

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILDREN'S DIVISION

P.O. BOX 88

JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

August 25, 2005

**WHAT'S INSIDE!**

Revised and Reinforced  
Child Welfare Manual  
Policy for improved  
practice based on lessons  
learned!

MEMORANDUM

TO: REGIONAL EXECUTIVE STAFF, CIRCUIT MANAGERS AND  
CHILDREN'S DIVISION STAFF

FROM: FREDERIC M. SIMMENS, DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR IMPROVED PRACTICE BASED ON  
REVIEW OF FATALITIES

*CHILD WELFARE MANUAL REVISIONS:*

Section 2, Chapter 4;  
Section 2, Chapter 5;  
Section 3, Chapter 6;  
Section 3, Chapter 8;  
Section 3, Chapter 4, Attachment F  
Section 4, Chapter 24

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this memorandum is to introduce changes in policy and to reinforce existing policy to strengthen field practice based on lessons learned following recent fatalities. (Note: changes in policy pertaining to weapons and gun safety are not included in this revision. A memo specifically addressing that issue is forthcoming).

***Notifying the Family When a Child Dies in CD Custody***

Family Centered Out-Of-Home (FCOOH) Case Managers have a unique responsibility in notifying a biological and/or foster family of a child's death in a timely and sensitive manner. It is crucial that staff notify families in person, and not by phone or letter. It is equally important to coordinate efforts with other persons involved who may be communicating with the family or coordinating services, such as another CSW, Contracted Case Manager, OHI Investigator, Law Enforcement, or Juvenile Officer, so that the primary or extended family doesn't experience multiple or unnecessary contacts which may only add to their grief or despair.

*Reference Section 4, Chapter 24.11*

### ***Use of Prior History and Collateral Information***

It is crucial for staff to carefully review a family's prior CD history during Investigations and Family Assessments. It is equally important to gather and utilize information provided from collaterals. Supervisors must assure staff has made every effort to search for prior CD involvement, and that they have effectively used the prior history, as well as collateral information, in determining child safety and in reaching a conclusion.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 4.1.1.2, Reviewing Prior History; Section 2, Chapter 4.1.4.3, Collaterals; Section 2, Chapter 5.1.1.1, Reviewing Prior History; Section 2, Chapter 5.5.14, Collateral and Other Information*

### ***Interviewing Skills***

Workers must assure that children are given the opportunity to be interviewed separately, and without undue influence, when at all possible, during a CA/N Investigation and Family Assessment. Supervisors should assure workers demonstrate competence in interviewing skills. Supervisors should seek assistance through supervisory channels when there is an identified training need that can't be resolved using local resources. Field Managers should assist the local county in accessing resources that can assist with identified local training needs, including FCS consultants as available, Social Work Specialists, and/or the Quality Improvement and Field Support Unit, when other resources aren't available.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 4.1.4.1.a, Interviewing; Section 2, Chapter 5.1.4.1, Interviewing the Child Alone*

### ***Case Conferences***

It is critical that all Supervisors conduct regular and frequent case conferences with staff to review cases, CA/N reports included. It is beneficial for supervisors to utilize case conference and case review tools as available. Supervisors are responsible for reviewing case narratives from the treatment section of FCS and FCOOH records, as evidenced with a dated signature. Field Administration is responsible for assuring supervisors are regularly conducting case conferences with their assigned staff, including the review of case narratives.

*Reference Section 1, Chapter 1.3, Roles and Responsibilities of CS Supervisor; Section 3, Chapter 10, Supervision and Case Consultation; Section 5, Chapter 1.3.3, Subsequent Recording Outline*

### ***Child Abuse/Neglect Reports Concluded Timely***

Missouri Law requires that investigations are to be completed within 30 days, with few exceptions. Without jeopardizing the safety of children, staff should make every effort to conclude reports within required timeframes, and should seek assistance from their supervisor if unable to do so. Field Management are responsible for utilizing all available resources to assist county staff in the timely completion of Investigations. Such resources may include shared circuit staff, Social Work Specialists, FCS Consultants as available, or the Quality Improvement and Field Support Unit.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 4.1.8, Reaching a Conclusion*

### ***Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety and Risk Assessment/ Reassessment***

Staff must adhere to policies based on Structured Decision Making (SDM):

- Staff must continually assure for the safety of children. CA/N checks are to be completed whenever the household composition changes for the duration of a CA/N Investigation or Family Assessment. Additionally, a safety re-assessment must be

completed on any case whenever new information becomes available that may indicate a threat to the safety of the children, including during a CA/N investigation or Family Assessment. Additionally, SDM requires that a risk re-assessment is completed every 90 days at a minimum on open FCS cases.

- For CA/N reports, a risk assessment is completed based on conditions that exist at the time the incident is reported and investigated/assessed, as well as the prior history of the family. The risk assessment should include all persons in the household. A risk re-assessment is to be completed whenever household composition changes. SDM instructions specify that the household includes all persons who have significant in-home contact with the children, including those who have a familial or intimate relationship with any person in the home. Supervisors must carefully review that workers have correctly completed the risk assessment, and based the decision to open or not open an FCS case using SDM guidelines. Supervisors are reminded that discretionary and policy overrides of the Risk Level are allowed as indicated. Supervisors must assure that any decision to close an FCS case is supported and guided by the completion of a risk re-assessment that falls within acceptable SDM risk level ranges for closing a case.
- While policy based on SDM has been integrated and disseminated throughout the Child Welfare Manual in relevant sections, additional useful instruction can be found in the Forms Instructions for the CPS-1, CPS-1a, CS-16D and CD-16E located on the CD Intranet. The forms instructions explain when and how Safety Assessment or Re-assessment forms and Risk Assessment or Re-assessment forms should be completed, and includes necessary definitions. Information can also be found for using discretionary and policy overrides in risk assessments. Regional Administration is responsible for assuring staff understand and adhere to structured decision making guidelines.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 4.1.3, Safety Assurance of Victim; Section 2, Chapter 4.1.4.1.b, Household Children; Section 2, Chapter 4, Attachment F, Safety Analysis and Risk Assessment; Section 2, Chapter 5.1.3, Safety Assurance of Victim; Section 2, Chapter 5.1.7.2, Determining Level of Intervention; Section 2, Chapter 5.5.4, Assessment of Safety; and Section 3, Chapter 10, Supervision and Case Consultation*

### **Courtesy Requests Feedback Loop**

There is a need for improved communication and timely feedback between counties when courtesy requests have been made for Investigations and Family Assessments. County staff assigned to the courtesy must respond to the requesting county timely so that the requesting county has the information necessary to verify child safety and to conclude reports. Courtesy counties who complete a safety plan should assure the requesting county receives a legible copy as soon as possible after it is signed by all parties.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 4.1.3, Safety Assurance of Victim; Section 2, Chapter 4, Attachment C, Courtesy Requests; Section 2, Chapter 5.1.3, Face to Face Safety Assurance of Victim*

### **Safety Plans**

Supervisors are required to review and sign safety plans, and to assure that a safety plan is time limited and not abandoned, by assigning the re-assessment due date and worker responsible on the bottom of the safety plan. This will provide the opportunity for workers to revisit the effectiveness of the safety plan, and to verify that a safety plan has been adhered to by the parties signing.

*Reference Section 2, Chapter 5.5.4, Assessment of Safety*

NECESSARY ACTIONS:

1. Review this memorandum with all Children's Division Staff.
2. Review Revised Child Welfare Manual Sections.
3. Review [CS-Forms and Form Instructions](#) for the CPS-1, CPS-1a, CS-16D, and CS-16E located on the CD Intranet.
4. All questions should be cleared through normal supervisory channels and directed to:

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Related Statutes:

Chapter 210 RSMo

Administrative Rules:

N/A

Council on Accreditation (COA) Standards:

N/A

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN (PIP):

N/A

SACWIS REQUIREMENTS:

[http://dssweb/cs/priority\\_tracking/sacwis/status/20050316.xls](http://dssweb/cs/priority_tracking/sacwis/status/20050316.xls)

1. Intake Management

2. Case Management