



NH Department of Health & Human Services
Division for Children, Youth & Families

DCYF Standard Operating Procedure

1105.1 STAFF SAFETY PROCEDURES-CPS

Policy Directive: **21-36**

Approved:

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Implements Policy: **1105**

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This SOP defines responsibilities for CPSWs and CPS Supervisors around staff safety.

Procedure

The following information is to support the implementation of the above referenced policy. This document shall not preclude staff from using their professional judgement based on individual circumstances, consistent with the requirements of the policy.

- I. CPSWs should prepare for any face-to-face meeting with clients by reviewing prior DCYF and law enforcement history for indications of potential danger and by having a plan for safety.
- II. CPSWs should always be aware of their environment and be diligent in not placing themselves in a situation in which they cannot easily exit if things become unsafe. If at any time during a face-to-face meeting, regardless of the location of the meeting, a CPSW does not feel safe, they should immediately remove themselves from the situation and consult with a Supervisor.
- III. As part of the Circle of Safety, each District Office (DO) maintains:
 - A. A sign-out system that indicates who CPSWs are meeting with (first and last name), where they are meeting them (including when they meet at the DO), and what time they are expected to return or end their day outside the office;
 - B. A system for CPSWs to have a designated contact person who is aware of their whereabouts throughout the workday and who is identified to follow-up in a timely manner if a CPSW does not report in as expected;
 - C. A clear and detailed process as to what actions will be taken, by whom, and at what time intervals, dependent upon level of concern, and who else should be contacted (family, law enforcement, or Administration) if necessary; and
 - D. A current contact list that includes the phone number and address of each CPSW and their emergency contact in preparation for situations in which efforts to locate a CPSW exceed regular business hours.
 1. This list will be provided to any individual responsible for closing the Circle of Safety with CPSWs in the field.

- IV. CPSWs are responsible for:
 - A. Ensuring they are properly signed out and have a plan for follow-up when in the field;
 - B. Adhering to policy and procedures, including the Department's policy on the use of Safe Signal;
 - C. Reporting any situations in which their safety was at risk to their Supervisor; and
 - D. Completing any necessary paperwork relative to unsafe situations in a timely manner.
- V. Supervisors (or designee) are responsible for:
 - A. Ensuring all staff are aware of, and adhere to, office safety procedures, including the Circle of Safety and use of Safe Signal;
 - B. Following-up with CPSWs to close the Circle of Safety and ensuring staff have ended the safe signal session;
 - C. Debriefing with CPSWs, and other staff as appropriate, following any incident in which safety or well-being would likely be affected; and
 - D. Following-up with CPSWs beyond the initial debriefing.
- VI. Supervisors are highly encouraged to approve or assign the use of a teamed response in the following circumstances:
 - A. In all initial responses to allegations of abuse in unknown (no prior child protection history) Assessments if requested by the assigned CPSW;
 - B. In all responses where there may be elevated risk, such as at night, in rural areas, or areas considered to be high risk (prevalence of crime, gang activity, or drug use/trafficking), or when there is a history of violence or presence of weapons in the home;
 - C. When a CPSW is transporting a child with behavioral issues or conducting a home/field visit with clients or household members with known emotional or behavioral problems;
 - D. When a CPSW is transporting more than one child;
 - E. When a CPSW is court-ordered to remove a child from their home;
 - F. When interviewing/meeting with individuals with a known history of violence, who are reported to be violent, or who have threatened violence (regardless of who the

target of said threat was) or demonstrated previous acts of aggression (both verbal or physical) towards any DCYF staff; or

- G. When interviewing/meeting with individuals who may be under the influence of alcohol/drugs, or who may be experiencing mental illness or significant stress.
- VII. The need for a teamed response should be based on consideration of staff safety.
- VIII. When a teamed response is warranted, all team members will be made aware of the safety concerns and create a plan as to how to respond to the unsafe situation before the meeting.
- IX. Supervisors may also support CPSWs who have been affected by an unsafe encounter by:
 - A. Transferring the Assessment/case to a different CPSW as soon as possible. This transfer will include conversation between the previous and newly assigned CPSWs and their respective Supervisors to outline concerns and plan for safety; and
 - B. Providing CPSWs with information on how to access support through E.P.I.C. (Encourage Peers, Inspire Change), the Clinical Services Specialist, and the EAP (Employee Assistance Program), as well as creating opportunities for them to process what has occurred and the trauma they have experienced to the extent they feel it necessary.
- X. Information about threats or acts of violence will be shared with other staff and providers as appropriate to ensure the safety of all. This includes staff in the field or itinerant offices, as well as other Divisions or Bureaus within the building.
- XI. The CPSW will document any threats related to an open Assessment/case in the DCYF electronic information system.
 - A. If a safety concern remains at the time an Assessment/case is closed, the CPSW will document this in the Closing Screen.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. What are some things I can do to keep myself safe?

- A Use Safe Signal;
- A Review your Field and Office Safety Handbook and refer to it frequently;
- A Utilize your Supervisor and your team to plan ahead for safety;
- A Review current and prior DCYF involvement, with attention paid to prior allegations and confirmation of violence or weapons in the home, substance abuse, gang activity, history of mental health issues, or security alerts;
- A Consult with the reporter/Prosecutor/other involved staff (current or previous) to gain clarity around any safety concerns;

- A Consult with the Family Violence Prevention Specialist (FVPS) when there are concerns for domestic violence, regardless of if the alleged perpetrator resides in or frequents the home or not;
- A Contact law enforcement about any recent involvement with the family/household and any known history of violence and substance abuse;
- A Request a member of law enforcement attend the meeting as part of a teamed response when it is indicated that any known household member has a history of assaults or threats of violence, threatening to harm themselves or others, or a conviction involving the use of a weapon in the commission of a crime; and
- A Consult with a Supervisor (or designee) about another type of teamed response when the level of risk does not appear to necessitate law enforcement presence or law enforcement is not available to assist. This may include utilizing a DCYF Supervisor or other DCYF staff, a service provider, or an assigned CASA/GAL (as applicable) to participate in the meeting.

Q2. What other resources are available to me regarding staff safety?

- A Safe Signal;
- A The DCYF Safety Culture Specialist (can be reached at (603) 271-4455);
- A The Field and Office Safety Handbook (Form 1105); and
- A The Incident Response Guide (Form 1095).

Q3. Why is it recommended to have 2 staff and law enforcement present for emergency removals?

- A The presence of 2 staff provides additional supports for the child(ren) and can lessen trauma associated with separation from their family as one staff member can focus on the needs of the child(ren) while the other can focus on completing the necessary paperwork with the parent(s)/guardian(s).
- A Removals are often intense, highly emotional situations. Having a second staff present increases the ability to recognize and react to danger.
- A The presence of law enforcement greatly decreases the risk of harm to staff and should a dangerous situation arise, law enforcement are present to take action to mitigate danger.

Q4. Who can I tell when I need to update my sign out?

- A Each office shall determine their own practice so long as coverage is always available.
- A A designee can be another Supervisor or staff person, or support staff.

Q5. When should I use Safe Signal?

- A Safe signal should be used any time when meeting face-to-face with a client, regardless of location or if law enforcement is present.

Glossary and Document Specific Definitions

A - B C - D E - F G - I J - L M - N O - Q R - S T - V W - Z

| Document Change Log | | | |
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| PD | Modification Made | Approved | Date |