Worksheet would need to be completed on the home in which the child is placed, as per the intervals established in the OOHC process.
- If the situation arises that the court's decision in any of the above permanency goal change exceptions is appealed, it is not necessary to continue completion of the In-Home Safety Assessment during that appeal process.
- If there is a court decision to change the permanency goal back to reunification in any of the above scenarios, it will be necessary to resume completion of the In- Home Safety Assessment from the time of the goal change forward, following the established intervals.
- When permanency has been achieved through the transfer of custody, the caregivers to whom custody has been transferred are now considered the caregivers of origin for any subsequent referrals or involvement regarding that child.

#### Court Ordered Terminations:

- When court jurisdiction is terminated and the agency simultaneously closes the family's case, there is no expectation that the agency must return to the home within 30 days following the child's return home in order to complete a safety assessment as prescribed by the interval policy.

#### Other:

- One of the intervals for completing an In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet is within three business days after the first face-to-face contact with the subject child and caregiver(s) of origin. This includes instances when the child and caregiver(s) of origin are not seen at the same time.

If the caregiver and child have not been seen at the same time, the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet would be completed after these individuals have been seen. This, however, should not exceed the three business day timeframe. The three business day timeframe begins once the first face-to-face contact is completed, regardless of whether or not the contact is with the child or the caregiver.

A preliminary safety assessment must be made at the initial contact. There may be

instances when a child welfare professional must make the immediate, preliminary assessment and Safety Decision without seeing both the child and the caregiver in order to assure the child's safety. This would lead to the development of an Immediate Preliminary Safety Plan.

### **Other Policy Implications:**

- **Bogus or False Reports:** It is necessary to gather information to fully determine if the report is false, as the Safety Assessment and Management Process does not focus solely on the presence or absence of substantiated allegations.
  - If it is a new referral, the child welfare professional would still conduct a face-to-face contact and gather information related to the Six Assessment Domains. If it has been determined that the allegations were false, the child welfare professional would document their findings using the In- Home Safety Assessment Worksheet and indicate that no Safety Threats were present. Both the child welfare professional and his/her supervisor would still need to sign off on the worksheet. This would need to be completed within three business days of the first face-to-face contact. The case would then be closed. Any other documentation would be recorded in the structured case note, as needed.
  - If a new referral was received on a family already open with the County Children and Youth Agency, a child welfare professional would still need to explore the validity of the referral. If after gathering information, the referral was determined to be false, documentation could be made to that effect in the structured case note. A new In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet would not be required and safety would continue to be formally assessed at the next designated interval.
- **Courtesy In-Home Safety Assessments:** There are limited situations or circumstances where one County Children and Youth Agency would be asked by another County Children and Youth Agency or Regional Office to complete an In- Home Safety Assessment (e.g. child is allegedly abused in one county but the family resides in another county; or cases in which the County Children and Youth Agency does not have an open case but is providing an adoption subsidy.)
  - If the receiving County Children and Youth Agency is not willing or able to conduct the courtesy assessment, the requesting County Children and Youth Agency must complete the assessment in accordance to the designated interval/visitation requirements.
  - If the receiving County Children and Youth Agency is willing to conduct the courtesy assessment, they would be required to communicate the safety related information as follows:

- If Safety Threats are identified during the courtesy assessment, the receiving County Children and Youth Agency must provide verbal communication to the requesting County Children and Youth Agency immediately. In addition, the discussion should also include the development and/or modification of a Safety Plan, as needed. The receiving County Children and Youth Agency would then provide written documentation to the requesting County Children and Youth Agency of the information gathered during the courtesy assessment, via a structured case note, within three business days.
  - If no additional Safety Threats were identified, the receiving County Children and Youth Agency would provide written documentation of the information gathered during the courtesy assessment via a structured case note to the requesting County Children and Youth Agency within three business days.
- The requesting County Children and Youth Agency would then use the information gathered by the receiving County Children and Youth Agency to inform their In-Home Safety Assessment in accordance with the intervals and develop and/or modify the Safety Plan, as needed.
- **Safety Plans:** When a child is determined to be unsafe as a result of an In-Home Safety Assessment, a Safety Plan must be developed. This plan would include any and all safety actions necessary to control the Safety Threats (e.g. visitation between child and the caregiver(s) of origin and supervision during visitation). However, safety plans are not required if the children are removed as the result of a safety threat. The emergency order should be self-explanatory/sufficient. Information regarding the child's safety, the reasons for the child's removal and the identified safety threats should be documented in the structured case note.
- **Signature on In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheets:** The signature section of the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet is a critical component of the In-Home Safety Assessment and Management Process. The child welfare professional signature on the worksheet indicates that the child welfare professional has completed the Safety Assessment and Management Process, has reviewed and analyzed all of the gathered safety related information, and verifies that the information documented on the worksheet is accurate and supports the Safety Decision. The supervisor's signature on the worksheet indicates that the supervisor has reviewed all of the information available on the worksheet and in the case record, and is in agreement with the information and Safety Decision documented on the worksheet.

Title 55, Pa. Code, Chapter 3490 (relating to protective service regulations), specifically Sections 3490.61(a) and 3490.235(e), require 10-day supervisory reviews during the investigation/assessment period. These

reviews provide an opportunity for the supervisor and child welfare professional to have ongoing dialogue regarding the case in order to assure that the services are consistent with the level of risk, assuring safety and making a determination on the case. These reviews should include the review of the structured case notes, any completed In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheets, and developed Safety Plans. As part of the supervisory review, the supervisor should be documenting either in a separate log or in the case record that they have met with and provided support to the child welfare professional to review the information gathered. This process of reviewing the gathered information, supporting the child welfare professional, and approving/signing the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheets should continue throughout the life of the case. While the 10-day supervisory reviews are not required beyond the Family Service Plan development once the case has been accepted for service, the supervisor should continue having ongoing dialogue with the child welfare professional throughout the life of the case.

Based on the above, supervisory signature (electronic signature is acceptable) on the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet should occur as soon as possible, but **no later than 10 business days** following each prescribed interval.

In addition, if an In-Home Safety Assessment completed by the child welfare professional results in the need to develop a Safety Plan, the supervisor should be providing verbal approval to the Safety Plan when it is developed to assure that it is sufficient to go into effect immediately. The supervisor is then required to review and sign the developed Safety Plan **by the next business day**.

- **Shared Case Management:** In accordance with Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF) Bulletin 3130-10-01 entitled “Shared Case Responsibility Policy and Procedures”, youth determined to fall under the purview of the bulletin must be seen and safety documented monthly; however, it is the sole responsibility of the CCYA to perform formal safety assessments, in accordance with the Safety Assessment and Management Process interval policy, and to develop Safety Plans, if necessary. It is anticipated that when JPO visits a youth, JPO will alert the CCYA if any general safety concern is noted during a visit with the child or family. It will then be the CCYA’s responsibility to do a formal assessment, if indicated. In practice, this requirement means that decisions in a youth’s case must be based on consideration of the youth’s safety at every step in the case. Documentation of the youth’s safety should be addressed in any service plan, during all face-to-face visits and at each permanency hearing, if applicable, for as long as the youth remains in placement. Ongoing documentation of required monthly contacts must be maintained in the CCYA case record, and must include the date of the contact, names of others present, and how the youth was determined to be safe in the setting.

- **Shared Custody and Other Non-Offending Caregiver Household Situations:** Engaging families is an important part of child welfare practice. As part of the engagement process, child welfare professionals gather information related to family strengths and challenges, resources available to the family, and ultimately whether or not the family members have the Protective Capacity to assure child safety. All of these concepts are equally important for not only primary households, but also for any other secondary households in which the child may reside on a part-time basis. This concept also applies to the efforts made by the CCYA to locate and work with absent parents. It is the responsibility of the CCYA to assure that information from the six domains is collected from all family members, including from those households in which the child resides on a part-time basis.

If this part-time residence is the non-offending household, the information gathered should be documented in a structured case note unless active Safety Threats are identified. In those instances, a formal safety assessment must be completed on the part-time residence using the In-Home Safety Assessment Worksheet.

- **Voluntary Placement Agreements:** If the child entered care on a Voluntary Placement Agreement due to an identified Safety Threat, the Safety Decision would be “Safe with a Comprehensive Safety Plan”. A comprehensive Safety Plan must be developed which should include the Voluntary Placement Agreement as one component. Voluntary Placement Agreements cannot in and of themselves be the Safety Plan. Actions on the Safety Plan should focus on actions that can be completed to assure child safety and promote reunification with their caregiver(s) of origin within 30 days. If the child enters into a court ordered placement, the court order is a sufficient safety plan.