

West Virginia Department of Human Services

# Child Protective Services Policy

Bureau for Social Services

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<b>SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Mission, Vision, and Values.....	1
1.2 Introduction.....	1
1.3 Philosophical Principles.....	2
Child Safety is Paramount.....	2
Permanency is an Integral Part of Safety.....	2
Rights of Children and Caregivers.....	3
Respect for Families.....	3
Child Centered and Family Focused Practice.....	3
Least Intrusive Intervention.....	3
1.4 Legal Basis.....	3
1.5 Target Population.....	4
1.6 Casework Process.....	5
1.7 Reporting.....	5
Reporting and Communication with the Family and Circuit Courts.....	7
Child Protective Services Alert.....	8
1.8 Meaningful Contacts.....	9
1.9 General Definitions.....	10
<b>SECTION 2 – INTAKE ASSESSMENT.....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	23
2.2 Intake Assessment Objectives and Decisions.....	24
Objectives.....	24
Decisions.....	24
2.3 Staff Responsibilities.....	24
2.4 Information Collection.....	24
2.5 Intake Interviewing Protocol.....	25
Introductory Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol.....	25
Exploratory Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol.....	25
Closing Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol.....	25
2.6 Intake Decisions.....	26
The Screening Decision.....	26
Present Danger Determination.....	27
Impending Danger Determination.....	27
Maltreatment with no indications of Present or Impending Danger.....	28
Priority Response Decision.....	28
2.7 Reporting to Law Enforcement, Prosecuting Attorney and Medical Examiner.....	28
2.8 Reports Involving Another Jurisdiction.....	29

2.9 Additional Requirements of Intake Assessments for Certain Reports of Abuse and Neglect.....	29
Reports Involving Certain Abandoned Infants (Safe Haven).....	29
2.10 Reports Involving Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU).....	29
<b>SECTION 3 - INITIAL ASSESSMENT.....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 Definitions.....	30
3.2 Initiation of the Initial Assessment.....	31
Purpose.....	31
Protocol.....	31
Preparation.....	32
Personal Safety.....	33
3.3 Initial Family Contact.....	34
3.4 Additional Allegations Received During an Open Initial Assessment.....	36
3.5 Notifications.....	36
Notification of Parents and Children’s Rights.....	36
Notification to Individuals Subject of the Initial Assessment.....	37
Notification to Parents who are not Subject of the Initial Assessment.....	38
Notification to Mandated Reporters.....	38
Notification Requirements Regarding Parents and Guardians in the Military.....	39
3.6 Information Collection.....	40
Diligent Efforts to Locate Children who are Reportedly Abused or Neglected.....	43
Administrative Subpoena.....	43
3.7 Initial Assessment Areas.....	44
3.8 Immediate Safety Threat Assessment.....	45
Imminent Danger.....	48
3.9 Temporary Protection Plans.....	49
3.10 Impending Safety Threats and the Danger Threshold Criteria.....	52
Danger Threshold Criteria and Definitions.....	53
Standardized Impending Safety Threats.....	53
3.11 Safety Evaluation Conclusion.....	62
Initial Assessment Conclusion: Decision to Provide Ongoing CPS and Transfer Summary.....	62
3.12 Safety Analysis and Safety Planning.....	63
Safety Planning.....	64
Safety Planning that Requires Court Oversight for Removal of a Child.....	65
Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal.....	65
Safety Resources.....	67
Safety Services and Socially Necessary Services.....	70
3.13 Statutory Remedies for Protecting Children.....	71

3.14 Completion of the Initial Assessment.....	72
Maltreatment Findings.....	73
Completing Initial Assessments When Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal are Not Required... 74	
Policy Exceptions to Waive Completion of the Initial Assessment.....	75
3.15 WV Birth to Three Program Referrals.....	77
3.16 Initial Assessments When Children are Determined to be Abused or Neglected but Safe.....	77
3.17 Additional Requirements of Initial Assessments for Certain Reports of Abuse and Neglect.....	78
Initial Assessments Involving Another Jurisdiction.....	78
Initial Assessments Involving Certain Abandoned Infants (Safe Haven).....	79
Initial Assessments Involving Reports Made by the Court.....	79
Initial Assessments Involving Critical Incidents.....	81
Initial Assessments Involving Medical Neglect of a Disabled Child (Baby Doe).....	82
Initial Assessments Involving Domestic Violence.....	83
Initial Assessments Involving Substance Use, Misuse or Substance Use Disorder.....	87
Initial Assessments Involving Substance Use, Misuse or Substance Use Disorder, Specific to Newborns and Infants (Drug Affected Infants).....	88
Plan of Safe Care.....	90
Plan of Safe Care with No Maltreatment and No Impending Safety Threats.....	91
Initial Assessments Involving Children Found at Clandestine Drug Laboratories and/or Exposed to Methamphetamine Residue Contamination.....	92
Initial Assessments Involving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Drug Testing.....	92
Initial Assessments Investigations Involving Informal, Unlicensed/Unregistered Child Care Settings.....	93
Initial Assessments Involving Abusive Interactions Between Children.....	95
Initial Assessments Involving Individuals on Registries.....	96
Child Sex Offender Registry.....	96
Child Abuse and Neglect Registry.....	97
Initial Assessments Involving Educational Neglect.....	97
Initial Assessments Involving Human Trafficking.....	98
Initial Assessments Involving Unaccompanied Children in Disasters.....	101
Time Limits on Worker Custody.....	102
3.18 Investigations Involving Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU).....	102
Child Maltreatment in Foster/Resource Homes, Certified and Pending Certification Kinship/Relative Homes, In State and Out of State Facilities, Shelter, or Other Placement.....	102
Pre-Investigation.....	102
Investigation.....	104
Conclusion of Investigation.....	105

Corrective Action Plan.....	105
Corrective Action and Monitoring.....	106
Child Maltreatment in School Settings.....	106
Pre-Investigation.....	106
Investigation.....	106
Obtaining Video Recordings From Schools for Completion of the Investigation.....	107
Conclusion of the Investigation.....	108
Child Maltreatment in Licensed Child Care Centers/Registered Family Child Care Facilities/Registered Family Child Care Homes.....	109
Pre-Investigation.....	109
Investigation.....	110
Conclusion of Investigation.....	110
Corrective Action Plan and Monitoring.....	111
<b>SECTION 4 - CASE TRANSFER TO ONGOING SERVICES.....</b>	<b>112</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	112
4.2 Case Transfer Meeting.....	112
Determining Safety Plan Sufficiency at Case Transfer.....	114
Modifying the Safety Plan at Case Transfer.....	114
4.3 Ongoing Services to Children Abused or Neglected but Safe.....	115
<b>SECTION 5 ONGOING SAFETY MANAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>116</b>
5.1 Managing Safety and the Safety Plan.....	116
Managing Safety Plans that Include the Safety Resource of Foster Care Services.....	117
Requirements for Immediate Contact with a Child in the Placement Setting.....	118
Supervisor Consultation.....	118
<b>SECTION 6 ONGOING ASSESSMENT.....</b>	<b>118</b>
6.1 Identifying Protective Factors.....	119
6.2 Identifying the Child’s Needs.....	122
6.3 Ongoing Assessment Decisions.....	124
<b>SECTION 7 CASE PLANNING.....</b>	<b>125</b>
7.1 Definitions.....	125
7.2 The Case Planning Process.....	125
Developing the Case Plan.....	126
Uncooperative Caregivers.....	128
Foster Care Candidacy.....	128
7.3 Case Plan and Safety Plan Review.....	129
7.4 Case Closure.....	130
<b>SECTION 8 – GENERAL INFORMATION.....</b>	<b>131</b>
8.1 Definitions.....	131

8.2 Grievance Procedure to Contest the Substantiation of Maltreatment Findings of Child Abuse or Neglect.....	131
8.3 Confidentiality.....	132
Record Requests.....	132
Releasing of Information and/or Records.....	134
Request for Records from the Foster Care Ombudsman.....	135
8.4 Payment Guidelines and Use of Certain Services.....	135
Gibson Payments.....	135
Medical and Mental Examinations.....	137
Photographs and X-rays.....	138
Recovery Residences for Substance Use Disorder.....	138
Special Medical Card.....	139
Expert and Fact Testimony.....	139
<b>SECTION 9 - CPS LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESSES.....</b>	<b>140</b>
9.1 Reasonable Efforts.....	140
9.2 Aggravated Circumstances and Other Situations Where Reasonable Efforts are not Required... 141	141
9.3 Imminent Danger.....	142
Emergency Custody of a Child in Imminent Danger without Prior Judicial Authorization.....	142
Circumstances Where Custody is Taken During the Pendency of a Child Abuse or Neglect Hearing. 143	143
Custody of a Child Taken by a Law Enforcement Officer.....	144
When a Child is Determined to be Abandoned.....	145
Exceptions.....	146
When a Child is in Need of Emergency Medical Care.....	146
Family Courts ordering Children into Department Custody.....	147
9.4 Multidisciplinary Investigative Teams.....	148
9.5 Medical Examination of a Child for Evidentiary Purposes.....	149
Worker Actions in Requesting an Order for a Medical Examination.....	149
Time Limits for Department Custody after a Medical Examination.....	149
9.6 Filing a Petition.....	149
Role of the Prosecuting Attorney.....	150
Initiation of an Abuse/Neglect Petition.....	150
Worker Actions: Placement.....	151
Worker Actions: Contact with the Prosecuting Attorney.....	152
Worker Actions: Summary of the Facts and Items for Inclusion in the Petition.....	152
Format of the Summary of Facts.....	153
Worker Actions: Review and Verification of the Petition.....	154
Worker Actions: Prior Notice of the Filing of a Petition.....	154

Amendments to a Petition.....	155
Worker Actions: Requesting to Amend a Petition.....	155
9.7 Temporary Custody Pending a Preliminary Hearing.....	155
Worker Actions: Preparation for Temporary Custody Hearing.....	156
Worker Actions: During the Temporary Custody Hearing.....	156
Worker Actions: After the Temporary Custody Hearing.....	156
9.8 Placement Requirements.....	156
Visitation.....	156
Placement Facility.....	156
Placement of Siblings.....	156
Worker Contact.....	157
Transportation.....	157
Telephone Calls.....	157
Placement of a Child Whose Siblings are Already in Foster Care.....	157
9.9 Court Appointed Legal Counsel.....	158
Access to Records.....	158
9.10 Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).....	158
Access to Records.....	159
9.11 Discovery.....	159
9.12 Preliminary Hearing.....	160
Worker Preparation for the Preliminary Hearing.....	160
Worker Actions: During the Preliminary Hearing.....	161
Worker Actions: When a Pre-adjudicatory Improvement Period is Granted.....	161
Worker Actions: When a Pre-Adjudicatory Improvement Period is not Requested or is Denied.....	163
9.13 Child Support.....	163
Court Actions.....	163
Worker Actions: When the Income Shares Formula is Applied by the Court.....	164
Worker Actions: When the Income Shares Formula is Not Applied by the Court.....	165
Worker Actions: When a Child Returns Home.....	165
9.14 Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Planning Process.....	165
Multidisciplinary Treatment Team.....	165
Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Membership.....	166
MDT Operation and Worker Responsibilities.....	166
9.15 Medical and Mental Examinations.....	168
9.16 Adjudicatory Hearing.....	168
Worker Preparation for the Adjudicatory Hearing.....	168
Worker Actions: During the Adjudicatory Hearing.....	168

Worker Actions: Following the Adjudicatory Hearing.....	169
Worker Actions: When an Improvement Period is not Requested or Improvement Period Is Denied.....	172
9.17 Dispositional Hearing.....	172
Worker Preparation for the Dispositional Hearing.....	173
Worker Actions: During the Dispositional Hearing.....	173
Worker Actions: Following the Disposition Hearing.....	174
Worker Actions: When an Improvement Period is Granted.....	174
Worker Actions: When the Petition is Dismissed.....	176
Worker Actions: Conduct When Continuing Supervision is Ordered.....	176
Worker Actions: When the Court Terminates Parental Rights.....	176
Worker Actions: When Custody of Child is Continued with the Department.....	177
Worker Actions: Final Dispositional Hearing.....	177
9.18 Unified Child or Family Case Plan.....	178
Family Case Plan.....	178
Child’s Case Plan.....	179
9.19 Reunification Services.....	179
9.20 Quarterly Status Reviews.....	179
9.21 Yearly Permanency Hearings and Permanency Hearing Reviews.....	180
9.22 Change in a Child’s Placement - Report to the Court.....	180
Worker Actions.....	180
9.23 Aggravated Circumstances and Other Situations Where Reasonable Efforts are not Required.....	180
Exceptions.....	181
Worker Actions.....	182
Compelling Reason to not Request Termination of Parental Rights.....	182
9.24 Post-Termination Placement Plan.....	182
9.25 Overturning Substantiated Maltreatment Findings.....	183
<b>SECTION 10 - NONDISCRIMINATION, GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE &amp; DUE PROCESS STANDARDS, REASONABLE MODIFICATION POLICIES, and CONFIDENTIALITY.....</b>	<b>183</b>
10.1 Nondiscrimination.....	183
10.2 Non-Discriminatory Placement Protocol.....	184
10.3 Complaint Procedure and Due Process Standards.....	185
A: Complaints Based on Disability or other Forms of Discrimination.....	185
Procedure.....	185
B: Grievances Regarding the Child Protective Services Worker or Casework Process.....	187
10.4 Reasonable Modification Policy.....	188
A: Purpose.....	188
B: Policy.....	188

10.5 Limited English Proficiency..... 190  
    PROCEDURES:..... 190  
**APPENDIX A - THE DEPARTMENT'S CIVIL RIGHTS DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINT FORM..... 193**

# **SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

## **1.1 Mission, Vision, and Values**

The Bureau for Social Services mission is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, supporting individuals to succeed and strengthening families. Our vision is for all West Virginia families to experience safe, stable, healthy lives and thrive in the care of a loving family and community. Our values include professionalism, integrity, excellence, relationships, and staff contributions.

## **1.2 Introduction**

Child Protective Services (CPS) is a specialized component of a broader public system of services to children and families. In the late 19th century, abuse and neglect of children moved from being largely a private matter to one of public concern. During the first half of the 20th century, the protection of children was initiated through the efforts of local, private, non-profit societies for the prevention of cruelty to children. There were more than 250 such societies in the 1920's acting as a catalyst to bring resources to families and protection through the courts to the children involved in abuse and neglect. In West Virginia, Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children were organized in Wheeling and Charleston in the late 1800's and eventually a chapter was established in each county. Gradually, public social services agencies began to take on more of this responsibility. During the 1960's and 1970's, major developments in child protection began to take place. Reporting laws were passed in every state, including West Virginia, which requires certain professionals to report child abuse or neglect to local child protection departments. Child protection is dedicated to providing social services to families so that ultimately they become able to protect and effectively parent their children. Yet, there are situations when family preservation is not possible, and the safety needs of the child require another alternative.

On November 19, 1997, the President signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). This legislation passed by Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support, represented an important landmark in child welfare law. It established unequivocally that the national goals for children in the child welfare system are safety, permanency and well-being. The law reaffirmed the need to forge linkages between the child welfare system and other systems of support for families, as well as between the child welfare system and the courts, to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families.

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)n provides Federal funding to States in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities, as well as, provides grants to public agencies and nonprofit community-based organizations for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, addresses some of the most important needs affecting foster children, including extending federal foster care payments up to 21 years of age, providing federal support for relatives caring for foster children, increasing access to foster

care and adoption services to Native American tribes, and improving the oversight of the health and education needs of children in foster care.

In 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) aimed to reform child welfare by creating new opportunities to better serve children and families. The focus of the law is to reduce the need for foster care as well as supporting better outcomes for children in foster care. It has enabled states to use federal funds to assist in preventing foster care placements through the provision of mental health and substance use prevention and treatment services, in-home parent skill-based programs, and Kinship Navigator services.

The child protection system of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one in which there is a greater emphasis on collaboration between CPS, courts, law enforcement, health and mental health and community services agencies as well as a greater emphasis on timely outcomes for children and their families.

This material is based upon a combination of requirements from various sources, including but not limited to: social work standards for practice; the statutes contained in Chapters 48 and 49 of the Code of West Virginia; the Rules of Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings; Rules of Practice and Procedure for Domestic Violence Proceedings and Rules of Practice and Procedure for Family Court, all issued by the Supreme Court.

### **1.3 Philosophical Principles**

Philosophical beliefs about child maltreatment and their effects on families are the single most important variable in the provision of quality CPS. Thoughts about families, interactions with them, the decisions made independently and with families, and how the community is involved to assist them are determined in advance by what is believed.

The most basic and powerful influence of helping in CPS is expressed by consistently applying professional beliefs and values. The following philosophical principles represent the social work orientation to CPS. These principles are fundamental to the social work discipline and may not apply to other disciplines or agencies.

#### ***Child Safety is Paramount***

The mission of CPS is to assure that children are protected. Our model is directed toward determining who CPS should serve based on the existence of threats to a child's safety, and insufficient caregiver protective capacities to protect against the threats.

#### ***Permanency is an Integral Part of Safety***

Permanency refers to the restoration or establishment of stable living environments for children. It exists in tandem with child safety and well-being as the primary outcomes that it is designed to achieve. When CPS identifies children who are not safe, the issue of the child's permanency is automatically considered. The issue of permanency continues until the caregiver demonstrates all necessary

protective factors to ensure child safety, or a permanent out-of-home living arrangement is established for the child.

### ***Rights of Children and Caregivers***

Children and caregivers possess human and civil rights, and these interventions are respectful of those rights. Children have rights to be safe and secure, to be with their families, to be associated with their culture, and to experience the least trauma or interference in their lives as possible. Caregivers have rights related to privacy and due process. These rights include being informed and involved, receiving prompt responses, having their confidentiality respected, and experiencing the least amount of interference with their families.

### ***Respect for Families***

Respect for families is essential for effective intervention. It is a value that is demonstrated by staff communication, behavior, and interaction with children and caregivers throughout the process.

### ***Child Centered and Family Focused Practice***

Child centered, and family focused practice promotes interventions and skills that emphasize the family unit as the best source for solutions, engagement, involvement in decision making, and the family network as a supportive resource.

### ***Least Intrusive Intervention***

Child protective services is a non-voluntary government intervention that represents interference in a family's life under the best circumstances. CPS intervention should only be at the level required to 1) determine if children reported to the Department of Human Services, which henceforth will be referred to as the department, are safe, and 2) protect children from impending safety threats while attempting to restore the protective factors of their caregivers.

## **1.4 Legal Basis**

Child protective services stems from both a social concern for the care of children and from a legal concern for the rights of children. Child abuse and neglect are legally recognized and legally defined terms. The department is statutorily required to provide CPS. The legal basis of CPS is contained in [Chapter 49](#) of the Code of West Virginia. The Rules of Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings issued by the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia and opinions entered by the court in various cases also provide further interpretation and clarification of the statutes. Excerpts from Chapter 49 regarding the specific role and duties of CPS are included here; however, reference should be made to the entire Chapter and to the Rules and opinions of the court. Other parts of the West Virginia Code relevant to CPS are [Chapter 27](#), [Chapter 48](#) and [Chapter 61](#), which contain the statutes for mentally ill persons, domestic relations, and crimes and punishment. The statutes may be found on the internet at [www.wvlegislature.gov](http://www.wvlegislature.gov). The Rules of Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings and court opinions may be found on the internet at <http://www.courtswv.gov/>.

The [W. Va. Code §49-1-105](#) provides the framework for the child protection system in West Virginia. Its purpose is to provide a system of coordinated child welfare and juvenile justice services for children, youth and families in West Virginia, while ensuring safety and recognizing their fundamental rights. The state has a duty to assure that proper and appropriate care is given and maintained, as well as providing specific and determined services and resources to strengthen children, youth, and families and meet their basic, and mental and physical health needs.

The [W. Va. Code §49-2-101](#) authorizes the Department of Human Services to accept custody of children as well as provide care, support, and protective services to children and their families.

The [W. Va. Code §49-2-802](#) mandates the establishment of child protective services and the investigation of all reports of child abuse or neglect. It further requires the provision of emergency services to children at all times, the immediate response to allegations of imminent danger to the physical well-being of a child, serious physical injury, the provision of services to children suspected or known to be abused or neglected, and the use of an administrative subpoena to locate children alleged to be abused and neglected.

## **1.5 Target Population**

The target population for CPS agency intervention is a family in which a child (birth to age 18) has been suspected to be abused or neglected or subject to conditions that are likely to result in abuse or neglect (as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#) legal definitions and department operational definitions) by their parent, guardian or custodian. The terms “abused child” and “neglected child” are defined in statute (*See CPS Policy Section 2 Definitions*).

A child does not have to be injured in order to be in the target population for CPS. (*See Section 1.9 General Definitions* or state statute for the complete definition of an abused and neglected child.) In the interest of brevity, the term “caregiver” is used throughout this policy to refer to the child’s caregiver(s) but may also be construed to refer to a parent, guardian, or custodian. The term caregiver is extended to include parent substitutes, non-custodial parents, extended family members, step-parents, unrelated persons living in the same household, paramours or any other intra-familial or quasi-familial situation, resource parents, adoptive parents, day care providers, day care centers, residential facilities and school personnel.

CPS shall be extended to children who have been or are suspected to be abused or neglected, or subjected to conditions that are likely to result in abuse or neglect by a(n):

- parent or guardian;
- non-custodial parent;
- parent substitute;
- stepparent;
- extended family member who provides care to the child;
- unrelated person living in the same household;

- paramour of parent;
- employees of child-placing agencies and residential facilities;
- employees of day care centers;
- family day care facilities or homes;
- in-home daycare provider;
- any unlicensed group care situation, for one to six children, in a non-home setting in-home child care;
- resource family care parents, specialized foster family care parents, or emergency shelter care parents; or
- school personnel.

## 1.6 Casework Process

Throughout the life of a case, child welfare workers must assess the safety of all children in the home, choose appropriate treatment strategies and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of those strategies.

The casework process in CPS consists of seven basic steps:

- intake assessment;
- initial assessment;
- safety planning;
- ongoing assessment
- family case planning;
- service provision;
- case evaluation; and
- case closure.

## 1.7 Reporting

The protection of abused and neglected children depends on the prompt identification of children whose health or welfare is threatened. The [W. Va. Code §49-2-803](#) contains detailed reporting requirements. Mandated reporters with the knowledge of the alleged abuse and/or neglect, are required to report that information directly to the department, regardless of what their employer's policies may be. The duty of reporting suspected child abuse and/or neglect cannot be delegated to another individual, such as a supervisor.

Certain persons whose occupation brings them into contact with children on a regular basis are mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Those who are required to report are listed in [W. Va. Code §49-2-803](#).

In addition to mandated reporters, any person over the age of eighteen who receives a disclosure from a credible witness or observes any sexual abuse or sexual assault of a child, shall immediately and not more than 24 hours after receiving such a disclosure or observing the sexual abuse or sexual assault, report the circumstances or cause a report to be made to the department or the State Police or other

law-enforcement agency having jurisdiction to investigate the report. If the reporter feels that reporting the alleged sexual abuse will expose themselves, the child, the reporter's children or other children in the subject's household to an increased threat of serious bodily injury, the individual may delay making the report while they undertake measures to remove themselves or the affected children from the perceived threat of additional harm. The individual must make the report as soon as practical after the threat of harm has been reduced. The law enforcement agency that receives a report regarding sexual abuse must report the allegations to the department. Reports of child abuse or neglect shall be made immediately by telephone to the the department's Centralized Intake reporting line. A report made to the statewide Centralized Intake Unit for child abuse and neglect is acceptable. At their discretion, CPS staff may request that a mandated reporter also submit a written report within 24 hours

Any other person, including a person who wishes to remain anonymous, may make a report if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected in a home or institution or observes the child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse or neglect.

In any case where the reporter believes that the child suffered serious physical abuse, sexual abuse, or sexual assault, the reporter must also immediately report. The report must be made to the West Virginia State Police **and** to any law-enforcement agency having jurisdiction to investigate the report, which would either be municipal police or the county sheriff's department. This report is in addition to the report made to CPS.

A mandated reporter who is a member of the staff of a public or private institution, school, facility or agency must immediately notify the person in charge of such institution, school, facility or agency or a designated agent thereof, who shall report or cause a report to be made. Nothing in the law precludes individuals from reporting on their own behalf.

Any person or official who is included in the list of mandated reporters, including employees of the department, and who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has died because of child abuse or neglect, shall report to the coroner or medical examiner.

Additionally, the [W. Va. Code §49-2-806](#), requires workers to report reasonable suspicions that an animal is the victim of cruel or inhumane treatment to humane societies within their counties.

When CPS receives a referral from a mandated reporter they are required to mail a notification letter within two business days of the disposition of the intake assessment informing the mandated reporter whether the referral has been screened out or accepted for assessment. Within two business days of the conclusion of the assessment, CPS shall mail a letter to the mandated reporter informing them that the assessment has been completed.

Any person, whether mandated or permitted to report, has certain legal protections. These protections are extended so that persons will not hesitate to report for fear of future legal difficulties. The [W. Va.](#)

[Code §49-2-810](#) states that any person who reports in good faith shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability.

As an aid in the determination of child abuse or neglect, as well as to gather physical evidence which can be used to protect an abused or neglected child, [W. Va. Code §49-2-808](#) permits mandated reporters to take photographs or order x-rays. Radiological examinations (x-rays) are used to determine the scope of present and past injuries. A series of old fractures may indicate a repeated pattern of battering. The department is responsible for payment of expenses incurred in taking the photographs or x-rays, when requested to do so. Photographs and reports of the findings from x-rays should be made available to the local district office.

A mandated reporter who fails to report, or knowingly prevents another person from doing so, is guilty of a misdemeanor, and if convicted, may be confined in the county jail, fined, or both.

### ***Reporting and Communication with the Family and Circuit Courts***

Throughout child welfare involvement with families, child welfare workers should be aware of the specifics of any current or upcoming court cases a family may be involved in. It is also necessary for a family court judge, who may be making decisions of custody, to be made aware of any allegations or suspicion of child abuse and/or neglect, or threats to child safety. Although CPS has no duty to provide oversight for family court cases, the worker has a duty to notify family court when a "material change of circumstance" occurs. A material change of circumstance is a change in the case that could threaten the safety and/or welfare of the child. This material change of circumstance can be made by phone but must also be made in writing. The notification by phone must be documented in the case contacts, and the notification in writing must be saved in the CCWIS file cabinet. Examples of material changes of circumstance could include letting the court know if a perpetrator of domestic violence chooses to leave a treatment program or education courses centered around domestic violence; or one of the parents begins a relationship with a sex offender. It should also include letting the court know if a petition is filed by the child welfare worker; if a case is closed or if a family moves out of the area. The family court also has a duty to apprise CPS of when such cases are closed or are pending. The court has special orders for notifying CPS when their cases are pending or are closed.

There are further requirements of CPS when the mandated reporters are family or circuit court judges.

- When referrals for CPS have been received from family court and/or circuit court, the worker must send a copy of the notification letter at the onset, as specified above. The worker must also, at the end of the initial assessment, send the *Disposition of CPS Initial Assessment Report for Family and Circuit Court form* and a copy of the initial assessment to the referring family court judge, as well as the chief circuit court judge and prosecuting attorney. The worker will send the report directly to the family court judge making the referral but would file the circuit court report via the chief circuit court judge, with a copy to the prosecuting attorney.
- When a worker does an initial assessment on a family involved with family court proceedings, the worker must send a copy of the initial assessment to the family court judge who is presiding over the case, regardless of referral source. The worker will also send a copy of the *Disposition of*

*CPS Initial Assessment Report for Family and Circuit Court form to the chief circuit court judge with a copy to the prosecuting attorney.*

The [W. Va. Code §48-9-209](#) states that the court can determine if a parent, who may be given responsibility of a child under a parenting plan, has made false reports of domestic violence or child abuse. It is not sufficient evidence for the court to consider a report false because a parent withdrew, did not pursue a report of domestic violence, or seek child support.

If the court determines, that an accusation of child abuse or neglect, or domestic violence made during a child custody proceeding is false and the parent making the accusation knew it to be false at the time the accusation was made, the court may order reimbursement to be paid by the parent making the accusations. This could include reimbursement for costs that an accused parent incurred from defending themselves against the accusations. Such reimbursement may not exceed the actual reasonable costs incurred by the accused parent as a result of defending themselves against the accusation and reasonable attorney's fees.

If the court grants a motion for the department to disclose the identity of a person who made a report of abuse or neglect, disclosure by the department will be in camera. The court may disclose to the accused parent, information received from the department only if the court has reason to believe the other parent knowingly made a false report.

### ***Child Protective Services Alert***

A child protective services alert is often necessary due to child welfare staff attempting to locate a caregiver or family who is believed to have fled with child(ren), either within the state or to another state to avoid child welfare intervention and the children are in immediate danger. An alert can also be issued in the event that assistance is being requested in locating a child in the legal and physical custody of the State. It is to request immediate notification to the receiving county or state for any information regarding the child(ren).

The *Child Protective Services Alert Memorandum* template is editable and offers workers and supervisors the ability to provide specific information regarding the family and child(ren). All known information regarding the child(ren) and family or known contacts should be provided in the form. If possible, include a recent photograph of the child(ren) and any member of the family available to provide the most accurate assistance possible.

Completed alert memorandums are to be sent to the administrative secretary for the Division of Children and Adult Services for distribution to all community service managers and social services managers, or their designees.

The Division of Children and Adult Services issues this alert if a request is received from another state or federal government for assistance locating a family or child. If local staff receive information from

another state, this information should be forwarded to the Administrative Secretary for Division of Children and Adult Services and copied to the regional program manager for distribution.

Once the community service managers and social services managers, or their designee receives a child protective services alert, these are to be distributed to all relevant staff within the county or district offices immediately.

The purpose of a child protective services alert is to make diligent efforts to locate families who are the subject of a child protective services assessment or case.

## **1.8 Meaningful Contacts**

Contacts with children, families, and collaterals are critical components to a thoroughly documented investigation, assessment, and case record. Contacts are intended to provide clarity regarding the conversation, interview, or other means of communication. The intention of the contact will vary with the point of contact. Contacts with children and families should focus mainly on the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being.

A significant component of this protocol is thorough and timely documentation of all contacts. All documentation of contacts should be entered within three business days of the completion of the contact. To meet this requirement all contacts must provide sufficient information to reflect worker effort in gathering information and a summary of the information obtained. At a minimum, the worker must document the following.

- Name of person interviewed.
- Location where interview was held.
- A general description of information sought by the worker.
- A summary of information collected including that which pertains to the reported allegations of abuse and neglect and the child's environment.
- Worker observations pertinent to decision making.
- Contact with children and placement providers must be based upon the child's needs, behaviors and other circumstances, and the supervisor should be involved in making this determination, but in no case should face to face contact be less than once a month.
- Face to face contacts with children must include private, individual discussion.
- Face to face contact must occur with all substitute caregivers responsible for caring for the children at a minimum of one time per month but more if the case circumstances require.
- Contact with placement providers, and children if age appropriate, should be made by phone as necessary but no less than bi-weekly.

As mentioned in the above bulleted list, contacts should occur more often than monthly when circumstances change or there may be concern for the child's safety, permanency, or well-being.

- **Example 1:**
  - A child in the custody of the department is placed in a psychiatric residential facility and is having a lot of concerning behaviors during the third week of the month. The child was

already visited during the first week of that month. The staff member assigned to that child’s case should make another contact with that child. If face-to-face contact is not feasible, phone contact would suffice.

- **Example 2:**
  - A staff member made their monthly contact with a family and there were no areas of concern. The following day, a provider contacted the ongoing worker to report there was a fight between the mother and father, and police were called to the residence. Although contact was made the previous day, there has been a change in circumstances, and a face to face contact is needed with the family.

In both examples above, the child welfare worker needs to contact the child or family to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being.

### 1.9 General Definitions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<b>Abandonment</b>	Any conduct that demonstrates the settled purpose to forego the duties and parental responsibilities to the child. The child is left for extended periods of time without adequate supervision or provision of basic needs. The parent has disappeared, and it is not known when they may return. No long-term provisions have been made for care of the child. May also include situations in which the parent may be physically present, but in a condition that prevents them from caring for the child; or the parents who are absent, temporarily or permanently, as the result of a natural disaster. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>
<b>Abused child</b>	A child whose health or welfare is harmed or threatened by a parent, guardian or custodian who knowingly or intentionally inflicts, attempts to inflict or knowingly allows another person to inflict, physical injury or mental or emotional injury, upon the child or another child in the home; or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation; or the sale or attempted sale of a child by a parent, guardian or custodian, human trafficking or attempted human trafficking and domestic violence... In addition to its broader meaning, physical injury may include an injury to the child as a result of excessive corporal punishment. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Administrative Services Organization (ASO)</b>	An organization that manages and authorizes socially necessary services referrals for child welfare cases as laid out in child welfare policy.
<b>AFCARS</b>	The “Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System” is designed to collect uniform, reliable information on children who are under the responsibility of the title IV-B/IV-E agency for placement, care, or supervision. Adoption and foster care data collection is mandated by the <a href="#">Social Security Act, Section 479</a> .
<b>Age or developmentally appropriate</b>	Activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally-appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group; in the case of a specific child, activities or items that are suitable for the child based on the developmental stages attained by the child with respect to the cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities of the child.
<b>Battered child syndrome</b>	A medical condition, primarily of infants and young children, in which there is evidence of repeated inflicted injury to the nervous, skin, or skeletal system. Frequently the history as given by the caretaker does not adequately explain the nature of occurrence of the injuries. A medical diagnosis is required to determine if a child suffers from battered child syndrome.
<b>Caregiver</b>	A parent, guardian, or custodian who is responsible for the care and supervision of a child. Any person who is at least eighteen years of age and: (A) is related by blood, marriage or adoption to the minor, but who is not the legal custodian or guardian of the minor; or (B) has resided with the minor continuously during the immediately proceeding period of six months or more. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-204</a>

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Caregiver protective factors</b>	<u>Behavioral</u> , <u>cognitive</u> , and <u>emotional</u> characteristics possessed by the caregiver that help to reduce, control, or prevent threats of serious harm, which are specifically relevant to child safety.
<b>Child</b>	Any person less than 18 years of age. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-202</a>
<b>Child abuse and neglect services</b>	Social services which are directed toward: protecting and promoting the welfare of children who are abused or neglected; identifying, preventing and remedying conditions which cause child abuse and neglect; preventing the unnecessary removal of children from their families by identifying family problems and assisting families in resolving problems which could lead to a removal of children and a breakup of the family; in cases where children have been removed from their families, providing services to the children and the families so as to reunify such children to their families; placing children in suitable adoptive homes when restoring the children to their families is not possible or appropriate; and assuring the adequate care of children away from their families when the children have been placed in the custody of the Department or third parties. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a> .
<b>Child exposed to domestic violence</b>	A child whose health or welfare is being harmed or threatened by: Domestic violence as defined in section <a href="#">W. Va. Code §48-27-202</a> . <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Attempting to cause or intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causing physical harm to another with or without dangerous or deadly weapons.</li> <li>2) Placing another in reasonable apprehension of physical harm.</li> <li>3) Creating fear of physical harm by harassment, stalking, psychological abuse or threatening acts.</li> <li>4) Committing either sexual assault or sexual abuse as those terms are defined in <a href="#">W. Va. Code § 61-8B</a> and <a href="#">W. Va. Code § 61-8D</a>, and</li> <li>5) holding, confining, detaining or abducting another person against that person's will. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §48-27-202</a>.</li> </ol>
<b>Child maltreatment</b>	When a caregiver’s behaviors and interactions with a child are consistent with the statutory definition of child abuse or neglect.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Child Protective Services (CPS)</b>	A specialized department service extended to families on behalf of children who are unsafe or abused or neglected by their parents, guardians or custodians having responsibility for their care.
<b>Child vulnerability</b>	The degree to which a child cannot avoid, negate or modify the impact of safety threats or missing or insufficient protective factors and/or a child has characteristics more likely to elicit a dangerous response from a caregiver who has or can have uncontrolled access to the child.
<b>Corporal punishment</b>	Physical punishment inflicted directly upon the body.
<b>Court appointed special advocate (CASA)</b>	Someone appointed primarily in civil protection proceedings involving child abuse and/or neglect. Duties of a CASA representative include an independent gathering of information through interviews and review of records; facilitating prompt and thorough review of the case; protecting and promoting the best interests of the child; follow-up and monitoring of court orders and case plans; making a written report to the court with recommendations concerning the child's welfare; and negotiating and advocating on behalf of the child. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-3-102</a> .
<b>Critical incident</b>	A reasonable suspicion that a fatality or near fatality was caused by abuse or neglect or when abuse or neglect has been determined to have led to a child's death or near death.
<b>Crime Victim's Compensation Fund</b>	A special revenue fund within the state Treasury established by the Crime Victims Compensation Act, created by the West Virginia Legislature, which can be utilized for victims of crimes (including minors in civil abuse and neglect cases) for payment of expenses attributed to or caused by their victimization. See also Foster Care Policy. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §14-2A-11a</a>
<b>Custodian</b>	A person who has or shares actual physical possession or care and custody of a child regardless of whether such person has been granted custody of the child by a contract, agreement or legal proceedings. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-204</a>

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Dangerousness Lethality Assessment Guide</b>	Dangerousness Lethality Assessment Guide (D-LAG) is an evidence-based guide that assists professionals in assessing domestic violence perpetrators for highly dangerous and or potentially lethal behaviors and provide an effective response that heightens both safety measures for victims and accountability for highly dangerous or potentially lethal perpetrators.
<b>Domestic violence</b>	<p>The occurrence of one or more of the following acts between family or household members:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Attempting to cause or intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causing physical harm to another with or without dangerous or deadly weapons.</li> <li>2) Placing another in reasonable apprehension of physical harm.</li> <li>3) Creating fear of physical harm by harassment, psychological abuse or threatening acts.</li> <li>4) Committing either sexual assault or sexual abuse as those terms are defined in <a href="#">W. Va. Code § 61-8b</a> and <a href="#">W. Va. Code § 61-8d</a>; and</li> <li>5) holding, confining, detaining or abducting another person against that person’s will. Family or household member means current or former spouses, persons living as spouses, persons who formerly resided as spouses, parents, children and stepchildren, current or former sexual or intimate partners, other persons related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently or in the past have resided or cohabited together or a person with whom the victim has a child in common. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §48-27-202</a></li> </ol>
<b>Drug affected infants</b>	Infants referred by medical staff, including hospital social workers, who are less than one year old, test positive for legal or illegal substances or prescribed medication or suffer from withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
<b>Excessive corporal punishment</b>	Physical punishment inflicted directly upon the body which results in an injury to the child. This includes bruises, bites, scratches, cuts, abrasions, scars, burns or internal injuries.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary clothing</b>	The parent/caregiver does not provide their child with clothing that provides protection from the elements of weather.
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary education</b>	A child’s physical or mental health is harmed or threatened due to the parent/caregiver’s failure or inability to send their child or allow their child to attend school in accordance with legal requirements as outlined in <a href="#">W. Va. Code §18-8</a> ; or a child’s physical or mental health is harmed or threatened due to the parent/caregiver not attempting to notify authorities of their child’s habitual truancy and refuses to seek assistance to correct the truancy or a child’s physical or mental health is harmed or threatened due to the caregiver refusing or failing to participate in planning for the educational needs of a child.
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary food</b>	The parent/caregiver does not feed their child or withholds food from their child or children. In a situation where the parent seeks food for the child but does not have the resources to purchase the food, a referral to the community may be warranted and a report will not be accepted.
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary medical care, including hygiene</b>	The parent/caregiver does not provide or seek medical or mental health care for a child’s condition that if not cared for will cause or likely cause harm to the child; or the parent/caregiver chronically does not provide care for a child’s need for physical hygiene.
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary shelter</b>	The parent/caregiver does not provide a shelter or residence for their child, or the shelter is clearly unsafe and jeopardizes the child’s physical safety including but not limited to, exposed and unprotected wires, unprotected areas where a child can fall and be injured, i.e. no heat in frigid weather.
<b>Failure or inability to supply necessary supervision</b>	The parent/caregiver does not provide their child with adequate supervision, permits the child to be in unsafe situations, or leaves their child alone without a capable caregiver to provide appropriate supervision. This situation needs to be considered with due regard to the child’s age, development and the circumstances being described.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Fictive kin</b>	An adult of at least 21 years of age, who is not a relative of the child, but who has an established, substantial relationship with the child, including but not limited to, teachers, coaches, ministers, and parents or family members of the child’s friends. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-206</a> .
<b>Foster Care Candidacy</b>	A child, under the age of 21, who is at imminent risk of foster care entry or re-entry and who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● has not been removed from their home and placed in foster care; or</li> <li>● is not under the placement and care of the title IV-E agency and is residing with a relative or an individual with whom the child has an emotionally significant relationship characteristic of a family relationship (fictive kin); or</li> <li>● has returned home on a trial home visit; or</li> <li>● has returned from a foster care placement and is residing with their parent or a non-paid kinship relative caregiver; or</li> <li>● has been adopted or is in a legal guardianship arrangement.</li> </ul>
<b>Guardian</b>	An individual who has been court appointed to care for a child and make decisions on the child’s behalf.
<b>Hearing Request Form</b>	A document created by the Board of Review that initiates the administrative hearing process.
<b>Human trafficking victim</b>	A victim who has been forced, coerced, enticed, transported, isolated, harbored, obtained, or received for the purpose of debt bondage, sexual servitude, a commercial sex act, or forced labor.
<b>Immediate safety threats</b>	An immediate, significant, and clearly observable family condition (or threat to child safety) occurring in the present tense, endangering, or threatening to endanger a child and therefore requiring a prompt CPS response.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Imminent danger</b>	<p>An emergency situation in which the welfare or the life of the child is threatened. Such emergency exists when there is reasonable cause to believe that any child in the home is or has been sexually abused or sexually exploited or reasonable cause to believe that the following conditions threaten the health or life of any child in the home:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Non-accidental trauma inflicted by a parent, guardian, sibling or a babysitter or other caretaker;</li> <li>2) A combination of physical and other signs indicating a pattern of abuse which may be medically diagnosed as battered child syndrome;</li> <li>3) Nutritional deprivation;</li> <li>4) Abandonment by the parent, guardian or custodian;</li> <li>5) Inadequate treatment of serious illness or disease;</li> <li>6) Substantial emotional injury inflicted by a parent, guardian or custodian; o</li> <li>7) Sale or attempted sale of the child by the parent, guardian or custodian; or</li> <li>8) The parent, guardian or custodian’s abuse of alcohol, or drugs or other controlled substance as defined in <a href="#">W. Va. Code §60A-1-101</a>, has impaired their parenting skills to a degree as to pose an imminent risk to a child’s health or safety. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>.</li> </ol>
<b>Impending safety threat</b>	Family behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions and/or situations that pose a threat to child safety.
<b>Initial assessment</b>	The gathering of information by a child welfare worker to determine if a child is unsafe or has been abused or neglected by a parent, guardian or custodian.
<b>Kinship/Kin</b>	A person who is a relative, member of a tribe or clan, Godparents, stepparents, or anyone who has a family like relationship to a child. Anyone who the child considers to be kin or a close family friend, or anyone the child demonstrates a strong attachment.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Kinship parent</b>	A person with whom the department has placed a child to provide a kinship placement. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-206</a> .
<b>Kinship placement</b>	The placement of the child with a relative of the child, or a placement of a child with a fictive kin. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-206</a> .
<b>Knowingly allows another person to inflict</b>	<p>Knowingly allow another person to inflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) physical; or</li> <li>(2) mental or emotional injury; or</li> <li>(3) sexual abuse or exploitation; or</li> <li>(4) injury as a result of excessive corporal punishment upon a child; or</li> <li>(5) sells or attempts to sell a child and a parent has knowledge (or should have had knowledge) that this has occurred and has not yet taken any action to intervene or to ensure the child’s safety.</li> </ul> <p>The term “knowingly” does not require that a parent actually be present at the time the abuse occurs, but rather that the parent was presented with sufficient facts from which they could have and should have recognized that abuse has occurred (Department of Health and Human Resources ex rel. Wright vs. Doris S. 1996). See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>.</p>
<b>Mental or emotional injury</b>	The parent/caregiver has demonstrated a pattern of degradation of their child that is or will likely adversely affect the child’s functioning. The parent/caregiver is aware that their child’s mental health is being affected by maltreatment from someone other than the parent/caregiver and does not act to protect their child or prevent the action of others from affecting the child’s functioning. Examples could include but not limited to: continual scapegoating or rejection of a child, constant berating, being left alone for extended periods of time on short notice with persons who are unfamiliar to the child, allowing and/or encouraging the child engage in illegal activities, and exposure to domestic violence in the home.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Multidisciplinary Treatment Teams (MDTs)</b>	A team designed to assess, plan, and implement a comprehensive, individualized case plan for a child who is involved in court proceedings either because of child abuse and neglect, status offense, or delinquency proceedings. This team includes the child’s custodial parent(s) or guardian(s), other immediate family members, the attorney(s) representing the parent(s) of the child, the child if over the age of 12 or the child’s participation is deemed appropriate, the Guardian Ad Litem, the prosecuting attorney, and any other person who may contribute to the team’s efforts to assist the child and the family.
<b>NCANDS</b>	The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) is a voluntary data collection system that gathers information from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico about reports of child abuse and neglect. NCANDS was established in response to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1988.
<b>Near fatality</b>	An act that, as certified by a physician, places the child in serious or critical condition.
<b>Neglected child</b>	A child whose physical or mental health is harmed or threatened by a present refusal, failure or inability of the child’s parent, guardian or custodian to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care or education, when such refusal, failure or inability is not due primarily to a lack of financial means on the part of the parent, guardian or custodian; or who is presently without necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision because of the disappearance or absence of the child’s parent or guardian. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a> .
<b>Physical injury</b>	Non-accidental trauma to the body, such as bruises, bites, scratches, cuts, abrasions, scars, burns, fractures, asphyxiation, internal injuries, or poisoning. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a> .

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Plan of Safe Care</b>	A Plan of Safe Care is a plan to ensure the safety and well-being for the infant born and identified as being exposed to and/or affected by legal or illegal substance use or withdrawal symptoms or testing positive for substances, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder following release from the care of healthcare providers by addressing the health and substance use disorder treatment needs of the infant and affected family or caregiver. This includes referrals to and delivery of appropriate services for the infant and affected family or caregiver.
<b>Protective caregiver</b>	A parent, guardian or custodian who is responsible for the care and supervision of a child/children and who is able and willing to mentally, emotionally, and physically keep the child safe.
<b>Reasonable and prudent parent standard</b>	The standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while at the same time encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the State/Tribe to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities. In this context, ‘caregiver’ means a resource parent with whom a child in foster care has been placed or a designated official for a child care institution in which a child in foster care has been placed.
<b>Relative of the child</b>	An adult of at least 21 years of age who is related to the child, by blood or marriage, within at least three degrees. The three degrees of relationship is a grandparent, great-grandparent, aunt, uncle, great-aunt, great-uncle, or adult sibling of the child or children receiving care. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-206</a> .
<b>Recovery Residences</b>	A single-family, drug-free, and alcohol-free residential dwelling unit, or other form of group housing, that is offered or advertised by any person or entity as a residence that provides a drug-free and alcohol-free living environment for the purposes of promoting sustained, long-term recovery from substance use disorder.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Resource parent</b>	A person with whom the department has placed a child and who has been certified by the department, a child placing agency, or another agency of the department to provide foster care. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-206</a> .
<b>Safety plan</b>	A temporary measure designed to control one or more impending safety threat(s) identified which threaten the safety of a vulnerable child and there are not sufficient caregiver protective factors to assure that impending safety threat can be offset, mitigated and controlled.
<b>Sale or attempted sale of a child</b>	The offering of a child in exchange for cash or other goods or services. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a> and <a href="#">§61-2-14h</a> .
<b>Serious bodily injury</b>	Bodily injury which involves substantial risk of death, extreme physical pain, protracted and obvious disfigurement, or protracted loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty. See, <a href="#">W. Va. Code §61-8D-4</a> and <a href="#">§61-8B-1</a> .
<b>Serious harm</b>	<p>Refers to the effects of physical, emotional or mental injury that have already occurred and/or have the potential for harsh effects based on the vulnerability of a child and the family behavior, condition or situation that is out of control. Serious harm includes such effects as serious physical injury, disability, terror and extreme fear, impairment and death. It could result in harsh and unacceptable pain and suffering for a child. It could include but not limited to conditions that are considered “Imminent Danger” as defined by <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>.</p> <p>Serious harm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is life-threatening or poses the risk thereof.</li> <li>● Substantively inhibits the child’s mental or physical health or development or poses the risk thereof.</li> <li>● Produces substantial physical or mental suffering, physical disfigurement or disability, whether permanent or temporary, or poses the risk thereof; or</li> <li>● involves sexual victimization.</li> </ul>

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Serious physical abuse</b>	Bodily injury which creates a substantial risk of death, which causes serious or prolonged disfigurement, prolonged impairment of health or prolonged loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>
<b>Sexual abuse</b>	<p>Sexual intercourse, sexual intrusion, sexual contact, or conduct proscribed by <a href="#">W. Va. Code §61-8C-3</a>, which a parent, guardian, or custodian engages in, attempts to engage in, or knowingly procures another person to engage in, with a child notwithstanding the fact that for a child who is less than 16 years of age, the child may have willingly participated in that conduct or the child may have suffered no apparent physical, mental or emotional injury as a result of that conduct or, for a child 16 years of age or older, the child may have consented to that conduct or the child may have suffered no apparent physical injury or mental or emotional injury as a result of that conduct.</p> <p>Any conduct where a parent, guardian, or custodian displays his or her sex organs to a child, or procures another person to display his or her sex organs to a child, for the purpose of gratifying the sexual desire of the parent, guardian, or custodian, of the person making that display, or of the child, or for the purpose of affronting or alarming the child.</p> <p>Any of the offenses proscribed in <a href="#">W. Va. Code §61-8B-7</a>, <a href="#">§61-8B-8</a>, or <a href="#">§61-8B-9</a> of this code. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>.</p>
<b>Sexual exploitation</b>	<p>A parent, custodian, or guardian, whether for financial gain or not, persuades, induces, entices or coerces a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct as that term is defined in <a href="#">W. Va. Code §61-8C-1</a>.</p> <p>A parent, guardian, or custodian persuades, induces, entices or coerces a child to display his or her sex organs for the sexual gratification of the parent, guardian, custodian or a third person, or to display his or her sex organs under circumstances in which the parent, guardian, or custodian knows that the display is likely to be observed by others who would be affronted or alarmed.</p> <p>A parent, guardian, or custodian knowingly maintains or makes available a child for the purpose of engaging the child in commercial sexual activity in violation of <a href="#">W. Va. Code §61-14-5</a>. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-201</a>,</p>

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Socially Necessary Services (SNS)</b>	Supportive services, provided in conjunction with medical and behavioral health services, for children and families with an open youth services, child protective services, or completed adoption case to facilitate meeting their needs and case plan goals. These services help to keep the families together in their home communities, to reunite them as safely as possible, or to ensure families’ success once their children are returned.
<b>Temporary protection plan</b>	A specific and concrete strategy implemented immediately to protect a child from immediate safety threats in order to allow completion of the assessment.
<b>Transitioning adult</b>	An individual with a transfer plan to move to an adult setting who meets one of the following conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Is 18 years of age but under 21 years of age, was in departmental custody upon reaching 18 years of age and committed an act of delinquency before reaching 18 years of age, remains under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, and requires supervision and care to complete an education and or treatment program which was initiated prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.</li> <li>(2) Is 18 years of age but under 21 years of age, was adjudicated abused, neglected, or in departmental custody upon reaching 18 years of age and enters into a contract with the department to continue in an educational, training, or treatment program which was initiated prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. See <a href="#">W. Va. Code §49-1-202</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Unsafe child</b>	Refers to the presence of present or impending danger to a child.

**SECTION 2 – INTAKE ASSESSMENT**

**2.1 Introduction**

The Intake Assessment is the first assessment in Child Protective Services (CPS). The purpose of the Intake Assessment is to evaluate allegations of maltreatment and threats to child safety to determine if the allegations require CPS response.

## **2.2 Intake Assessment Objectives and Decisions**

### ***Objectives***

The practice objectives of the intake assessment process are to:

- Receive reports of alleged child maltreatment and concerns about child safety.
- Assist individuals who are reporting their concerns by gathering behaviorally specific, detailed information.
- Determine if the report includes child maltreatment as defined by state code.
- Assess if the report includes indicators of present danger or impending danger.
- Make the screening decision.
- Assign the priority response time for the initial family assessment.
- Establish whether the reported information should be referred to law enforcement or other applicable entities.

### ***Decisions***

The information gathered during the intake assessment is used to inform two decisions relative to screening and response times. Whenever criteria are met, the intake will be assigned for assessment and given a specific response time.

## **2.3 Staff Responsibilities**

The centralized intake (CI) worker is required to:

- Receive, document, and assess reports.
- Identify situations that meet established screening criteria.
- Search for family history and documents.
- Provide documented rationale for screening and response time decisions for all reports.
- Notify the CI supervisor as required.

The CI supervisor is required to:

- Review and verify family case history has been documented by the CI worker.
- Review and approve or override screening decisions made by CI workers.
- Notify management and leadership as required.
- Act as a resource to CI workers.
- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive notification of whether the referral has been accepted or screened out for an initial family assessment.

## **2.4 Information Collection**

When reports are made by phone, the CI worker must utilize the Intake Interviewing Protocol as outlined in Section 2.5 and diligently gather information from the reporter(s) based upon the reporter's relationship, familiarity, and exposure to the family.

When reports that lack information are made through other means, the CI worker is required to make an attempt to contact the reporter to gather information.

## **2.5 Intake Interviewing Protocol**

The *Intake Interviewing Protocol* provides a standardized interviewing approach to ensure consistency in information collection and maximize the quantity and quality of information gathered. Although the protocol is standardized, it is essential to remain flexible when interviewing reporters. The protocol consists of three stages: *Introductory*, *Exploratory*, and *Closing*.

### ***Introductory Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol***

The Introductory Stage process include the following:

1. Complete introductions.
2. Gather reporter information and conduct an initial evaluation of the reporter.
3. Collect family demographic information, address, and finding directions.
4. Allow the reporter to express their concerns about the family.
5. Respond to emotional reactions; and,
6. Determine whether the reporter is calling about potential child abuse or neglect.

### ***Exploratory Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol***

The exploratory stage is focused on gathering information in the four assessment areas. The exploratory stage includes the following:

- Guide the interview to assist the reporter in providing details about the four assessment areas. The four assessment areas are:
  - *Extent and Surrounding Circumstances of the Alleged Maltreatment*, which is related to Family circumstances that are alleged to justify the existence of maltreatment, or circumstances confirming the absence of maltreatment.
  - *Child Functioning*, which relates to how each child in the residence behaves, feels, socializes, and manages themselves.
  - *Adult Caregiver Functioning*, which relates to how each caregiver in the home thinks, acts, behaves, feels, and manages themselves in their everyday lives, influences caregiver role performance.
  - *Parenting and Discipline Practices*, which relate to how the caregivers in the home perceive their parenting role and perform responsibilities for ensuring a child's basic needs, supervision, protection, and behavior management.
- Seek clarification regarding information that may indicate present danger or impending danger, such as if the threat is currently active or if there is a pattern of negative family conditions or behaviors.

### ***Closing Stage of the Intake Interviewing Protocol***

The closing stage clarifies and finalizes the information collection process, ensuring that all information gaps have been noted and that all demographic and family composition information has been obtained.

It also provides the reporter with the opportunity to convey their perspective on what they believe should happen. The four steps of the closing stage are:

- Ensure all essential information has been collected from the reporter regarding allegations of maltreatment and indications of present danger or impending danger.
- Seek the reporter's opinion about what they believe needs to happen in terms of intervention, including the reporter's perception of how the family may react to intervention.
- Conclude the intake interview and ensure that the intake documentation is completed and transferred to the supervisor promptly for review.

## **2.6 Intake Decisions**

The decisions made at the conclusion of the intake assessment are the screening decision and the priority response time decision, which are outlined below.

- Screening decision: To make an accurate screening decision, determine if the allegations meet the legal definitions outlined in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#) and if there is an indication that either present or impending dangers exist.
- Priority response time decision: The priority response time is based on the indication of present or impending dangers.

The CI worker makes a recommendation for screening and priority response time when submitting the intake assessment to the CI supervisor. The CI supervisor then makes the final decision. The CI supervisor must complete the following:

- Review the intake assessment to ensure that the information documented meets the legal definitions of maltreatment and supports the identification of present or impending danger.
  - The CI supervisor will return the report to the CI worker for required edits if corrections or additional information are needed.
- Confirm that the CI worker searched for CPS history.

### ***The Screening Decision***

Criteria for screening in a report for initial family assessment:

- The report involves a child (or children) who is between birth and 17 years of age.
- The alleged maltreater(s) is a parent, guardian, or custodian.
- There is alleged child maltreatment (child abuse/neglect as defined in West Virginia statute), or present danger, or impending danger.
- The child (or children) and/or family reside in West Virginia and can be located. An address or location is known or can be obtained.
- A report of a new incident of maltreatment, present danger, or impending danger is received and meets criteria for assignment, during an open initial family assessment, will be accepted and linked to the family's case for assessment.
- A report of maltreatment or a present or impending danger that has not been assessed in an initial family assessment within an open child protective services case, that meets criteria for assignment is received, the intake assessment will be accepted.

Criteria for screening out a report for initial family assessment:

- Alleged victim(s) is 18 years of age or older.
- There is insufficient information to locate or identify the child(ren) or family.
- The information reported does not meet the definition of maltreatment as defined by [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#) or is not alleged to be in present or impending danger.
- The client is not a West Virginia resident.
- No children in the household.
- The family is receiving ongoing child protective services, and the reported information has already been assessed and is the reason the case was open.
- The allegations are a duplicate to a current intake assessment that has been accepted for initial family assessment and has not been completed.

Undesirable behaviors on the part of caregivers do not, by themselves, constitute child maltreatment or result in present danger or impending danger. Substance use, intimate partner/domestic violence, mental health conditions, and criminal behavior may exist, but are not reported to directly relate to, or result in, child maltreatment or present or impending danger. For example, a caregiver who frequently gets intoxicated but whose children are adequately cared for, supervised, and protected is not neglectful or in danger simply because of their intoxication. Alternatively, a caregiver who is frequently intoxicated and is not protective and fails to care adequately for their children may be neglecting them or placing them in present and/or impending danger. The intake information must make the connection between a caregiver's behavior and child maltreatment and/or child safety.

### ***Present Danger Determination***

If the report is screened in and the information indicates the children are likely in a present danger, an immediate/same-day response must occur to ensure child safety.

Present danger is an immediate, significant, and clearly observable threatening family situation which has just occurred, is actively occurring, or is in the process of continuing to occur, which has or will likely result in serious harm to a child and requires immediate action to ensure safety.

The CI worker and supervisor must review all present danger information, definitions, and determine the absence or presence of any present dangers based on their analysis of the information in the report.

### ***Impending Danger Determination***

If a report is screened in and the information does not indicate the children are likely in present danger, but are in impending danger, a face-to-face contact with the alleged victim child should occur within twenty-four hours after the receipt of the report.

Impending danger threats are dangerous family conditions that represent situations or circumstances; caregiver behaviors, emotions, attitudes, perceptions, motives, and intentions which place a child in a

continuous state of danger. These dangerous family conditions exist within the child's home as a result of diminished caregiver protective capacities.

The CI worker and supervisor must review all impending danger threats, definitions, and determine the presence of any impending danger based on their analysis of the information in the report.

### ***Maltreatment with no indications of Present or Impending Danger***

When there are indications that a child has been abused or neglected, as defined in Section 3.14, but there are no indications that the child is in present or impending danger, a face-to-face contact with the alleged child victim must be made within 72 hours after the receipt of the report.

### ***Priority Response Decision***

Priority response time refers to the time required to initiate the Initial Family Assessment with face-to-face contact with the child.

One of three priority response times is determined based on the reported information. The priority response times are:

- Same day response, within 8 hours, if there are allegations that indicate present danger.
- Within 24 hours, if there are allegations that indicate there is no present danger, but there are indications of impending danger.
- Within 72 hours if the report alleges maltreatment with no identified present or impending danger.

## **2.7 Reporting to Law Enforcement, Prosecuting Attorney and Medical Examiner**

For reports alleging serious physical injury, sexual abuse, or sexual assault, the report must be forwarded to the appropriate law enforcement agency, the prosecuting attorney, or the coroner or medical examiner's office as required by [W. Va. Code §49-2-809\(c\)](#). The CI supervisor or designee must do the following if the report is screened out:

- Forward the information regarding the screened out referral to the West Virginia State Police and the district office.
- The district supervisor will then send the information contained in the screened out referral to the local law enforcement agency, the prosecuting attorney, or the coroner or medical examiner's office.

If the report is accepted and assigned to the district, the child welfare staff must do the following:

- Forward a copy of the referral contained within CCWIS that is titled *Referral for Child Protective Services*. The referral should be printed from CCWIS and mailed, faxed, or electronically sent promptly to the appropriate agencies. The report should be sent by the district child welfare staff prior to contact with the family, if possible. A copy of the referral should be filed in the CCWIS file cabinet to document whether the department fulfilled its duty.

- Make a report to the multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT), as established by [W. Va. Code §49-4-402](#) per the local protocol for MDITs.

## **2.8 Reports Involving Another Jurisdiction**

For reports alleging abuse or neglect in another state, the CI supervisor will:

- Contact the CPS agency in the other state and make a child abuse and neglect report to them.
- Contact the appropriate law enforcement agency in the other state and make a report to them, if required.
- If providing a courtesy interview is the only activity required, the referral should be screened out and an intake for Request to Receive Services should be documented in CCWIS.

## **2.9 Additional Requirements of Intake Assessments for Certain Reports of Abuse and Neglect**

### ***Reports Involving Certain Abandoned Infants (Safe Haven)***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-201](#) allows for the acceptance of surrendered infants, within 30 days of the infant's birth, without court order, by:

- Hospitals or health care facilities.
- Fire department.
- Emergency medical service facility.
- Police department.
- 911 call center; or,
- Sheriff's detachment. (See, [W. Va. Code §49-4-206](#)).

The parent(s) is not required to identify themselves if an infant is voluntarily relinquished to a designated fire department, the fire department is required to deliver the infant to the nearest hospital or health care facility as soon as possible, but transport may begin no later than 30 minutes upon taking possession of the infant. The designated fire department is required to notify CPS within two hours of taking possession of an infant. If a hospital or health care facility accepts possession of a surrendered infant, they must notify CPS by the close of the first business day after the date the parent left the infant, that it has taken possession of the infant. Any information provided by the parent shall be given to CPS by the hospital, or health care facility or designated fire department. [W. Va. Code §49-4-202](#)

## **2.10 Reports Involving Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU)**

The Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU) investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect in out of home setting per W. Va. State Code. Reference should be made to the following chapters:

- Chapter 18 - Education.
- Chapter 49 - Child Welfare.
- Chapter 51- Courts and their Offices; and,
- Chapter 61- Crimes and their Punishments.

The process used for IIU focuses on:

- Ensuring safety of the child.
- Determination of whether the incident occurred.
- Whether maltreatment occurred, and
- Areas of concern identified during the investigation that may indicate non-compliance of policies and procedures.

The IIU investigates child maltreatment in:

- Licensed residential facilities.
- Child placing agencies.
- Certified foster homes.
- Certified kinship/relative foster homes or those pending certification.
- Licensed or registered child care providers.
- Schools; and,
- Juvenile detention or corrections facilities.

## SECTION 3 - INITIAL ASSESSMENT

### 3.1 Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<b>Critical incident</b>	A reasonable suspicion that a fatality or near fatality was caused by abuse or neglect or when abuse or neglect has been determined to have led to a child's death or near death.
<b>Drug affected infants</b>	Infants referred by medical staff, including hospital social workers, who are less than one year old, test positive for legal or illegal substances or prescribed medication or suffer from withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
<b>Near fatality</b>	An act that, as certified by a physician, places the child in serious or critical condition.

<b>Plan of Safe Care</b>	A Plan of Safe Care is a plan to ensure the safety and well-being for the infant born and identified as being exposed to and/or affected by legal or illegal substance use or withdrawal symptoms or testing positive for substances, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder following release from the care of healthcare providers by addressing the health and substance use disorder treatment needs of the infant and affected family or caregiver. This includes referrals to and delivery of appropriate services for the infant and affected family or caregiver.
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### **3.2 Initiation of the Initial Assessment**

The initial assessment is the second assessment within child protective services (CPS). The initial assessment determines who CPS will serve by assessing and reaching conclusions about caregivers who are unable or unwilling to protect their children from impending safety threats.

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of the initial assessment is:

- To respond in a timely manner in accordance with the allegations made within the intake assessment.
- To inform caregiver’s that there is a reported concern for the safety of their children.
- To engage caregivers in a process that provides a picture of the family and reveals whether children are in danger.
- To meet emergency needs that are apparent at the onset or during the initial assessment.
- To conduct a structured, thorough information collection process that includes all family members who reside in the home.
- To keep caregivers informed and appropriately involved in case decision making.
- To reach a finding regarding the existence of child maltreatment consistent with state statute;
- To determine if a child in the home is unsafe.
- To establish a sufficient, least intrusive safety plan when indicated.

#### ***Protocol***

The initial assessment provides a uniform, systematic, and structured approach to addressing allegations of abuse or neglect of a child. It is designed to ensure that a family centered approach is taken. The initial assessment begins with the preparation phase and continues until sufficient information is collected to make the necessary initial assessment decisions. It is important to understand that several steps in this process can be completed during the same visit with the family.

Steps for completion of the initial assessment and safety evaluation are:

- preparation;
- initial family contact requirements;

- Information collection;
- immediate safety threat assessment;
- safety planning;
- safety evaluation; and
- safety evaluation conclusion.

There may be referrals which require a variant response due to the nature of the allegations. Specific requirements related to certain reports can be found in *Section 3.17*.

### **Preparation**

Upon assignment of a referral for initial assessment, the child welfare worker will:

- Review the referral and all previous reports, referrals, records and documentation on the family which are relevant to CPS.
- Consider alleged threats of serious harm to the children.
- Determine if the referral requires a variant response based upon the allegations and review the corresponding policy requirements.
- If necessary, consult with a supervisor to determine the best course of action for responding to the referral.
- Develop a plan for completion of the initial assessment, considering a child welfare worker's personal safety needs and response time indicated at intake. The preferable site to interview the child is one that is child-friendly, neutral, confidential, and aides in a feeling of psychological safety. It is the position of the department that the choice of the site of the interviews and who is present during an interview is left to the discretion of the CPS staff. This choice is affirmed in [W. Va. Code §49-2-802](#) which requires certain groups to provide such assistance that will enable child welfare to fulfill its responsibilities. Such assistance can and should, when necessary, be interpreted to mean private interviews. There are some exceptions. If a child indicates that they would be more comfortable with a teacher, counselor or other person present during an interview, then the child welfare worker can include that person if the person is not the alleged maltreater. The alleged maltreater or non-maltreating parent may also indicate that they would like to have an advocate, counselor, attorney or other person present during an interview, and the worker must make arrangements to accommodate that request. However, **under no circumstances** should a child be left in an unsafe situation while waiting to make arrangements for the interview.
- Contact law enforcement, the prosecuting attorney, or the medical examiner if the report involves serious physical injury, sexual abuse, sexual assault, or death of a child, to coordinate any arrangements for a joint investigation/initial assessment. If the prosecuting attorney and/or the law enforcement official declines to proceed with a joint investigation/assessment, CPS must proceed as the sole entity conducting the initial assessment. The failure of law enforcement or the multidisciplinary investigative team (MDIT) to investigate reports of suspected child abuse or neglect does not relieve the department of its responsibilities to protect children. Reports alleging physical injury, sexual abuse, and critical incident will be automatically referred to the West Virginia State Police Child Abuse Unit. The referral to the West Virginia State Police Child

Abuse Unit does not abolish the requirement to contact local law enforcement.

- Contact the local MDIT according to the protocol established in collaboration with the prosecuting attorney and local law enforcement. An MDIT should be established in each county and should be headed and directed by the prosecuting attorney, pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-402\(a\)](#). The team should be responsible for coordinating or cooperating in the initial and ongoing investigation of all civil and criminal allegations pertinent to cases involving child sexual assault, child sexual abuse, child abuse and neglect ([W. Va. Code §49-4-402\(c\)](#)).

Supervisor duties:

- Review the referral and, if necessary, provide guidance on completing the initial assessment.
- Ensure that law enforcement, the prosecuting attorney or the medical examiner has been contacted if required.

### ***Personal Safety***

Within the scope of the duties of child welfare workers and other department employees, staff must take precautions to prevent harm to themselves. Before making client contact, child welfare workers should continually assess situations based on the nature of the allegation(s) or changing case characteristics. The following are issues for child welfare workers and supervisors to consider before making field visits.

- Are firearms or other weapons noted in the referral or record?
- Is there a previous history of domestic violence or other violent behavior towards others (this includes adults and youth)?
- Is there a history of criminal activity, mental illness, substance use, ritualistic abuse or cult practices?
- Is the family's geographic location isolated or dangerous and is there cell phone coverage in that location?
- Is the contact scheduled after normal working hours?
- Are there aggressive animals on or near the premises?
- Is there a "potential danger to worker" notification on the referral?
- Is there a lack of available information?

If the intake assessment reveals possible risk to the child welfare worker, the following could be considered as part of a personal safety plan.

- Ask for assistance from law enforcement for accompaniment and ask about known information regarding caregiver criminal history;
- Ask another staff person to accompany worker;
- Carry a cell phone;
- Use a state car rather than personal vehicle (or vice versa);
- Carry personal safety equipment, such as a whistle or personal alarm;
- Check with the prosecuting attorney's office or magistrate's office for information regarding criminal history or obtain history of complaints before making contact.

- Consult with other informal sources, such as local law enforcement, previous child welfare workers, collaterals, coworkers, or colleagues from other agencies.

During every interaction with clients the child welfare worker must do the following.

- Always notify a supervisor where they are going and how long they anticipate being there through their districts sign out protocol.
- Avoid wearing or carrying valuables into homes.
- Take only what is necessary into the home.
- Park in such a way that would allow the child welfare worker to leave the residence quickly if necessary.
- Be cautious entering homes where there are large groups of people.
- Do not invade the individual's personal space and never touch them.
- Be aware of the surroundings and identify potential safety risks.
- Always have a clear path to the exit, free from human or other obstacles that could block the ability for a worker to freely leave in the event of an emergency.
- Child welfare workers are expected to use state issued or rental vehicles for work purposes. However, in the event that a child welfare worker must use a personal vehicle in the execution of their job duties, it should be maintained in good mechanical condition.
- If the child welfare worker feels unsafe, end the visit and leave immediately; and seek assistance if children are unsafe in the home. Leave immediately.

Despite precautions, threats and other incidents may occur. Child welfare workers and other employees must immediately notify their supervisor, another supervisor in the office, or other person in the chain of command following an incident such as assault, a threat of harm to staff and/or family members or property damage. The supervisor or their designee will do the following.

- Provide the opportunity to debrief and explore the possibility of staff receiving counseling or other services.
- When warranted, report to law enforcement and request restraining orders for individuals and/or offices.
- Report the incident to the supervisor and social services manager (SSM).
- Any child welfare worker or other staff who suspect they have entered an area where methamphetamine is manufactured, will exit the residence and the property immediately and call 911 to request law enforcement response to address the safety of the children.
- Any staff person suspected of methamphetamine exposure should consult with their personal physician within two hours of exposure. ([W. Va. Code §60A-11-3](#) for more information).

### **3.3 Initial Family Contact**

Due to the nature of CPS, there are requirements that must be adhered to when initially contacting families. Those requirements include:

- Make face-to-face contact with the identified child(ren) in the time indicated as the response time on the referral. If unable to do this, the worker must document the reasons in CCWIS. All

initial face-to-face contacts or attempted face-to-face contacts with the identified child(ren) should be documented within three business days of the contact or attempted contact. The response time is the maximum amount of time that is allowed to contact the target child; it is best practice to contact the target child, other children and caregivers as soon as possible;

- Identify themselves as a child welfare worker from the Bureau for Social Services. Display state employee identification to all family members and any other individuals to be interviewed;
- Inform the caregivers, with a brief description, of the child abuse or neglect allegations, the reason for the contact and the process for completing the initial assessment. If permission to conduct interviews with the child is denied, then the worker will explain to the family that they must discuss this situation with the child welfare supervisor. Once the supervisor has reviewed the situation, the supervisor or worker must contact the prosecuting attorney or Regional Assistant Attorney for consultation on how to gain access, so that the child/family may be interviewed.
- The child welfare worker must notify parents of the intent to interview the child(ren) unless notification could compromise child safety. Initial contact can occur at school where children attend, if child safety **may be compromised based on the allegations or safety threats**. When it is necessary to interview/observe the child(ren) prior to notifying the parents/primary caregivers, the parents/primary caregivers **must** be immediately notified to inform them about the report and that the child(ren) have been interviewed/observed. The child welfare worker **must** provide the parents and/or caregivers with a full explanation about the decision to contact the children prior to their being contacted. This notification must be documented in the case record as a contact. The parents **must** be interviewed within 24 hours of initial contact with the children to gather information for the initial assessment.
- Provide the caregivers with the booklet, *A Parent's Guide to Working with Child Protective Services*. The child welfare worker will place their name and contact information in the appropriate place in the booklet. Briefly explain the content with emphasis on the parent's rights during the CPS process. The worker will assure the parents that they can help answer any questions they have during the assessment process.
- Ask the child's parents if they are represented by legal counsel. If the parents are represented by legal counsel, then the worker should not continue the interview without first obtaining the permission of counsel to do so. If permission to conduct the interview is denied, then the worker will discuss this situation with their supervisor. Once the supervisor has reviewed the situation, the supervisor or the worker must contact the prosecuting attorney or regional assistant attorney general for consultation on how to gain access so that the child/family may be interviewed.
- In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreaters have been arrested or charged with a crime, the child welfare worker must consult with the prosecuting attorney in order to coordinate the interview with the individual charged.
- If possible, the interviews should occur sequentially on the same day in the following order:
  1. identified child(ren),
  2. siblings,
  3. non-maltreating parent,

4. maltreating parent (see previous bullet for instruction on interviews with parents who have been arrested or charged with a crime), and
  5. other adults in the home
- If there is an infant in the home under age one, the child welfare worker should observe the sleeping conditions of the infant and review safe sleep practices with the parent or caregiver.
  - If two families reside in a household and maltreatment is suspected in both families living in the home, then separate referrals should be entered and both families assessed.
  - Assess for immediate safety threats and implement a temporary protection plan if necessary.;
  - Consult with a child welfare supervisor within 24 hours of contact with the identified child unless an immediate safety threat is identified. See *Section 3.8 Immediate Safety Threat Assessment* for more information.

Supervisors duties:

- Utilize CCWIS reports and/or supervisor logs to track face-to-face contacts with children and caregivers to ensure that child welfare workers are meeting the initial face-to-face time frames for interviewing children and caregivers.

### **3.4 Additional Allegations Received During an Open Initial Assessment**

After a referral/intake has been accepted for assessment, centralized intake must accept any subsequent referrals on that family which allege separate and distinct allegations and meet the criteria for acceptance. All open referrals should be assigned to the same worker. Each allegation must be investigated following its acceptance. Workers **must** make additional contact with the family to specifically discuss each new allegation.

Multiple accepted referrals on the same family do not require multiple assessments. In situations with more than one outstanding intake/referral open (alleged repeat maltreatment) workers can document all the information and analysis into one assessment. However, each referral must have its own initial contacts, validations and findings entered on all allegations. Each of these subsequent open referrals can reference the intake number of the completed assessment, and that referenced intake should fully assess all the allegations of maltreatment.

For referrals containing duplication allegations, see *Section 2.4 Duplicate Allegations Received During an Open Initial Assessment*.

### **3.5 Notifications**

#### ***Notification of Parents and Children's Rights***

CPS has legal and moral duties to notify clients of the allegations against them and their legal rights during CPS proceedings. Clients have an inalienable right to be as educated and involved as much as possible in the decisions being made about their families. An amendment to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) titled *Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003*, placed into effect higher standards of notification.

The more knowledgeable and invested families are, the better they can participate during CPS intervention. The worker is entrusted with the responsibility to share information with the family during key points throughout the intervention process, not just those concerning the initial assessment. It is also important to keep in mind that the way in which information is disclosed is important. The child welfare worker must balance the right of notification with the concern for not compromising any criminal proceedings that may be initiated as a result of the maltreatment. Clients have the following rights and must be advised of such by the worker.

- The right to be free from warrantless search and seizure.
- The right to be free from intrusion into one's home except upon lawful consent.
- The right to have information collected and maintained in the course of an investigation and delivery of services held in confidence in accordance with [W. Va. Code §49-5-101\(a\)](#).
- The right to be allowed access to one's personal file in accordance with [W. Va. Code §49-5-101\(b\)](#).
- The right to appeal the exclusion or inclusion of a parent or child from any service program and the right to request a grievance hearing with regard to either the manner in which the parents and the child are treated by agency personnel or any other concern related to the service programs of the agency.
- The right to refuse child protective services as well as the right to be advised of the consequences when individuals refuse said services.
- The right to be free from discrimination for reasons of age, race, color, sex, mental or physical disability, religious creed, national origin or political belief.
- The right to auxiliary aids to individuals with disabilities, at no additional cost, where necessary to ensure effective communication with individuals with hearing, vision or speech impairments.
- The right to be informed of complaints or allegations made against an individual in a manner that is consistent with law protecting the rights of the reporter.
- The right to be informed of the findings of child abuse and neglect investigations and how the findings will affect the family, as well as the individual.
- The right to be made aware of all actions taken in regard to the family throughout the life of the case and the reasons for such action.

### ***Notification to Individuals Subject of the Initial Assessment***

Upon supervisor approval of the initial assessment, a notification letter is completed and mailed to the parties, as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-4-601b](#), and documented in CCWIS. If there is not a substantiation of maltreatment of abuse and/or neglect in the finding of the initial assessment, the notification letter will be completed and mailed to the parties. If there is a substantiation of abuse and/or neglect in the initial assessment, a notification letter will be printed and signed by the child welfare worker. The worker will send a separate notification letter addressed to each individual maltreater listed in the intake and/or assessment, via certified mail. This must also include a return receipt for each individual letter requested within 15 days of the maltreatment substantiation. Failure to accept the letter will be deemed as receipt of the notice. A copy of the signed document will be uploaded to the electronic filing cabinet as well as the certified mailing receipt. An original copy of the signed notification letter will be placed in

the client's paper record. The letter must specify the victim(s) of the abuse and/or neglect for which the maltreater was substantiated, where the abuse and/or neglect occurred and when the abuse and/or neglect occurred. The letters will state that the maltreatment findings could affect employment or from providing foster or kinship care to a child in the future. The letter will also notify the family of their right to appeal and the process to request a grievance. (Please see *Section 8.2 Grievance Procedure to Contest the Substantiation of a Child Abuse or Neglect Substantiation.*)

If the child welfare worker or supervisor discovers a client did not receive their notification letter, it is the child welfare worker or supervisor's obligation to mail the appropriate notification letter as soon as possible. Each adult and alleged maltreater subject of the initial assessment gets their own letter addressed to them.

### ***Notification to Parents who are not Subject of the Initial Assessment***

In most instances, parents who are not the subject of the initial assessment should be notified if their children are unsafe or have been maltreated. This requirement does not apply if the case is unsubstantiated and the children are safe.

If the child has been maltreated or is determined to be unsafe, the parent who is not subject of the initial assessment must be notified unless there is good cause documented in the case file to show that the information would be seriously detrimental to the best interests of the child. Good cause would include documentation in the record of the following circumstances: no contact order with the parent who is not the subject of the initial assessment, the parent's rights have been terminated, or there is a documented pattern of violent behavior that could place the children in danger by the parent who is not the subject of the initial assessment.

This notification cannot be automated in CCWIS due to the complexity of the decision to notify. If the decision is made, to notify the parent who is not subject of the initial assessment, the child welfare worker should make attempts to contact that parent, by either calling or making a face to face contact, to discuss the safety of their child. If the worker is unable to make contact with this parent, a letter should be sent to notify the parent that their child is unsafe and provide contact information for the worker and supervisor. All attempts to contact and completed contacts should be documented in CCWIS.

*Notification at the conclusion of the initial assessment does not preclude the notification of parents not subject to the report during the initial assessment as part of reasonable efforts to prevent removal.*

### ***Notification to Mandated Reporters***

The [W. Va. Code §49-2-804](#) requires mandatory reporters to be notified of the department's decision whether or not to accept a referral and, if accepted, when the assessment of the referral is complete. Upon supervisor approval of the initial assessment, the mandatory reporter notification letter must be

completed and mailed. It is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that the mandated reporter received the notification letter.

**Notification Requirements Regarding Parents and Guardians in the Military**

During the 2018 Legislative session, [W. Va. Code §49-2-802\(c\)\(4\)](#) was revised to require the department to make efforts as soon as practicable to determine the military status of parents whose children are subject to abuse or neglect allegations. If the worker determines that a parent or guardian is in the military, the worker shall notify a Department of Defense family advocacy program that there is an allegation of abuse and neglect that is screened in and open for assessment that relates to that military parent or guardian.

The worker will do the following.

- Determine if a parent/parents of the child victim is a member of the military and the branch of the military in which they serve.
- Contact the appropriate branch by phone to make a report with the information below.
- Follow up the verbal report by copying and pasting the following information contained in the Military Letter to your county or district letterhead.

<p><b><u>ARMY</u></b>  <b>Family Advocacy Program, US ARMY Carlisle Barracks</b>  <b>Family Advocacy Program Manager for WV, OH, and PA</b>  <b>Kelly Villalobos, LCSW-C</b>  <b>632 Wright Ave.</b>  <b>Carlisle, PA 17013</b>  <b>(717) 245-3775-office</b>  <b>(717)962-5267 (cell)</b>  <b>Email: Kelly.j.villalobos@civ.mail.mil</b></p>	<p><b><u>NAVY</u></b>  <b>Family Advocacy Program Manager</b>  <b>Lolita T. Allen, LCSW</b>  <b>Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC)</b>  <b>716 Sicard Street, SE, Suite 1000</b>  <b>Washington Navy Yard, DC 20373-5140</b>  <b>202 433-4683 (office)</b>  <b>571-455-5155 (cell)</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:Lolita.allen@navy.mil">Lolita.allen@navy.mil</a></b></p> <p><b>Counseling, Advocacy, and Prevention (CAP)</b>  <b>Program Manager</b>  <b>Crystal C. Griffen, LCSW</b>  <b>Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC)</b>  <b>716 Sicard Street, SE, Suite 1000</b>  <b>Washington Navy Yard, DC 20373-5140</b>  <b>(202) 433-4597 (office)</b>  <b>(910) 546-1671 (cell)</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:crystal.c.griffen@navy.mil">crystal.c.griffen@navy.mil</a></b></p>
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<p><b><u>AIR FORCE</u></b>  <b>Clinical Director, Air Force Family Advocacy Program</b>  <b>Pamela S. Collins, LCSW</b>  <b>AFMOA/SGHW</b>  <b>Family Advocacy Branch</b>  <b>2261 Hughes Avenue, Suite 162</b>  <b>JBSA Lackland, TX 78236-1025</b>  <b>(210) 395-9156; DSN 969-9156</b>  <b>(210) 379-7262 (cell)</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:pamela.collins@us.af.mil">pamela.collins@us.af.mil</a></b></p> <p><b>Chief, AF Family Advocacy Program Christopher I. Patrick, LtCol, USAF, BSC AFMOA/SGHW</b>  <b>Family Advocacy Branch</b>  <b>2261 Hughes Avenue, Suite 162</b>  <b>JBSA Lackland, TX 78236-1025 (210) 395-9090;</b>  <b>DSN 969-9090</b>  <b>(210) 535-6906 (cell)</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:christopher.patrick@us.af.mil">christopher.patrick@us.af.mil</a></b></p>	<p><b><u>MARINE CORPS</u></b>  <b>Family Advocacy Program Manager</b>  <b>Jayne Hart, LISW, MBA, CEIM</b>  <b>Section Head, Family Advocacy Program (MFCP2)</b>  <b>Behavioral Health Branch</b>  <b>Headquarter Marine Corps Base Quantico</b>  <b>3280 Russell Road</b>  <b>Quantico, VA 22134</b>  <b>COM: 703-784-1290</b>  <b>CELL: 703-457-0603</b>  <b>Email: <a href="mailto:jayne.hart@usmc.mil">jayne.hart@usmc.mil</a></b></p>
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### 3.6 Information Collection

The child welfare worker must apply a child centered and family focused approach when collecting information during the initial assessment. This approach seeks to support and involve children, caregivers/parents, and other individuals in CPS intervention. The child welfare worker must make every effort to constructively engage children, caregivers, and other persons involved with and knowledgeable of the circumstances surrounding the information within the CPS intake assessment as well as additional information that may be learned during the initial assessment.

Detailed information must be collected through interviews, observations, and written materials provided by knowledgeable individuals, including complete demographic information. All documentation of face to face contacts should be entered within three business days of the completion of the contact. The child welfare worker must conduct sufficient interviews of sufficient length and effort necessary to assure that due diligence is demonstrated, and sufficient information is collected to assess threats of serious harm and determine if the child is abused or neglected.

The child welfare worker must conduct interviews with all parents and caregivers, children and other adults residing in the home, persons allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect/threats of serious harm,

and collaterals. To ensure that a family centered approach is taken, the following should occur when interviewing parents/caregivers, children and collaterals.

### **1. Children in the home**

- a. Individual, in-person, private interviews must be conducted with all children in the home within the response time designated at intake.
- b. Non-verbal children must be observed.
- c. If there are any infants under the age of one in the home, safe sleep conditions should be observed by the child welfare worker. The worker should observe the sleeping area of the child and discuss with the parent or caregiver safe sleep practices and recommendations. The worker should visit [Our Babies: Safe and Sound](#), for resources, educational material, and information to share with the family regarding safe sleep practices. The infant should have a separate crib, bassinet or “pack and play” that is clear of toys, heavy or loose blankets, bumper pads and pillows. The mattress should be firm and only covered in a snug fitted sheet. The infant should always sleep alone on their back in a smoke and vape-free space. The worker can also provide the parent or caregiver a copy of the [“Say YES to Safe Sleep”](#) parent brochure.
- d. The number and identity of all children residing in the home must be verified and documented. The verification source may include, but is not limited to, relatives, neighbors, friends or the department records. If verification cannot be obtained and all efforts have been exhausted, the child welfare worker must document efforts made, sources contacted, and information reviewed.
- e. When it is necessary to interview/observe the children prior to notifying the parents and primary caregivers of the intent to interview the children, the parents and primary caregivers must be immediately contacted to inform them about the report and then interviewed as soon as possible thereafter. The child welfare worker must provide the parents and primary caregivers with a full explanation about the decision to contact the children prior to their being contacted.
- f. Other children in the home who were not identified in the intake assessment must be interviewed in order to gather sufficient information to provide an understanding of whether they are also experiencing abuse/neglect or are at threat of serious harm and to determine if they have information related to what is alleged in the report.

*Note: When there are allegations of sexual abuse, sexual assault, physical trauma or other concerns regarding the genital, breast or anal/buttock area of a child, the child welfare worker must refer the child to be seen by a medical professional for examination and photographs, if needed, of the trauma. A worker shall not take photographs of a child’s genital, breast or anal/buttock area, even with permission of their parent/caregiver.*

### **2. Parents/Caregivers**

- a. Individual, in-person, private interviews must be conducted with all parents and caregivers in the home. Seek the parents’ and caregivers’ assistance with completing the initial assessment. The parents’ and caregivers should be interviewed separately with

the non-maltreating parent being interviewed first. The child welfare worker must also encourage and support parents/caregivers to ask questions and express their concerns about the initial assessment process and continued involvement with CPS.

- b. Interviews must focus on obtaining behaviorally specific, detailed information related to the alleged abuse/neglect/threats of serious harm and exploring family conditions and circumstances relevant to the allegations and initial assessment areas.
- c. The child welfare worker must be alert to evidence of any safety threats that were unreported or unidentified during the intake assessment.
- d. The child welfare worker must gather specific information concerning parents not subject to the initial assessment. Information should be gathered regarding the parental rights, custody and visitation of the parent. The information is needed in order to notify the parent if their child has been abused, neglected, unsafe and to make reasonable efforts to prevent removal or entry into foster care. (Note: Information should be documented in contacts and as appropriate in the initial assessment.)
- e. The child welfare worker must provide information about the initial assessment status and progress with the parents/caregivers as the initial assessment continues including:
  - i. concerns about child safety;
  - ii. status and oversight of the temporary protection plan (if one is in place) including parents/caregivers continuing attitudes, willingness, and concerns;
  - iii. general observations and impressions emerging from the initial assessment process; and
  - iv. specifics about any court activity, evaluation appointments; service provision issues that are a part of the initial assessment process.

### **3. Other Adults in the Home**

- a. Individual, in-person, private interviews must be conducted with all other adults in the home.
- b. The purposes of these interviews are to corroborate information provided by individuals previously interviewed; to obtain additional information regarding the alleged abuse/neglect/threat of serious harm; to assess their involvement in or association with threats of serious harm; and/or to assess them as a resource to provide protection to children who are at threat of serious harm.

### **4. Collaterals**

- a. Collaterals are any third party (e.g., friends, neighbors, relatives, or professionals) with information about the alleged abuse/neglect and risk of serious harm to the children.
- b. Collaterals are contacted to corroborate information provided by individuals previously interviewed, obtain additional information about the family, and to assess as protective resources.
- c. The child welfare worker must interview as many collaterals as needed to reach conclusions regarding the alleged abuse/neglect and threat of serious harm. All individuals known to have first-hand knowledge of the allegations must be contacted.

Interviews must be conducted individually and privately, by telephone or in-person. Collaterals can be interviewed at any point during the initial assessment. When interviewing collaterals stress the confidential nature of the initial assessment.

### ***Diligent Efforts to Locate Children who are Reportedly Abused or Neglected***

Child welfare workers are expected to make diligent efforts to locate children reported to be abused or neglected. Diligent efforts, in this context, are persistent, relevant attempts to locate the child and their family. Child welfare workers are expected to be creative and flexible in determining the whereabouts of families who are not located by routine means. The list **is not** all inclusive but identifies several sources which may assist the child welfare worker when attempting to locate a family or re-locate missing families.

- Visit the home after regular work hours.
- Mail certified letters to the last known address.
- Check the telephone book, directory assistance, internet phone searches such as [whitepages.com](http://whitepages.com) or [411.com](http://411.com), as well as the post office for alternative addresses or telephone number changes.
- Review the department case records, including but not limited to CPS records, APS Records, Youth Services Records, Oscar and Rapids to attempt to locate alternative addresses, phone numbers, and extended family members.
- Contact the schools and day care attended by the children to determine if they have information concerning a new school or address.
- Contact the reporter and any known friends or relatives to get information on possible whereabouts of the family.
- Contact the landlord for the forwarding address.
- Contact utility companies to determine if they have a forwarding address.

### ***Administrative Subpoena***

The [W. Va. Code §49-2-802\(g\)\(1\)](#) gives the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, or designee, the ability to issue an administrative subpoena in order to facilitate the location of a child suspected of being a victim of abuse or neglect. Should you believe that a child is subjected to abuse or neglect and a corporation, partnership, business, organization or individual refuses to provide information that would assist you in locating a child, the procedures below should be followed.

1. Directly ask the entity or individual for the information.
2. Make certain that the information being sought is not readily available from secondary sources;
3. If primary and secondary sources are not fruitful, consider issuing an administrative subpoena directly to the entity or individual. To facilitate this option, first contact the social services manager (SSM) for assistance. Delivery of the administrative subpoena by certified mail or personal service, or both, should be under the name of the SSM. Personal service should not be attempted by any department employee, but rather personal service should be performed by the aid of the county sheriff or a professional process server.
4. If the entity or individual provides the information requested, no further action is needed.

5. Should the entity or individual fail to respond or refuses to provide the requested information, the SSM should contact the cabinet secretary for the department, explain the circumstances in which the information is being sought and the response thereto and ask to be designated with the authority to invoke the aid of a circuit court for compelling the information under the applicable statute.
6. Once the SSM is designated, the SSM should contact the prosecuting attorney and request that they file a petition before the appropriate circuit court in order to compel the information sought.

If the prosecuting attorney is unable or unwilling to assist you in compiling the information before the circuit court, you should seek the aid of your Regional Assistant Attorney General or the Assistant Attorney Generals assigned to the Bureau for Social Services.

### 3.7 Initial Assessment Areas

The child welfare worker must make diligent efforts to gather behaviorally specific, detailed information related to each initial assessment area listed below. The initial assessment areas are specifically related to child safety and the information must be used to support and justify initial assessment decision making.

The initial assessment areas are as follows.

1. **Maltreatment:** The types of maltreatment apparent; this includes all types of maltreatment, physical injury or mental or emotional injury, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation, sale or attempted sale, domestic violence, excessive corporal punishment, failure or inability to supply necessary food, clothing, shelter, supervision and education. A specific description of the maltreatment which includes the type of injury or threats that occurred and to whom. The severity of the abuse or neglect, including the frequency and chronicity. A detailed description of the incident(s) which includes when (i.e. date, time), where (i.e. location), how it occurred, and whether any instruments (animate or inanimate) were used to threaten the child or inflict the injury; also who was present and who was responsible for the abuse/neglect.
2. **Nature:** The Nature (surrounding circumstances) which accompany the maltreatment; this should always include the caregivers' explanation of the circumstances related to the alleged maltreatment.
3. **Child Functioning:** Information is collected on all children in the home regarding how they function daily, including pervasive behaviors, feelings, intellect, physical capacity, and temperament. This must include consideration of capacity for attachment, general temperament, expressions of emotions/feeling, typical behaviors, presence and level of peer relationships, school performance and behaviors, known mental disorders (organic/inorganic), issues of independence/dependence, motor skills and physical capacity. The effects of any maltreatment should be documented in the Child General Functioning element. This element will be completed on all children residing in the home.
4. **General Parenting:** The overall, typical, pervasive parenting practices used by the caregiver(s);

this must include consideration of perception of children, reasons for being a parent, nurturing, understanding of child's needs and capabilities, expectations of child, satisfaction with parenting role, feelings about being a parent/caregiver, knowledge and general skill, basic care, decision making about parenting, parenting style, history of parental behavior and success, sensitivity and understanding toward children, empathy and expectations.

5. **Parenting Discipline:** The disciplinary approaches used by the caregiver(s), including the typical context; this must include consideration of when, how, where and for what reasons/purpose discipline might occur.
6. **Adult Functioning:** Adult functioning in respect to daily life management and adaptation; this must include consideration of communication, coping, stress management, impulse control, problem solving, judgment, decision making, independence, money and home management, employment, social relationships, citizenship and community involvement, self-esteem, life management, control of emotions, use of legal or illegal substances or alcohol, mental health functioning, use of violence to meet needs, and self-concept, will be documented in the Adult Functioning element. This element should be completed on each adult in the home.

### 3.8 Immediate Safety Threat Assessment

At the initial contact with the family or at any time during CPS involvement with families when new information is learned, when there is a reported crisis or new report, CPS will begin focusing on whether there are immediate safety threats to a vulnerable child's safety. Immediate safety threats can be identified at any time during the initial assessment, ongoing assessment or ongoing CPS case and if identified, a temporary protection plan must be implemented prior to leaving the family or situation.

Immediate safety threats are immediate, significant, and clearly observable family conditions (or threat to child safety) that is actively occurring or "in process" of occurring and will likely result in serious harm to a child. Immediate safety threats can be divided into four categories and include maltreatment, child, parent, and family. They are described in detail below.

#### Maltreatment

- **Maltreating Now:** Refers to caregivers who are maltreating their children at the point of contact during the assessment process. Maltreatment will typically be physical, verbal, or sexual in nature. This does not include indications of chronic neglect that are reported as being ongoing but may not necessarily meet the criteria for an immediate safety threat.
- **Multiple Injuries:** Refers to different types of injuries that are non-accidental and have resulted from child maltreatment. For example, a child who has a burn on their hand and their arm also has significant bruising, and information indicates that the injuries occurred as a result of maltreatment by a caregiver.
- **Face/Head:** Refers to any injury to the face or head including bruises, cuts, abrasions, swelling, etc. identified in a report and/or verified at any point of contact during the assessment process. There must be a determination that the injuries occurred because of child maltreatment by a caregiver. Injuries to the face and head which may have occurred last week, or month are not an

immediate safety threat.

- **Serious Injury:** Refers to injuries that are consistent with such injuries as bone breaks, deep lacerations, burns and malnutrition, because of caregiver maltreatment (action or inaction). This relates to serious injuries that are identified in a report and/or evident at the point of contact during the assessment or medically diagnosed concurrent with the report.
- **Several Victims:** Refers to the identification of more than one child who currently is being maltreated by the same caregiver. It is important to keep in mind that several children who are being chronically neglected do not meet the standard of immediate safety threat in this definition.
- **Premeditated:** Refers to child maltreatment by a caregiver that indicates that the abuse was deliberate, a preconceived plan or intentional. This may include information that indicates that the caregiver's motive was to inflict harm on the child.
- **Life Threatening Living Arrangements:** Refers to specific information which indicates that a child's living situation is an immediate threat to their safety. This includes serious health and safety circumstances such as unsafe buildings, serious fire hazards, accessible weapons, unsafe heating or wiring, guns/knives available and accessible.
- **Unexplained Injuries:** Refers to non-accidental injuries to a child which parents or other caregivers cannot or will not explain.
- **Bizarre Cruelty:** Refers to maltreatment that is exaggerated and seriously detrimental to a child's emotional and physical state. This includes such things as locking children up to keep them in an "imprisoned state," chaining up children, forcing children to eat off the floor, extreme physically demanding punishment, and serious emotional abuse. This qualifies the nature of identified maltreatment and requires interpretation to determine that abuse meets the definition of an immediate safety threat.

### Child

- **Parent's Viewpoint of Child Is Dangerously Negative:** Refers to an extremely negative viewpoint of a child that is identified in the report and/or clearly expressed by a caregiver at any point during the assessment process. This is not just a general negative attitude toward the child. The caregiver's perception or viewpoint toward a child is so skewed and distorted that it poses an immediate safety threat to that child. It is consistent with the level of seeing the child as demonic.
- **Child Is Unsupervised or Alone for Extended Periods:** Refers to vulnerable children (more likely to be a younger child) who are unsupervised and without care right now concurrent with the report and/or at any point of contact during the assessment process. The time of day, of course, is as important as is the length of time the child has been unsupervised. To qualify as an immediate safety threat, there must be information that indicates that a child is alone now and there is no responsible caregiver providing supervision. If the child was unsupervised the previous night but is not alone now, it is not an immediate safety threat of harm.
- **Child Needs Medical Attention:** Refers to emergency medical care that is needed immediately for a child of any age. To be an immediate safety threat, the medical care required must be significant enough that its absence could seriously affect the child's health and safety. In other

words, if children are not being given routine medical care, it would not constitute an immediate safety threat. It should have an emergent quality.

- **Child Is Fearful or Anxious:** Refers to children who are obviously afraid. The child's fear tends to be extreme, specific, and presently active. The fear is directed at people and/or circumstances associated with the home situation, and it is reasonable to conclude there is a personal threat to the child's safety if the condition is currently active. Information would likely describe actual communication or emotional/physical manifestation from the child's knowledge or perception of their situation.

### **Caregiver**

- **Caregiver Is Intoxicated (alcohol or other substance):** Refers to a caregiver who is currently drunk or high on legal or illegal substances and unable to provide basic care and supervision to a child right now. In order to qualify as an immediate safety threat, it must be evident that a caregiver who is primarily responsible for child care is unable to provide care for their child right now due to their level of intoxication. The state of the parent/caregiver's condition is more important than the use of a substance (drinking compared to being drunk; uses substances as compared to being incapacitated by the substances); and if accurate affects the child's safety.
- **Caregiver Is Out of Control:** Refers to individuals in the caregiver role who are currently acting incapacitated, bizarre, aggressive/extremely agitated, emotionally immobilized, suicidal, or dangerous to themselves or others at the time of the report or at any point of contact during the assessment process. To qualify as an immediate safety threat, it must be determined that due to a caregiver's state of mind, uncontrolled behavior and/or emotions, they are unable to provide basic care and supervision to their child right now.
- **Caregiver Described as Dangerous:** Refers to caregivers described as physically or verbally imposing and threatening, brandishing weapons, known to be dangerous and aggressive, currently behaving in an attacking or aggressive manner, or other such dangerous behavior.
- **Parent/Caregiver Is Not Performing Parental Responsibilities:** Refers to caregivers who currently are not providing basic care to their children right now. To qualify as an immediate safety threat, there must be information in the report or any point of contact during the assessment process that indicates that caregivers are not providing child care necessary and the absence of care poses an immediate threat to child safety. This is not associated with whether the parent/caregiver is generally effective or appropriate. It is focused on whether their inability to provide child care right now leaves the child in a threatened state at the time of the report or at the point of contact.
- **Caregiver Overtly Rejects Intervention:** Refers to situations where a caregiver refuses to see or speak with CPS staff and/or to let CPS staff see the child; is openly hostile (not just angry about CPS presence) or physically aggressive towards CPS staff; refuses access to the home, hides child or refuses access to child.

### **Family**

- **Family Violence Present:** Refers to family situations in which the alleged child maltreatment is accompanied by spouse abuse. To qualify as an immediate safety threat, there must be an

indication that the family violence associated with the allegations of maltreatment has occurred. This requires a judgment as to whether the family violence is actively threatening to family members right now concurrent with the report or at any point of contact during the assessment process. It is important to also consider if the child and spouse are being abused at the same time as a result of how the violence is occurring. D-LAG indicators that are considered in family violence as immediate safety threats are:

- o Possession, access and/or use of weapons
  - o Direct threats to kill
  - o Victim perceives that perpetrator might kill them
  - o Stalking behaviors
  - o Strangulation
  - o Intrusive coercive control
  - o Forced sex
  - o Victim has left or is attempting to leave the relationship
  - o Offender is unemployed
  - o Victim has a child that is not the perpetrator's child
  - o Violence is escalating
- **Family Will Flee:** Refers to situations where there are other possible threats to child safety and there is an indication that the family may flee CPS intervention. This qualifies as an immediate safety threat if alleged child maltreatment and possible threats to child safety are coupled with concerns about not having access to the children. This includes transient families or families where homes are not established as examples.

### ***Imminent Danger***

Imminent danger is defined in state statute, [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#). Imminent danger to the physical well-being of a child means an emergency situation in which the welfare or life of the child is threatened. Such an emergency situation exists when there is reasonable cause to believe that any child in the home is or has been sexually abused or sexually exploited or reasonable cause to believe that the following conditions threaten the health or life of any child in the home. Imminent danger is defined as the following.

- Non-accidental trauma inflicted by a parent, guardian, custodian, sibling, babysitter or other caretaker which can include intentionally inflicted major bodily damage such as broken bones, major burns or lacerations or bodily beatings. This condition also includes the medical diagnosis of battered child syndrome which is a combination of physical and other signs indicating a pattern of abuse.
- Nutritional deprivation.
- Abandonment by the parents, guardian, or custodian.
- Inadequate treatment of serious illness or disease.
- Substantial emotional injury inflicted by a parent, guardian, or custodian.
- Sale or attempted sale of the child by the parent, guardian, or custodian.
- The parent, guardian or custodian's abuse of alcohol, or drugs or other controlled substance as defined in section one-hundred one, article one, chapter sixty-a of this code, has impaired their

parenting skills to a degree as to pose an imminent risk to a child's health or safety. ([W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#)).

If a child in the presence of a child welfare worker is in an emergency situation which constitutes an imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child, and if the child welfare worker has probable cause to believe that the child will suffer additional child abuse or neglect or will be removed from the county before a petition can be filed and temporary custody can be ordered, the child welfare worker may, prior to the filing of a petition, take the child into their custody without a court order: After taking custody of such child or children prior to the filing of a petition, the child welfare worker must appear before a circuit court judge or a juvenile referee of the county wherein custody was taken, or if no such judge or referee be available, before a circuit court judge or a juvenile referee of an adjoining county, and shall immediately apply for an order ratifying the emergency custody of the child pending the filing of a petition.

For additional information on filing a petition, see *Section 9*.

### **3.9 Temporary Protection Plans**

With the identification of any immediate safety threat(s), it is the child welfare worker's responsibility to assure that children are safe while the initial assessment continues by establishing a temporary protection plan. Temporary protection plans are a specific and concrete strategy implemented the same day an immediate safety threat is identified before the worker leaves the family or situation, unless worker safety is being threatened. If the worker's safety is being threatened, the worker needs to get to a safe place, contact law enforcement if needed, then contact their supervisor for consultation.

A temporary protection plan must meet the demand for immediate action to control immediate safety threats while more information about the family is being gathered. When developing a temporary protection plan with the parents/caregivers, the following decisions and supporting rationale are important in the process and must be documented in CCWIS.

1. What are the options for ensuring safety during the temporary protection plan?
2. What is the parent's/caregivers' willingness to develop and agree to a temporary protection plan?
3. Are there appropriate adults who are suitable and willing to provide protection?
4. What contacts and arrangements need to be made with members of the family's support system or others to ensure the supervision of the child?
5. Are roles and responsibilities clear and well defined for the parents/caregivers and others included in the temporary protection plan?
6. Is the worker able to confirm and implement each step/aspect of the plan to keep the child safe?
7. Are the logistics of the temporary protection plan accounted for (e.g. safety resource/supervision timeframes, transportation, etc.)?
8. Is safety ensured for the child 24 hours a day for the entire plan?

In some situations, temporary protection plans may be implemented when an immediate safety threat has not been identified. All protection planning standards and requirements must be adhered to anytime a temporary protection plan is implemented. Temporary protection plans may be implemented in the following situations.

1. To complete interviews to confirm an impending safety threat.
2. To complete documentation and decision-making justification when an impending safety threat has been identified.
3. To complete rigorous safety analysis and planning when an impending safety threat has been identified.

The worker should consider the following questions for suitability and appropriateness when a resource within the family's network is being considered as a safety resource.

1. Does the safety resource have a criminal history or a substantiated child protective services or adult protective services history.
2. Will the safety resource be supportive of the terms of the temporary protection plan.
3. Will the family may be more accepting of the temporary protection plan if someone they are more familiar with is the safety resource.
4. Will the safety resource perpetuate the same negative family patterns that created the unsafe situation for the child?
5. What is the geographic proximity of the safety resource and will it allow them to be readily available to the family?

When creating a temporary protection plan, the worker must:

1. Inform the caregivers why a temporary protection plan is necessary.
2. Consult with the supervisor, insofar as possible, to determine the best course of action.
3. Identify with the caregivers what temporary protection plan options for ensuring safety are available and acceptable to develop the temporary protection plan.
4. Attempt to use resources within the family network to form the temporary protection plan.

Child welfare staff:

- a. **cannot** utilize a safety resource for a temporary protection plan that has a history of substantiated maltreatment of an adult or child, by child protective services or adult protective services;
  - b. **cannot** utilize a safety resource for a temporary protection plan who has a known criminal history; and
  - c. **can** submit a Home Study request for a safety resource to be considered for long term placement, if needed.
5. Confirm that there is agreement by caregivers and safety resources. For example:
    - a. if not seeking legal custody of the child, agreement may be that the safety resource will supervise all contact between the child and caregiver; or
    - b. if seeking legal custody of the child, agreement may be that the caregiver not have contact with the child.
  6. Verify that the safety resources are responsible, available, capable, trustworthy and able to

sufficiently supervise and protect.

7. Put the temporary protection plan in place prior to leaving the family or situation.
8. Consult with the supervisor, preferably before leaving the family but at a maximum within 24 hours of the implementation of the temporary protection plan.
9. If an immediate safety threat exists and the parents/caregivers are unwilling or unable to permit the child welfare worker to implement a temporary protection plan, the worker should consult with the supervisor about attempting to gain legal custody through court intervention. See *Section 9.3 Imminent Danger*.
10. Complete the Initial Assessment within seven days. In limited circumstances, the Temporary Protection Plan can be reauthorized only for a maximum of three additional days. In situations where children and parents **are not separated**, the Temporary Protection Plan can be reauthorized up to a maximum of three additional days. A reauthorization can be granted to collect more information to correctly determine if a child is experiencing an Impending Safety Threat and the appropriate safety plan can be implemented. The reason for the reauthorization must be clearly outlined in the case record and be approved by the CPS supervisor, and required consultation with a Child Welfare Consultant and/or Regional Program Manager prior to the approval, to determine if the reauthorization is appropriate and to assist the supervisor and worker in clearly identifying the additional information required to make the necessary decisions;
  - If the Temporary Protection Plan that has separated a child from their parent(s) is reauthorized for an additional three days, at the end of the reauthorization period, the child welfare worker must either return the child to their caregivers or file a petition for court oversight. The child shall not be separated from their parent(s) for a period exceeding ten days total without court oversight.
11. Document all information, supervisory consultation and approval and action taken on the appropriate initial assessment screens within CCWIS.

The supervisor will do the following.

1. Be available or arrange for availability of supervisory consultation for emergency situations.
2. Review all information available relevant to the immediate safety threat of the child.
3. Approve legal action to protect the child, if indicated and no other alternatives are appropriate or available.
4. Document supervisory consultation and approvals on the appropriate screens within CCWIS.

Temporary protection plan options include but are not limited to the following.

1. A responsible, suitable person agrees to reside in the household and supervise the child always or as needed to assure protection until the initial assessment is complete. If this is part of the temporary protection plan, visit the residence and complete a safety check.
2. The child is cared for part or all of the time outside the child's home by a friend, neighbor, or relative until the initial assessment is complete (maximum of seven days.) The parent/caregiver has **no** stipulations to their contact or access to the child as long as the parent/caregiver is

supervised by the safety resource.

3. A maltreating or threatening person, who has no custodial or legal responsibility to the child, voluntarily agrees to leave and remain away from the home and child until the initial assessment is completed.
4. The child is legally removed, through court intervention, from the caregivers and placed in an out of home placement pending the completion of the initial assessment.

The *West Virginia Safety Plan* form that indicates a temporary protection plan is being done, contains specific information that must be documented and clearly defined in the case record. This includes a description of the following.

1. Identified immediate safety threat including the circumstances in which the assessment of immediate safety threats occurred.
2. Parent/caregivers' attitudes and intent to support the temporary protection plan.
3. Name(s) of the responsible/protective adult(s) who agree to ensure safety during the temporary protection plan and an explanation of the person(s) relationship to the family.
4. Suitability of individuals that will ensure supervision and protection (e.g. trustworthiness, reliability, commitment, availability).
5. Details of the temporary protection plan (e.g., how it will work, time frames, activities, child location, caregiver and child supervision), the plan to communicate with the family and safety resources, and how the child welfare worker will oversee/manage the temporary protection plan.
6. Arrangements for visitation and contact with children **must** be described when the temporary protection plan involves parent/caregiver and child separation due to the children being removed by emergency ratification.

The child welfare worker must oversee the temporary protection plan as the initial assessment continues by seeing children and by having direct contact with those responsible for carrying out the temporary protection plan. Below are the purposes for oversight.

- to ensure that the temporary protection plan is occurring as agreed to;
- that those responsible for the temporary protection plan are carrying out their responsibilities;
- that supervision of parents/caregivers and children is occurring as planned; and
- that those responsible for the temporary protection plan continue to be committed to their agreements.

### **3.10 Impending Safety Threats and the Danger Threshold Criteria**

The danger threshold criteria must be applied when considering and identifying any of the impending safety threats. In other words, the specific justification for identifying any impending safety threat is based on a specific description of how negative family conditions meet the danger threshold criteria.

The *danger threshold* is the point at which a negative condition goes beyond being concerning and becomes dangerous to a child's safety. Negative family conditions that rise to the level of the danger

threshold and become impending safety threats, are in essence negative circumstances and/or caregiver behaviors, and emotions, that negatively impact caregiver performance at a heightened degree and occur at a greater level of intensity.

### ***Danger Threshold Criteria and Definitions***

- **Observable:** Refers to family behaviors, conditions or situations representing a danger to a child that are specific, definite, real, can be seen and understood and are subject to being reported and justified. The criterion “observable” does not include suspicion, intuitive feelings, difficulties in worker-family interaction, lack of cooperation, or difficulties in obtaining information.
- **Vulnerable Child:** Refers to a child who is dependent on others for protection and is exposed to circumstances that they are powerless to manage, and susceptible, accessible, and available to a threatening person and/or person in authority over them. Vulnerability is judged according to age; physical and emotional development; ability to communicate needs; mobility; size and dependence and susceptibility. This definition also includes all young children from zero to 5 and older children who, for whatever reason, are not able to protect themselves or seek help from protective others.
- **Out-of-Control:** Refers to *family* behavior, conditions or situations which are unrestrained resulting in an unpredictable and possibly chaotic family environment not subject to the influence, manipulation, or ability within the family’s control. Such out-of-control family conditions pose a danger and are not being managed by anybody or anything internal to the family system.
- **Imminent:** Refers to the belief that dangerous family behaviors, conditions, or situations will remain active or become active within the next several days to a couple of weeks. This is consistent with a degree of certainty or inevitability that danger and serious harm are possible, even likely outcomes, without intervention.
- **Severity:** Refers to the physical, emotional, or mental injury that has already occurred and/or the potential for harsh effects based on the vulnerability of a child and the family behavior, condition or situation that is out of control. As far as danger is concerned, the safety threshold is consistent with serious harm. Serious harm includes such effects as serious physical injury, disability, terror and extreme fear, impairment, and death. The safety threshold is in line with family conditions that reasonably could result in harsh and unacceptable pain and suffering for a vulnerable child.

### ***Standardized Impending Safety Threats***

There are 11 standardized impending safety threats that are used to assess child safety. The identification of any one of the 11 impending safety threats means that a child is in a state of danger. If an impending safety threat has been identified the child is unsafe. The following list of impending safety threats may be associated with a child being in danger of serious harm. When assessing children’s safety, consider the effects that any adults or members of the household who have access to the children could have on their safety.

**1. Living arrangements seriously endanger a child's physical health.**

Based on the child's age and developmental status, this threat refers to conditions in the home which are immediately life-threatening or seriously endangering a child's physical health (e.g., people discharging firearms without regard to who might be harmed; the lack of hygiene is so dramatic as to cause or potentially cause serious illness). To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information that justifies and describes how living arrangements/ conditions of a home threaten child safety.

Examples may include but are not limited to:

- a. housing is unsanitary, filthy, infested, a health hazard;
- b. fecal contamination;
- c. non-existent or ineffective waste disposal and containment;
- d. dangerous cooking practices, food storage, food preparation and food management;
- e. the home's physical structure is decaying, falling down;
- f. wiring and plumbing in the house are substandard, exposed;
- g. furnishings or appliances are hazardous;
- h. heating, fireplaces, stoves, are hazardous and accessible;
- i. accessible alcohol, legal or illegal substances, weapons, matches / lighters;
- j. natural or man-made hazards located close to the home;
- k. the home has easy access to dangerous balconies and upper floor window;
- l. dangerous people or activity within the home;
- m. illegal substance production;
- n. legal or illegal substance sales or trafficking; or
- o. gang activity.

**2. Family does not have resources to meet basic needs.**

"Basic needs" refers to shelter, food, and clothing. This includes both the lack of such resources and the lack of capacity to use such resources if they were available. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that a family is consistently unable to meet basic needs daily. The inability for a family to meet basic needs may be situational but is often more likely to be a longstanding pattern and problem. The inability of a family to meet basic needs may often be associated with a caregiver's inability to be proactive in planning; resourceful; and/or demonstrate follow through.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

- a. The family has no money for safety-related necessities and resources because caregivers do not pursue and maintain gainful employment or caregivers do not seek out and/or use available basic services such as food stamps, housing, food or clothing banks.
- b. The caregiver is unable to sufficiently manage the household; pattern of poor decision-making; lack of forethought; lack of planning.
- c. The family does not have access or the ability to obtain food, clothing, or shelter.
- d. The family finances are insufficient to support essential needs at the basic care level.

- e. The family does not have resources for serious medical care and the medical condition is such that if left unmet will likely result in a child being in danger.
- f. The caregiver lacks life management skills to acquire and properly use resources when they are available, which impacts child safety.
- g. The family is routinely using their resources for things (e.g. recreational substances) other than for basic care and support thereby leaving children without their basic needs being adequately met.
- h. The child's basic needs exceed normal expectations because of unusual conditions (e.g. disability) and the family is unable to adequately address the needs.
- i. Caregiver's functioning and decision making are such that a child's basic safety needs are not met; resources are not available and/or are not being used appropriately.
- j. Caregiver limitations result in the inability to gain, sustain, and use resources to assure a child's safety.

**3. One or both caregivers intend(ed) to hurt the child.**

"Intended" suggests that before or during the time the child was harmed, the caregiver's conscious purpose was to hurt the child. This should be distinguished from an instance in which the caregiver meant to discipline or punish the child and the child was inadvertently hurt.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

- a. The incident was planned or had an element of premeditation and there is no remorse.
- b. The nature of the incident or use of an instrument can be reasonably assumed to heighten the level of pain or injury (e.g. cigarette burns, submersion in scalding water) and there is no remorse.
- c. The caregiver's motivation to teach or discipline seems secondary to inflicting pain or injury.
- d. The caregiver can reasonably be assumed to have had some awareness of what the result would be prior to the incident and there is no remorse.
- e. The caregiver's actions were not impulsive, there was sufficient time and deliberation to assure that the actions hurt the child, and there was no remorse.
- f. The caregiver does not acknowledge any guilt or wrongdoing and there was intent to hurt the child.
- g. The caregiver intended to hurt the child and shows no empathy for the pain or trauma the child has experienced.
- h. The caregiver may feel justified, may express that the child deserved the mistreatment, and they intended to hurt the child.
- i. The caregiver behaved in ways to bring about serious illness or medical conditions to gain attention (i.e. Munchausen Syndrome).
- j. The caregiver kept the child tied up or in some other way restricted (e.g. locked in a basement or dark room) that terrorized the child.
- k. The caregiver employed situations, communication, interaction, and/or threatening behavior to terrorize the child.

- I. The caregiver force-fed the child or starved the child.

To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that a caregiver intentionally maltreated a child to inflict physical harm. The maltreatment may be chronic in nature or an isolated occurrence if there is a clear indication that the intent was to inflict harm. Regardless of the nature of the maltreatment or the harm caused, any information that suggests that a caregiver actually intended to inflict harm on a child is the essence of what is dangerous and a threat to child safety.

**4. Child is perceived in extremely negative terms by one or both caregivers.**

This refers to a perception of the child that is totally unreasonable. It is out of control because the view of the child is extreme and out of touch with reality. In order for this condition to apply, the negative perceptions must be active, and the perceptions must be inaccurate. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that a caregiver's negative perception of their child is longstanding; consistent and pervasive. The negative perception toward the child is apparently negative to a heightened degree that there are implications that the child is likely to be seriously harmed.

Examples may include but are not limited to:

- a. The child is perceived to be the devil, demon-possessed, evil, or deformed, ugly, deficient, or embarrassing; caregiver views the child as undesirable or the child is unwanted.
- b. The child has taken on the same identity as someone the caregiver hates and is fearful of or hostile towards; the caregiver transfers feelings and perceptions of the person to the child.
- c. The caregiver is completely intolerant of the child; the caregiver cannot stand to be around the child and isolates the child.
- d. The caregiver has completely unrealistic expectations of the child; has expectations for the child that are impossible or improbable to meet.
- e. The caregiver views the child as responsible and accountable for the caregiver's problems; blames the child for losses and difficulties that they experience (job, relationships, and conflicts with CPS/police).
- f. The child is punishing or torturing the caregiver.
- g. The caregiver views the child as an undesirable extension, exhibits extreme jealousy toward the child, or views the child as a detriment.

**5. The Caregiver is unwilling or unable to perform parental duties and responsibilities, which could result in serious harm to the child.**

This impending safety threat refers only to adults (not children) in the home who are or can assume a caregiver role. Caregivers who are consistently and/or routinely unwilling and unable to perform basic duties and responsibilities related to the provision of food, clothing, shelter, and supervision would fit this impending safety threat. This impending safety threat should be considered at a basic needs level. It is the absence of providing basic provisions that is

dangerous and directly affects child safety. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that caregiver(s) are not providing adequate and appropriate basic care for the child including supervision.

Examples may include but are not limited to:

- a. The caregiver cannot or will not provide adequate food, clothing and / or shelter.
- b. The caregiver does not provide adequate supervision; leaves the child for prolonged periods of time.
- c. The caregiver often does not know where the child is at; frequently allows a child to wander out of the home or does not monitor the child's location.
- d. The caregiver allows the child to play with dangerous objects or to be exposed to serious hazards and is unmanaged.
- e. The caregiver's physical or mental disability / incapacitation renders them unable to provide basic care for the child.
- f. The vulnerable children who often must fend for themselves; child is primarily responsible for taking care of the caregiver.
- g. Unable to locate the caregiver (s); caregiver incarcerated, abandonment, etc.
- h. The caregiver has a frequent pattern of making inadequate or inappropriate childcare/ supervision arrangements.
- i. The caregiver allows other adults to improperly influence (legal or illegal substances, alcohol, abusive behavior) the child and the caregiver is present or approves.

**6. One or both caregivers fear they will maltreat their child and/or are requesting placement.**

This impending safety threat refers to caregivers who are expressing a specific concern that they will hurt their children. It is the expression of a specific concern about maltreating the child that is a threat to safety. This threat refers to caregivers who express anxiety and dread about their ability to control their emotions and reactions toward their child. This expression represents a "call for help." To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information communicated from a caregiver that indicates that they are on the verge of losing control with the child; that they feel that they are at a breaking point and are concerned about hurting the child; and/or they do not want the child to be around them.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

- a. The caregiver states they will maltreat; may even use specific threatening terms, identifying how they will harm the child or what sort of harm they intend to inflict.
- b. The caregiver threats are plausible, believable.
- c. The caregiver describes specific conditions and situations that stimulate them to think about maltreating the child.
- d. The caregiver is preoccupied with thoughts of maltreating and harming the child.
- e. The caregiver worries and is fearful that they will lash out at the child.
- f. The caregiver identifies specific things that the child does that aggravate or annoy them in ways that make them want to attack the child.

- g. The caregiver describes disciplinary incidents that have become out-of-control and they are continuing to feel overwhelmed and they are concerned they will become aggressive with the child.
- h. The caregiver is distressed or "at the end of their rope" and is asking for relief in either specific ("take the child") or general ("please help me before something awful happens") terms.
- i. One caregiver is expressing concerns about what the other caregiver is capable of or may be doing.

**7. One or both caregivers lack parenting knowledge, skills, or motivation which affects child safety.**

The judgment is based on caregivers:

- a. Lacking the basic knowledge or skills which prevent them from meeting the child's basic needs.
- b. Lacking motivation resulting in abdicating their role to meet basic needs.
- c. Failing to adequately perform the caregiver role to meet the child's basic needs.

To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information that describes what essential knowledge, skill or ability a caregiver lacks that affects the provision of basic needs and protection, and/or a specific justification for how a caregiver lack of motivation to care for the child or unwillingness to perform in the caregiver role threatens child safety. It is the inability and/or unwillingness of a caregiver to meet basic needs that poses a threat to child safety.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

- a. The caregiver's intellectual capacities affect judgment and/or knowledge in ways that prevent the provision of adequate basic care.
- b. Young or intellectually limited caregivers who have little or no knowledge of a child's needs and capacity.
- c. The caregiver's expectations of the child far exceed the child's capacity thereby placing the child in unsafe situations.
- d. The caregiver does not know what basic care is or how to provide it (e.g. how to feed or diaper; how to protect or supervise according to the child's age).
- e. The caregivers' parenting skills are exceeded by a child's special needs and demands in ways that affect safety.
- f. The caregiver's knowledge and skills are adequate for some children's ages and development, but not for others (e.g. able to care for an infant, but unable to meet the needs of a toddler).
- g. The caregiver does not want to be a parent and does not perform the role, particularly in terms of basic needs.
- h. The caregiver avoids parenting and basic care responsibilities.
- i. The caregiver allows others to parent or provide care to the child without concern for the other person's ability or capacity (whether known or unknown).

- j. The caregiver does not know or does not apply basic safety measures (e.g. keeping medications, sharp objects, or household cleaners out of reach of small children).
- k. The caregiver places their own needs above the children's needs thereby affecting the children's safety.
- l. The caregivers do not believe the children's disclosure of abuse/neglect even when there is a preponderance of evidence and this affects the children's safety.
- m. The caregiver's knowledge, skill or motivation is not sufficient to assess, address and manage threats that might exist within the child's environment in the home or outside the home.
- n. The caregiver is not attached or bonded with the child and does not hold deep feelings for the child; is not involved with the child.
- o. The caregiver does not view themselves as being primarily responsible for making sure that the child is protected and cared for; does not identify with the child; is not interested in caring for or protecting the child.
- p. The caregiver is developmentally unprepared to be a parent.

**8. The Caregiver's drug and / or alcohol use is pervasive and threatens child safety.**

This threat directly relates to parental substance use, misuse or substance use disorder that significantly impacts family functioning and caregiver performance. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that caregiver(s)' substance use is a consuming aspect of their lifestyle. The substance usage is occurring to the degree and frequency that it is having a prohibitive impact on a caregiver's ability to provide for the basic care and safety of the child.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

- a. The caregiver's substance use renders the caregiver incapable of routinely and consistently attending to the child's basic needs, including adequate supervision.
- b. The caregiver's substance use consistently results in a caregiver becoming violent and/or lashing out at a child or other family members.
- c. The caregiver constantly uses substances and is frequently inaccessible to a child physically and emotionally.
- d. The caregiver's substance usage results in a chaotic home environment including numerous individuals coming into the house; parties at all hours; child being accessible to strangers.
- e. The caregiver's substance usage becomes the driving influence and number one priority over all other aspects of their life; substance usage is the defining characteristic of a caregiver's lifestyle.
- f. The caregiver's lifestyle results in legal or illegal substances and/or substance use paraphernalia being accessible to a child; caregiver allows and/or encourages the child to use and/or sell legal or illegal substances.
- g. The child is fearful of their home environment due to legal or illegal activity inside the home or traffic in and out of the home.

- h. The caregiver has routinely driven with the child in the vehicle when intoxicated or impaired by substance use or misuse.

**9. One or both caregivers are violent; this includes Domestic Violence and General Violence.**

This refers to adults / caregivers in the home who routinely and consistently relate to and interact with others in an aggressive, hostile, and/or violently impulsive manner. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that a caregiver's volatile emotions and tendency toward violence is a defining characteristic of how they often behave and/or react toward others. The caregiver exhibits violence that is unmanaged; unpredictable and/or highly consistent.

Examples of this impending safety threat may include but are not limited to:

***Domestic Violence:***

- a. The caregiver/household member physically and/or verbally assaults another adult household member; the child is present during the violence and may even attempt to intervene to protect the battered individual.
- b. The child routinely witnesses the violence in the home.
- c. The child is fearful for their safety and/or the safety of others in the home; the child is preoccupied with the violent episodes and is feeling insecure and highly anxious.
- d. The caregiver/or other household member threatens, attacks and/or causes injuries to another adult or child in the home.
- e. The violence has occurred in which a child attempted to intervene. Violence has occurred in which the child is harmed or may be harmed, even though the child may not be the actual target of the violence.
- f. The caregiver/household member consciously uses force, aggression, control and/or violence to threaten, punish and/or intimidate.

***General violence:***

- a. The caregiver whose behavior outside of the home (e.g. legal or illegal substance use or misuse, violence, aggressiveness, and hostility) creates an environment within the home that threatens child safety (e.g. drug parties, gangs, drive-by shootings).
- b. The caregiver who is impulsive, explosive, or out of control, having temper outbursts which result in violent physical actions (e.g. throwing things).

**10. One or both caregivers cannot control behavior.**

This threat includes frequently unmanaged; unstrained behaviors (other than aggression/violence) and/or emotions that pose an imminent danger of serious harm to a child. To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information to suggest that a caregiver's impulsive behaviors; addictive behaviors; bizarre behaviors; compulsive behaviors; depressive behaviors; cannot be controlled by the individual. The out of control behaviors results in the inability or unwillingness of the caregiver to provide for the basic needs and safety of the child.

Examples of this impending safety threat include but are not limited to:

- a. The caregiver is experiencing an emotional or mental health disturbance (e.g. severe depression, emotional immobilization, delusional, hallucinations), whether chronic or situational, and is unable to control their emotions or behaviors, directly and significantly affects child safety (including meeting basic needs). The emotional and/or mental health issue is so severe that the caregiver is unable to function adequately to perform caregiver responsibilities.
- b. The caregiver addiction is all consuming and results in their inability to provide adequate care for the child.
- c. The caregiver routinely makes impulsive decisions; a caregiver that is unpredictable; or in a state of constant chaos; a caregiver that often fails to make adequate plans for the care of the children and the failure to plan leaves the children in precarious situations (e.g. in a dangerous environment, unsupervised, supervised by an unreliable person).
- d. The caregiver mismanages money (e.g. impulsive spending), resulting in a lack of necessities.
- e. The caregiver has addictive patterns or behaviors (e.g. addiction to substances, gambling, computers, sex) that are uncontrolled and leave the child in unsafe situations (e.g. failure to supervise or provide basic care).
- f. The caregiver is not reality oriented and the inaccurate perception of reality results in the child being unsafe.

**11. Child has exceptional needs which the caregivers cannot or will not meet.**

“Exceptional” refers to specific child conditions (e.g. developmental delays, physical disability, dependency, serious health problems, and serious behavioral / emotional needs) which are either organic or naturally induced as opposed to parentally induced. The key here is that the child’s needs are so tremendous; constant and/or immediate that when left unmet or failed to be addressed it results in a threat to the child’s safety and well-being.

Examples of this impending safety threat include but are not limited to:

- a. The child has a physical or mental condition that, if untreated, threatens their safety.
- b. The caregiver does not recognize the condition for what it is.
- c. The caregiver views the condition as less serious than it is; minimizes the urgency or need to address the condition or act.
- d. The caregiver refuses to address the condition for religious, or other reasons, and it threatens the child’s safety.
- e. The caregiver lacks the capacity to fully understand the condition and the need to respond.
- f. The caregiver will not or cannot perform basic functions to meet the child’s exceptional needs (e.g., feeding tubes, breathing machines, medication, wound care) due to their own lack of understanding, motivation, or ability.

- g. The caregiver's expectations of the child are totally unrealistic in view of the child's condition.
- h. The caregiver allows the child to live or be placed in situations in which harm is increased by the child's condition.
- i. The caregiver's physical capacity (e.g., energy, robustness, and strength), accompanied by other distractions (e.g., limited motivation or conviction), is sufficiently limited and prevents their diligent need-meeting performance.

To identify this impending safety threat there must be specific information that identifies a child's exceptional condition and a caregiver's inability to meet or address that condition. This impending safety threat considers a caregiver's willingness and ability to manage and meet the specific needs including the level of demand, timeliness, regularity, knowledge, skill and oversight.

### **3.11 Safety Evaluation Conclusion**

Evaluating the safety of a child is a decision which is **separate** from determining whether child abuse or neglect occurred. The safety evaluation conclusion must be completed in all initial assessments. The safety decision must be based upon the finding of impending safety threats. The following decisions will be documented in the safety evaluation conclusion.

1. The children are safe or unsafe;
2. Whether or not the family will be open for ongoing CPS.

**The Child(ren) is/are safe (because):**

- No impending safety threats were identified. Based on currently available information, there is no child(ren) likely to be in danger of serious harm. No safety plan needed at this time. If a temporary protection plan is currently implemented, consult with a supervisor regarding the dismissal of that temporary protection plan.

**The Child(ren) is/are unsafe (because):**

- One or more impending safety threats were identified which threaten child safety. The case must be opened for ongoing CPS. Proceed to safety analysis and planning.

***Initial Assessment Conclusion: Decision to Provide Ongoing CPS and Transfer Summary***

In the initial assessment conclusion section, a child welfare worker will indicate the reason(s) why the family is or is not being opened for ongoing CPS in the appropriate CCWIS field. Specify in detail any immediate needs that were addressed during or at the conclusion of the initial assessment (if applicable). If a case is to be closed at the conclusion of the initial assessment, document efforts that were made to connect the family with agency and/or community-based resources and services when applicable. Document the family's response to the receipt of community connections. The decisions are as follows.

- Child(ren) in the household were identified as UNSAFE. The case will be opened for ongoing CPS. Proceed to safety analysis and planning in order to develop and implement a sufficient safety plan.
- There were no children in the household identified as unsafe. The case will **not** be opened for ongoing CPS. The family should be referred for community resources and services, if applicable, unless maltreatment was substantiated (see below).
- There were no children in the household identified as unsafe, however maltreatment was substantiated based on [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#). [W. Va. Code §49-2-802\(e\)](#) mandates that CPS is responsible for providing, directing or coordinating the appropriate and timely delivery of services to any child suspected or known to be abused or neglected, including services to the child’s family and those responsible for the child’s care. For this reason, the case will be open for ongoing CPS. See *Section 4.3 Ongoing Services to Children Abused or Neglected but Safe*.
- Ongoing CPS is court ordered.

Child welfare staff must justify the decision to open the case for ongoing CPS or close the case following the initial assessment and safety analysis in the appropriate text field in CCWIS.

### 3.12 Safety Analysis and Safety Planning

Safety analysis and planning must be completed in all cases where children are identified as unsafe and in need of protection.

The safety analysis determines the level of CPS intrusiveness with families in order to manage impending safety threats and assure child safety. Safety analysis results in the development and implementation of sufficient safety plans to manage identified impending safety threats. The appropriate safety plan must be implemented the same day that children were identified as in need of protection because of the safety conclusion.

If the answer is “**NO**” to any of the safety analysis questions below, then the worker will need to utilize foster care services to keep the child(ren) safe and pursue legal and physical custody from the courts (see *Section 9.6*). A child may be safely maintained in the home if the following question can be answered “Yes”:

- Are the caregivers and if applicable, youth willing for a safety plan to be developed and implemented and have they demonstrated that they will cooperate with all identified safety resources?
- Is the home environment calm and consistent enough for a safety plan to be implemented and for safety resources to be in the home safely?
- Are safety resources available at a sufficient level and to the degree necessary in order to manage the way in which safety threats are manifested in the home?
- Do the caregivers have a residence in which to implement a safety plan?

Once the child welfare worker determines whether the child(ren) can be safely maintained in the home, the worker will need to meet with the family to explain the initial assessment findings and the next steps. When the initial assessment information leads to a conclusion that a child(ren) is unsafe and is in need of protection, the child welfare worker must explain to the family why the initial assessment supports this determination and work collaboratively with the family to develop an appropriate safety plan.

If it is determined that a child(ren) cannot be safely maintained in the home but the prosecuting attorney will not assist the department in filing a petition to obtain legal and physical custody, the department **must** initiate the provision for Dispute Resolution, pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-501\(c\)](#). (Please Review *Section 9.6, subsection Role of Prosecuting Attorney* for additional information.)

During the safety analysis and safety planning process, it is necessary for the child welfare worker to meet with the family. This meeting should occur the same day impending safety threats are identified unless there are extenuating circumstances. The following must occur during the meeting.

- Thoroughly explain the safety decision and impending safety threat(s) that must be addressed to appropriately plan for the child(s) safety.
- Listen to the caregiver's concerns, answer their questions, and allow the caregivers to be an intrinsic part of the safety planning process.
- Engage the family in exploring safety resources and safety planning options.
- Identify absent parents and their locations/contact information.
- Meet with both formal and informal safety resources (extended family, friends, community resources) if appropriate to assist in safety planning.
- Implement the appropriate safety plan.

*Note: Workers must locate information regarding absent, non-custodial or non primary residential parents who are not subject to the initial assessment. These parents would need to be contacted regarding assessment, safety planning and in the event of the removal of the child(ren). These contacts should be appropriately documented.*

### **Safety Planning**

Safety plans are written plans to keep child(ren) safe until a case plan can be implemented to treat the family conditions which led to the child(ren) being unsafe. Safety plans contain coordinated safety resources, actions, and responsible providers and family members working to provide safety for child(ren). This plan may include time-limited supervision of parents/caregivers and their child(ren) to prevent court-ordered child and caregiver separation. These voluntary arrangements may be certain times a day or certain days of the week and must be staffed with a supervisor prior to implementation.

All safety plans must identify the safety threat and the service which will control the unsafe situation it causes. If foster care is a safety resource which must be utilized and the child(ren) and caregiver will

require court-ordered separation, then the worker must also include the plan for visitation between siblings (if separated) and caregivers with their child(ren).

If the child welfare worker uses a safety resource within the family network, the child welfare worker:

- **Cannot** utilize a safety resource for a safety plan that has a history of substantiated maltreatment of an adult or child, by child protective services or adult protective services.
- **Cannot** utilize a safety resource for a safety plan who has a known criminal history.
- **Can** submit a Home Study request for a safety resource to be considered for long term placement, if needed.

Child welfare workers must inform caregivers of their right to accept or reject a developed safety plan. Child welfare workers must also explain any alternatives or possible consequences to refusing a safety plan or not following an implemented safety plan. Safety plans must be signed by the child welfare worker, family, and safety resources and must be finally approved by the supervisor.

### ***Safety Planning that Requires Court Oversight for Removal of a Child***

A safety plan that primarily depends on separation of a child from their home and separation from parents/caregivers where immediate or impending safety threats are identified, requires court oversight.

Safety planning for cases that require foster care as a safety resource also require a safety plan, as well as a petition to be filed with the circuit court.

See *Section 9.6, Filing a Petition* for more information.

*Note: In cases of domestic violence, the worker should know that to stay safe some victims will use the Address Confidentiality Program out of the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office ([W. Va. State Rule §153-37](#)). Additionally, it is prohibited by [W. Va. State Rule §191-2-3](#), for a domestic violence program to disclose personally identifiable information of a program participant.*

### ***Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal***

The right of a parent to the custody of their child is a fundamental personal liberty protected and guaranteed by the Due Process Clauses of the W. Va. and U.S. Constitutions. "Reasonable efforts" have been a concept in child welfare practice since the Federal Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. The Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89 (ASFA), clarified this concept. Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act reasonable efforts shall be made to preserve and reunify families.

- Prior to the placement of a child in foster care, to prevent or eliminate the need for removing the child from the child's home; and
- To make it possible for a child to safely return to the child's home; if continuation of reasonable efforts of the type described in subparagraph (B) is determined to be inconsistent with the permanency plan for the child, reasonable efforts shall be made to place the child in a timely

manner in accordance with the permanency plan, and to complete whatever steps are necessary to finalize the permanent placement of the child. [42 U.S.C. §671(a)(15)].

Reasonable efforts to prevent removal is the term used to describe those actions taken by the department to prevent or eliminate the need for removing the child from the child's home and to stabilize and maintain the family situation. Before initiating any procedure to take custody of a child, the department must first determine that there are no appropriate or available resources that would alleviate or mitigate the safety threat to the child. The department makes reasonable efforts to prevent removal of the child by completing and documenting the processes for the initial assessment and safety planning.

In certain situations, reasonable efforts to prevent placement are not required. Those situations include the following.

- Imminent danger of serious bodily or emotional injury or death in any home. ([W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#)).
- The parent has subjected the child to *aggravated circumstances* which include, but are not limited to abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse ([W. Va. Code §49-4-602\(d\)\(1\)](#)).

The parent has:

- Committed murder of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian.
- Committed murder of another child of the parent or any child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed voluntary manslaughter of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian.
- Committed voluntary manslaughter of another child of the parent or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter or been an accessory before or after the fact to either crime.
- Committed unlawful or malicious wounding that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian or custodian.
- Committed unlawful or malicious wounding that results in serious bodily injury to another child of the parent or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary custody of the parent.
- Committed sexual assault or sexual abuse of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian.
- Committed sexual assault or sexual abuse of another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Has been required by state or federal law to register with a sex offender registry, and the court has determined in consideration of the nature and circumstances surrounding prior charges against that parent, that the child's interests would not be promoted by a preservation of the family.

- The parental rights of the parent to a sibling have been terminated involuntarily ([W. Va. Code §49-4-602\(d\)\(3\)](#)).
- Has a child that has been removed from the parent’s care, custody, and control by an order of removal voluntarily fails to have contact or attempt to have contact with the child for a period of 18 consecutive months: *Provided*, that failure to have, or attempt to have, contact due to being incarcerated, being in a medical or substance use disorder treatment facility, or being on active military duty shall not be considered voluntary behavior.

For information, see *Section 3.14, subsection Completing Initial Assessments When Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal is Not Required* [W. Va. Code §49-4-602\(d\)](#).

*Note: For more information on reasonable efforts and aggravated circumstances see the Legal Requirements and Processes: Child Protective Services and Foster Care Policy; the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1996) and the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997).*

### **Safety Resources**

Safety resources refers to services or resources identified as part of a safety plan utilized specifically for controlling or managing safety Threats 24 hours a day. Safety resources must control the safety threat immediately upon being put in place. Safety resources are categorized according to how they control safety within a safety plan.

When developing a safety plan, safety resources must be implemented which mitigate the safety threat and in turn allows the child to remain in the home and under care, custody and control of their parents/caregivers. Safety resources differ from long-term treatment responses in that they are strictly for controlling for safety. Safety resources can be “formal” or “informal” but must work in conjunction to ensure safety. Some “formal” safety resources are available as Socially Necessary Services (SNS) through the ASO or other department programs. “Informal” resources can include relatives, friends, neighbors or other community resources available to the family to help ensure safety for the child.

*For example: An infant is determined to be unsafe due to the caregiver being unwilling or unable to perform parental duties and responsibilities. The parent/caregiver agrees to allow a relative(s) and the SNS provider to assist them in preparing bottles, home making activities and assisting in bathing the child in the evenings and on weekends. The child is also in daycare during the week which provides a safe environment when the relative(s) and the Socially Necessary Services provider is not available. These safety resources would control the impending safety threat and allow the child to remain safely in the home while treatment services were being established based upon the ongoing assessment and subsequent case plan.*

**Formal and Informal Safety Resources** may include the following;

- **Supervision:** “Eyes on” oversight of the child or family which provides an active, ongoing assessment of stresses which affect safety and may result in necessary action. The emphasis

here is that the provision of supervision will assist in controlling one or more of the identified safety threats. The identified child or family requiring supervision must be within the defined boundary in which the safety resource can intervene immediately if needed to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being. The safety resource controls for conditions created by a caregiver's reaction to stress, caregivers being inconsistent about caring for children; caregivers being out of control, caregivers reacting impulsively and caregivers having detrimental expectations of children.

- **Parenting Assistance:** Assists caregivers in performing basic parental duties or responsibilities which caregiver has been unable or unwilling to perform. Basic parental duties and responsibilities include such activities as feeding, bathing, basic medical care, basic social/emotional attention, and supervision. The lack of these basic parenting skills must affect the child's safety. The use of safety resources must have an immediate effect on controlling the safety threats. This safety resource is different than formal parenting education in that it is strictly for controlling the safety threat.
- **Family Crisis Response:** Family crisis response is a face-to-face intervention in the family's natural environment to assess and assist in order to deescalate a family crisis which affects child safety and controls the safety threat. This safety resource differs from traditional individual or family counseling in that the emphasis is to provide immediate relief and support from the crisis being experienced. A crisis is defined as a situation which involves disorganization and emotional upheaval. These safety resources may target dysfunctional family interactions or environmental situations that have escalated to a point that affects the safety of the child and has resulted in an inability to adequately function and problem solve.
- **Home Management:** Aids with general housekeeping/homemaking tasks caregivers must do in order to provide a safe environment for their child. Examples may include meal preparation, grocery shopping, budgeting, or cleaning and maintaining a physically safe residence. The emphasis is on controlling the safety threat.
- **Social/Emotional Support:** Provision of basic social connections and basic emotional support to caregivers. The lack of support must affect the child's safety. The safety resource must have an immediate impact on controlling the danger. Once formal linkage to community support systems or access to supportive services, such as therapy or counseling, has been established, this service ends.
- **Emergency Respite:** Unplanned break for primary caregivers who are in challenging situations in which a trained provider, friend or family member assumes care giving and supervision of a child(ren) for a brief period. Respite may be provided in or out of the natural home or on an hourly/daily basis. Temporary relief from parenting responsibilities is provided to control a safety threat.
- **Respite:** Planned break for primary caregivers who are in challenging situations in which a trained provider, friend or family member assumes care giving and supervision of a child(ren) for a brief period to control a safety threat. Respite may be provided in or out of the natural home or on an hourly/daily basis. Respite may also be utilized if the caregiver has a scheduled inpatient medical procedure.
- **Private Transportation:** Provision of transportation services in a personal vehicle to obtain

goods or services provided to control a safety threat.

- **Public Transportation:** Provision of transportation on buses, planes, and/or trains to obtain goods or services provided to control a safety threat.
- **Hospitalization:** Admission of a child and/or caregiver into a physical or mental health hospital. The condition requiring admission must relate to the danger which affects the child's safety.
- **Child Care:** Direct care provided to a child for a portion of a day in an approved child care program. The service responds to conditions where the child care responsibilities of the caregivers affect the child's safety. In addition to meeting the needs of the child, the service provides relief for the caregiver.
- **Financial services:** Provision of financial assistance to the family in meeting the child's safety needs which results from the lack of finances. This includes the lack of utilities which present an immediate threat to the child's well-being.
- **Housing:** Provision of housing or the securing of more affordable housing for a family where the lack of housing is affecting the child's safety.
- **Food/clothing resources:** Provision of food and clothing when the child does not have adequate food and/or clothing and the lack of these life necessities affect the child's safety. The family cannot afford to provide these necessities to the child.
- **Other safety resources (must specify):** any other safety resource which may directly relate to controlling the immediate safety of the child and has not otherwise been listed.

Safety resources may be provided by informal or natural supports, such as family members, community members or friends, without payment and/or may be provided by the child welfare staff.

The child welfare worker should check all available resources for payments for service including, but not limited to the following.

- Private insurance
- Medicaid
- LIEAP
- TANF
- SNAP
- Emergency assistance
- HUD and low-income housing assistance
- Family income
- Community agencies and resources
- CHIP
- Charitable and faith-based organizations
- Public Health Department
- Free Health Clinics
- Comprehensive Behavioral Health Centers
- WIC
- Child Care program
- Homeless program

- Volunteer organizations
- WVRx

Some families may be eligible for a special medical card or payments for housing, food and utilities. See *Section 8.5* for more information.

### ***Safety Services and Socially Necessary Services***

Socially Necessary Services (SNS) are formal services and interventions to help preserve or reunify the family. SNS assists in achieving the child welfare goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

The BSS administers the provision of some SNS through an Administrative Services Organization (ASO) which is managed by Acentra.

One of the services provided through SNS is safety services. The safety services bundle includes the following.

- Scheduled In-Person Observation
- Unscheduled In-Person Observation
- Basic Parenting Skills
- Navigation and Support
- Urgent Adult Skill Building
- Urgent Home Sanitation

The family may receive 200 hours of the safety services bundle over a 92-day period and may be reauthorized for limited reasons. The services may be more intensive at the beginning of the service period and less intensive at the end of the service period, if needed. The child welfare worker should specify the intensity/frequency of the services in the safety plan. All services in the bundle do not have to be provided to every family. The services must be apportioned according to the need to control the safety threat and must be specified in the safety plan.

Other safety services that can be provided through the SNS in conjunction with the safety services bundle are:

- Hourly Respite
- Public or Private Transportation

The child welfare worker must develop the safety plan and make the referrals to the necessary safety services as needed.

For more information about SNS, refer to the [Utilization Management Guidelines Manual](#).

### 3.13 Statutory Remedies for Protecting Children

Chapter 49 of the West Virginia Code provides several legal remedies for protecting children. The circuit court can, under certain specified circumstances, address the condition of children in need of protection, and as necessary, enter an order directing that certain actions be taken to promote the safety of children.

The court should be used, when necessary, to ensure children the protection they need. In order to properly use the services of the court, child welfare workers and supervisors must understand all the possible options available to the court and select those which can be of benefit to each family they serve on a case-by-case basis.

The following are examples of situations in which the assistance of the circuit court can be sought. This list is not exhaustive. The proper use of the court requires close collaboration between the child welfare worker and supervisor, and, as necessary, consultation with the prosecuting attorney and/or regional assistant attorney general.

1. When a report of suspected abuse or neglect has been received and the parents refuse to allow access to the children to be interviewed, court intervention may be appropriate. The relief that could be sought would be a petition to the court seeking judicial sanction for those actions necessary to complete the assessment to determine if the child is unsafe. Those actions may include access to the home, to the child, or other steps necessary to determine if the child is unsafe.
2. When immediate safety threats or imminent danger exists and there are no safety resources available and/or the primary caregivers are unwilling to permit the child welfare worker to implement a protection plan. The relief that could be sought would be a petition to the court seeking legal and physical custody to place the child in a safe environment.
3. When a child is unsafe, and the safety analysis determines that a safety plan is required, the child welfare worker may need to utilize foster care services in the safety plan.. The relief that could be sought would be a petition to the court seeking legal and physical custody to place the child in a safe environment.
4. When aggravated or other circumstances exist as described in [W. Va. Code §49-4-602\(d\)](#). (see *Section 3.14, subsection Completing Initial Assessments When Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal Are Not Required*)
5. A co-petition with the non-offending parent may be filed with the circuit court even in circumstances where the parents or guardians are no longer living together, separated or divorced and the offending parent or guardian would be substantiated against for child abuse and/or neglect. The department shall not request physical **or** legal custody of the children as the non-offending parent will maintain care, custody and control of their children. If the non-offending parent or guardian does not have physical or legal custody of the children, the department can request physical or legal custody to be placed with the non-offending parent.

See *Section 9.6* for more information on filing a petition.

### 3.14 Completion of the Initial Assessment

To conclude the initial assessment, the worker will:

- Complete the documentation of the initial assessment when sufficient information has been gathered to make the decisions in the safety assessment and safety evaluation. The maximum timeframe for completion of the initial assessment is within 30 days from receipt of the report. If extenuating circumstances have prevented the completion of the initial assessment within the time frame, the worker must request the approval of an extension from the supervisor.
- Contact the family to discuss the findings from the initial assessment. This contact can be made in person or by phone if the case will not be open for ongoing CPS.
- Make a referral for SNS - Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan, Case Management Services, and Agency Transportation if the child is safe **but** maltreatment did occur. See *Section 4.3* for further instruction.
- Electronically transmit the case to the supervisor for review and approval.

The supervisor will complete the following steps:

- Use CCWIS reports and supervisor logs to monitor the assessment and due dates to ensure the completion of initial assessments within 30 days, follow up with child welfare workers weekly, and identify delays in completing the initial assessment within the time frame.
- If requested, review the request for an extension of the time frames for the completion of the initial assessment and make a decision, as indicated. Reasons for granting an extension may include:
  - assigned workload prevented completion;
  - delay in receipt of necessary information;
  - assessment complete, paperwork pending;
  - other cases/reports have taken priority due to identified safety threats;
  - unable to yet contact client or client has not cooperated; or
  - other (must specify).
- Review the initial assessment as well as any safety plan for thoroughness and completeness.
- Review the procedure followed by the worker in completing the initial assessment.
- Review whether the information is sufficient to make the necessary decisions.
- Review whether all of the required CCWIS screens were completed.
- Review whether the information is documented in the correct initial assessment areas. (Is the documentation coherent? Does it contain appropriate and sufficient information? Are the sources of information cited?)
- Review whether necessary information was obtained from collaterals.
- Review whether the contacts are documented appropriately in order to show due diligence in collecting information.
- Review whether the MDIT was involved as appropriate.
- Review whether the presence of maltreatment is documented and correct.

Review whether impending safety threats have been identified.

- Review the adequacy and the specific details of the safety plan in terms of resources utilized, frequency, and if safety is ensured 24 hours a day throughout the plan.
- Based on the conclusions from the initial assessment, determine if CPS should provide, direct or coordinate ongoing services for the family or whether no ongoing service needs is present.
- Ensure the notification letters regarding maltreatment findings are mailed out once the initial assessment is approved.
- Initiate arrangements to transfer the case for ongoing CPS services, if needed.
- Ensure that either a safety plan has been developed and implemented in all situations in which a child has been determined to be unsafe.
- Review if a referral for a required early intervention service such as Birth-to-Three was made.
- Review whether the SNS referral for a Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan, Case Management, and Agency Transportation was made as appropriate.
- Document supervisory consultation and approval within the appropriate screens within CCWIS.
- Ensure that mandated reporters receive notification at the conclusion of the initial assessment.

If the initial assessment or safety plan is unsatisfactory for any reason, the supervisor will do the following.

- Meet with the worker to discuss the areas that need improvement.
- Provide or arrange for any assistance that the worker needs to make the requested improvements.
- Ensure that the improvements are made, prior to approving the initial assessment and safety plan.

At the conclusion of the initial assessment, if the decision is to open the case for ongoing CPS, the initial assessment supervisor and ongoing supervisor will designate a time for both them and the initial assessment worker and ongoing worker to meet for the case transfer meeting to discuss the family and any needed actions.

The initial assessment worker will ensure that any needed safety resources have been put into place and the safety plan has been signed. Any needed SNS referrals should be made by the initial assessment worker.

### ***Maltreatment Findings***

During the Initial Assessment, the child welfare worker gathers information in Initial Assessment Areas related to child safety, including Maltreatment and Nature. The specific, detailed information in the Maltreatment and Nature Assessment Areas must be analyzed to determine if maltreatment did or did not occur. The Maltreatment finding is based on whether “a preponderance of the evidence” (e.g., eye

witness accounts, worker observations, medical reports, professional evaluations) obtained during the Initial Assessment would lead the child welfare worker to conclude that maltreatment (abuse/neglect) did or did not occur. The legal definition of an abused or neglected child is the standard for determining that a child has been abused or neglected *Section 1.9 General Definitions* further defines caregiver conduct and/or conditions that meet the statutory definition of an abused or neglected child. The operational definitions must be examined when making a finding of maltreatment.

Maltreatment is considered to have occurred when a preponderance of the credible evidence indicates that the conduct of the caregiver falls within the boundaries of the statutory and operational definitions of abuse or neglect. Maltreatment is considered to not have occurred when a preponderance of the credible evidence indicates that the conduct of the caregiver does not fall within the boundaries of the statutory and operational definitions of abuse or neglect. After **diligent** information collection, if the worker is unable to determine by a preponderance of the evidence that maltreatment had occurred then the finding must reflect that decision. The Statutory definitions of child abuse and neglect can be found in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#) as well as *Section 1.9 General Definitions*.

*Note: Adoptive parents have all the same rights and privileges concerning the adopted child that a biological parent has. These rights include the right to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of the child. An adoptive parent merely allowing a child to be around a former parent that was barred from having contact with the child in a prior court order is not grounds for a finding of abuse and neglect. There must be evidence of a safety threat or that maltreatment is occurring as a result of the adoptive parent's decision for abuse and neglect to be substantiated. See Adoption Policy.*

### ***Completing Initial Assessments When Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal are Not Required***

The department is not required to make reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of a child if the court determines the parent has subjected the child to *Aggravated Circumstances*, [W. Va Code §49-4-602\(d\)](#), which include but are not limited to abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse. Other instances when reasonable efforts are not required are when the parent has done the following.

- Subjected the child, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent to aggravated circumstances which include, but are not limited to, abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse.
- Committed murder of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed voluntary manslaughter of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter or been an accessory before or after the fact to either crime.

- Committed unlawful or malicious wounding that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, to another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed sexual assault or sexual abuse of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Has been required by state or federal law to register with a sex offender registry and the court has determined in consideration of the nature and circumstances surrounding the prior charges against the parent, that the child's interests would not be promoted by a preservation of the family.
- The parental rights of the parent to another child have been terminated involuntarily.

*Note: The child welfare worker can present to the court information about the acts of a parent other than those described above and ask that the court consider these acts as aggravated circumstances.*

When completing the initial assessment on referrals alleging aggravated circumstances or other situations not requiring reasonable efforts to prevent removal, the child welfare worker must also do the following.

- If the parent's rights to previous children had been terminated, examine the circumstances of the removal and termination to determine what actions, if any, the parent has taken to remedy the circumstances which led to the prior termination(s).
- File a petition with the court detailing the conditions which would not require reasonable efforts to prevent removal, what actions, if any, the parent has taken to remedy the circumstances which led to the prior termination(s), as well as the results of the initial assessment and safety evaluation.
- If the results of the initial assessment indicate that the child/children are safe but the judge orders ongoing CPS Involvement, contact the appropriate CWC or regional program manager to discuss proceeding with the case.

### ***Policy Exceptions to Waive Completion of the Initial Assessment***

All initial assessments are to be thoroughly completed however there may be circumstances in which, through consultation, a worker and supervisor may determine that it is not necessary to complete a full initial assessment. In these circumstances, they may request a policy exception to waive completion of the initial assessment. All requests must be submitted for approval to the child welfare consultant (CWC) or regional program manager (RPM) for consideration of the policy exception no later than 15 days prior to the due date of the initial assessment to ensure timely review and approval. This will allow time for completion of the initial assessment if the request is denied. Those referrals include:

- **False Reports:**
  - **False Reports, when the family, child or location does not exist.** This would apply only to situations in which the worker finds that the reported family does not exist, or the location does not exist and the interview protocol cannot be followed. For example, a report alleges that a child is left unattended on the side of the road. Upon arrival at the

location, the worker does not find any child on the road and can find no such situation or family. This does **not** apply to situations in which the worker has a face to face contact with the identified child and does not observe any visible signs of maltreatment.

- **False Reports, when the family or child does exist, but the reported situation is clearly inaccurate.** This would apply to circumstances in which sufficient information has been gathered through interviews and other documentation (See *CPS Policy Section 3.3 Initial Family Contact*) and it is determined that the reported situation is clearly inaccurate, and there are **no** additional allegations of abuse or neglect discovered nor safety threats identified during the assessments. Again, this would **not** apply to situations where the allegations that were reported are not substantiated as abuse or neglect of a child.
  - An example of this would be when a report is received alleging that a six year old child has a black eye and the reporter suspects it may have been inflicted by the child's caretakers. When the child welfare worker responds, it is found that the child does not have a black eye, and through interviews it is determined that the child had been playing with eyeshadow on the bus with friends and they had shaded around his eye with the makeup.
  - An additional example may be that the living conditions are deplorable/life threatening and pose an immediate safety threat to the children. When the child welfare worker responds, it is found that the home is clean and safe.

All interviews completed and attempted must be thoroughly documented and the Immediate Safety Threat assessment completed in CCWIS before a request for a policy exception to waive completion of an Initial Assessment can be approved.

- **Child Turned 18 During Initial Assessment:** This would apply to situations in which the identified child turned 18 during the initial assessment and there are no other siblings/children under 18 years of age in the home.
- **Death of a Child:** This would apply to situations in which the identified child dies during the initial assessment and there are no other siblings/children under 18 years of age in the home. In this situation, information learned during the initial assessment must be documented in CCWIS.
- **Client Moved/Unable to Locate:** This would apply to situations in which the child and family have moved, and/or the child or family cannot be located. It **does not** apply to situations in which the family moves to another county and the worker knows the new location. Those referrals should be transferred to the new county. If a family moves to another state, a referral must be made to the other state. Prior to concluding an initial assessment as incomplete due to inability to locate, the worker **must** first exhaust all available remedies to locate the family, including the Administrative Subpoena Protocol if appropriate.
- **Duplicate Entry of Data:** This would apply to situations in which an initial assessment was already completed or in process on the same allegation, but the report was mistakenly accepted and assigned rather than screened out. For example, a report is made by a daycare center that a child is malnourished. The report is accepted for an initial assessment and is assigned to a child welfare worker. The next day a report is made by a pediatrician that a child is malnourished. For whatever reason, the report is accepted. The referral is assigned to another worker. Both workers begin an initial assessment only to discover they are working the same case. The

second initial assessment may be discontinued and a policy exception to waive completion of the initial assessment, due to duplicate entry of data, may be requested.

### **3.15 WV Birth to Three Program Referrals**

Children who have been abused or neglected are at considerable risk for a range of developmental delays. WV Birth to Three provides early intervention services, under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, to eligible infants and toddlers who are experiencing substantial developmental delays or who are at risk of substantial developmental delay if early intervention services were not provided.

Pursuant to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), children under three for whom maltreatment has been substantiated must be referred to the WV Birth to Three Program in order to be screened for the presence of the above-stated delays and risks.

If there are children younger than three years of age in the home for whom the worker has substantiated maltreatment, the worker will do the following.

- Inform the child's family that a referral to WV Birth to Three is required by federal law.
- Complete the referral form for Early Intervention Part C, Birth-to-Three services within two working days of entering a substantiated disposition into the CCWIS system. Send a copy to the WV Birth to Three Regional Administrative Unit in which the child resides, file in the CCWIS file cabinet and provide the family with a copy.
- When appropriate, request the family's written consent for release of information to share pertinent information regarding the child's health and/or developmental status or if Birth-to-Three Staff should be made aware of specific safety concerns.

WV Birth to Three must also be considered for all children under the age of three when abuse or neglect was not substantiated but through the initial assessment process have been identified as experiencing or at risk of developing substantial delays or atypical developmental patterns or; have been determined to fall under at-risk categories.

### **3.16 Initial Assessments When Children are Determined to be Abused or Neglected but Safe**

Once the supervisor reviews the initial assessment and/or consults with the child welfare worker and agrees that there is abuse or neglect but there are no identified impending Safety Threats in the home, the following must occur by either the child welfare worker or supervisor.

- contact the family to discuss the findings from the initial assessment.
- explain to the family that due to a finding that abuse or neglect occurred, either a child welfare worker will complete a services plan or a referral to an SNS provider will be made for the completion of a needs assessment and services plan. Inform the caregivers of the issues/dynamics that may have led to the abuse or neglect as well as the expectations of CPS, the providers when appropriate, as well as the family's expectations.

- discuss the case with the ongoing CPS supervisor and open the family for ongoing CPS (See *Section 4.3 Ongoing Services to Children Abused or Neglected but Safe* for additional information).

### **3.17 Additional Requirements of Initial Assessments for Certain Reports of Abuse and Neglect**

#### ***Initial Assessments Involving Another Jurisdiction***

For initial assessments involving another state, the worker will do the following.

- Document any reasons for not following the established protocol for completing an initial assessment.
- Follow the plan that was established by the two jurisdictions for handling the case, which may include a courtesy interview only. If so, the interview should be handled within CCWIS as a request to receive services. If the other state is conducting a courtesy interview for this state, the information received should be used in the appropriate elements for initial assessment.

The supervisor will complete the following steps.

- Document any reason for not following the established protocol for completing an initial assessment.
- Ensure that the plan that was established by the two jurisdictions for handling the case was followed.
- Initiate any necessary arrangements to transfer the case to another jurisdiction, which may include a telephone call or letter to the supervisor of the other jurisdiction, or to ensure that a referral to community services was completed.

For initial assessments involving another district, the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Document any reason for not following the established protocol for completing initial assessments.
- Follow the plan that was established by the two districts for handling the case, which may include a courtesy interview only. Depending upon the case situation, it may be necessary for both districts to work together to conduct an initial assessment. Workers may travel to another district to conduct an interview at the discretion of the supervisors involved. The decision should be made in consideration of what will be the most effective manner for the child in which to conduct the assessment. Generally, the child's county of residence would be considered the home district of jurisdiction and the district in which the alleged incident occurred would conduct any necessary courtesy interviews. If both parents live in the same county, but the abuse occurred in another county, the county where the child resides would be the appropriate jurisdiction to complete the assessment.
- If the parents live in separate counties, the county where the abusive caretaker resides (where the abuse occurred) would be the appropriate jurisdiction to complete the assessment.
- File a petition where the child resides, where the alleged abuse or neglect occurred, where the custodial respondent or one of the other respondents resides, or to the judge of the court in

vacation. A petition may be filed in only one county.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Certain Abandoned Infants (Safe Haven)***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-201](#) mandates the acceptance of certain abandoned infants by hospitals or health care facilities, or a fire department that has been designated as a safe-surrender site under [W. Va. Code § 49-4-206](#), without court order. The statute permits hospitals or health care facilities, or designated fire departments, to take possession of an infant if the infant is voluntarily relinquished to the hospital or health care facility, or designated fire department, by the infant's parent within 30 days of the infant's birth and the parent did not express intent to return for the infant. The hospital or health care facility may not require the parent to identify themselves and shall respect the parent's desire to remain anonymous. If an infant is voluntarily relinquished to a designated fire department, they are required to deliver the infant to the nearest hospital or health care facility as soon as possible, but transport may begin no later than 30 minutes upon taking possession of the infant. The designated fire department is required to notify CPS within two hours of taking possession of an infant. If a hospital or health care facility accepts possession of an abandoned infant, they must notify CPS by the close of the first business day after the date the parent left the infant, that it has taken possession of the infant. Any information provided by the parent shall be given to CPS by the hospital or health care facility, or designated fire department. [W. Va. Code § 49-4-202](#)

When a hospital or health care facility notifies CPS that they have accepted custody of an abandoned infant within thirty days of the infant's birth, the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Make no attempt to identify or contact the parent.
- Initiate the filing of a petition alleging child abandonment pursuant to [W. Va. Codes §49-4-601](#) and [§49-4-602](#).
- Initiate placement of the infant in emergency family care or foster/adopt care.
- Gather information concerning the alleged maltreatment, nature and the infant's condition and document the information in the appropriate initial assessment areas.

*Please review Foster Care Policy for more information concerning the court process when a child has been abandoned.*

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Reports Made by the Court***

In matters involving both child custody and suspected child abuse or neglect, a family court judge or a circuit court judge must report suspected child abuse or neglect to the department as mandatory reporters. Upon completion of the initial assessment, a copy of the report will be sent by the worker to the family court judge or circuit court judge, with a copy to the prosecuting attorney. [W. Va. Code §49-2-802\(c\)\(6\)](#) states, "when any matter regarding child custody is pending, the circuit court or family court judge may refer allegations of child abuse and neglect to the local child protective service for assessment of the allegations as defined by this chapter and require the local child protective service to submit a written report of the initial assessment to the referring circuit court or family court judge within the time frames set forth by the circuit court or family court judge."

[W. Va. Code §48-9-209](#) states that if either of the parents so requests, or upon receipt of credible information, the court shall determine whether a parent who would otherwise be allocated responsibility under a parenting plan or has made one or more fraudulent reports of domestic violence or child abuse, provided, that a person's withdrawal of or failure to pursue a report of domestic violence or child support shall not alone be sufficient to consider that report fraudulent.

[W. Va. Code §44-10-3](#) allows suitable individuals to petition for guardianship of minor children. If the basis for the Infant Guardianship petition is abuse and/or neglect, the circuit court will hear the case.

The worker will:

- Establish a plan to complete the initial assessment within the time frames set forth by the judge.
- Prepare a written report as requested by the judge, including but not limited to the following information.
  - Outlining the identifying information concerning the family;
  - allegations of maltreatment;
  - findings of maltreatment;
  - surrounding circumstances which accompany the maltreatment;
  - how the child functions on a daily basis;
  - disciplinary approaches used by the parent;
  - overall parenting practices used by the parent;
  - daily mental health functioning and substance use by the parent; and
  - general adult functioning of the parent.

The report should indicate whether maltreatment occurred, whether there is risk of future maltreatment to the child, any issues that influence the child's safety, and the action taken regarding any necessary development and implementation of a safety plan. The worker will do the following.

- Submit the *Disposition of CPS Initial Assessment Report for Family and Circuit Court* and a copy of the initial assessment to the circuit court judge, family court judge and prosecuting attorney within 45 days or sooner as directed by the court.
- Import the report/document into CCWIS and upload within the file cabinet to document compliance with the request from the circuit court or family court judge.

The supervisor will do the following:

- Ensure that the initial assessment is completed within the specified time frames.
- Ensure that a written report is prepared and submitted to the circuit court and/or family court judge within the specified time frame.
- Ensure that the report is filed within CCWIS.

After submission of the *Disposition of CPS Investigation Report for Family and Circuit Court*, the circuit court judge will review the assessment to determine whether CPS intends to file a petition and if not, whether CPS should be ordered to file such a petition. Specifically, the judge will want to make sure that

the department addressed any alleged circumstances that require that a petition to terminate parental rights is filed, or if certain aggravated circumstances exist that require a petition to be filed. In other words, if CPS substantiates any allegations that might require the filing of a petition to terminate parental rights under [W. Va. Code §49-4-604\(c\)](#) such as abandonment or the murder of another of the parent's children, the court will consider whether the circumstances are such that the duty to file a petition is essentially non-discretionary. If so, then CPS will be ordered to file a petition. Or, if CPS substantiates any allegations which do not require CPS to make reasonable efforts to preserve the family under [W. Va. Code §49-4-604\(b\)\(7\)\(A\)](#) (aggravated circumstances), then the court will consider whether CPS has acted arbitrarily in deciding not to file a petition.

If, when the circuit court compares the referral to the initial assessment and finds that the worker may be under a duty to file a petition but does not intend to do so, the circuit court will enter a show cause order setting a hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to determine whether a *Writ of Mandamus* should be issued, requiring the worker to file a petition.

The Show Cause Order will be circulated to the SSM. It will require the worker to appear to show cause why they have decided not to file a petition in view of substantiated allegations that come within [W. Va. Codes §49-4-604\(c\)](#) or [§49-4-604\(b\)\(7\)\(A\)](#).

*Note: The target population for CPS includes non-custodial parents or caregivers. The temporary transfer of custody/guardianship does not relieve CPS from working with non-custodial parents in situations where children have been or suspected to have been abused or neglected or subject to conditions that are unsafe. The temporary nature of protective orders and temporary guardianship does not ensure safety for children long term nor does it provide due process for children and parents for an opportunity to be safely reunified through service provision and close monitoring of improvement periods.*

### **Initial Assessments Involving Critical Incidents**

Whenever a deceased or severely injured child has siblings, and the cause of the death or injury of said child is suspected abuse and/or neglect, an initial assessment must occur. For these initial assessments, the worker will (see also Critical Incident SOP).

- Contact the prosecuting attorney and the appropriate law enforcement official to establish a plan for a joint investigation/assessment. The purpose of the contact is to clarify roles, establish a means for communication and to share information. If the prosecuting attorney and/or the law enforcement official declines to proceed with a joint investigation/assessment, CPS must proceed as the sole entity conducting the investigation/assessment. The failure of law enforcement or the MDIT to investigate a report of suspected child abuse or neglect **does not** relieve the department from its responsibilities to protect children;
- Defer to the law enforcement investigation if there are no surviving siblings or other children in the home or custody of the alleged maltreater. CPS may participate in the investigation as part of the MDIT. The worker will complete the initial assessment including any critical information about child's death due to maltreatment, if applicable, and the alleged maltreater's information. All functioning areas must be completed with as much information as possible;

- Refer any inquiries from the news media to the deputy commissioner of Field Operations who will consult with the director of Communications within the department Office of the Secretary about how to respond; and
- Follow all procedures in *The Standard Operating Procedure, Critical Incident Review, Field Practice and Procedures and Critical Incident Review Process*.

When a child dies due to alleged maltreatment and there are no other children in the household, the child welfare worker is still required to complete an initial assessment. Best practice is to interview all parties, including the alleged maltreater, however, the child welfare worker does not have to interview the alleged maltreater when there is sufficient and credible information from other sources (e.g., medical personnel, law enforcement) to provide the basis for making a maltreatment finding determination. Critical information about child deaths due to maltreatment and alleged maltreater should be recorded in CCWIS. Again, maltreatment findings should be documented in CCWIS in the event a parent/caregiver applies for licensure of a day care or foster care facility or has future children. The worker will complete the initial assessment including any critical information about child's death due to maltreatment, if applicable, and the alleged maltreater's information. The maltreatment and nature sections must be fully completed. All other functioning areas must be completed with all known information that was gathered during the assessment process.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Medical Neglect of a Disabled Child (Baby Doe)***

For initial assessments and safety evaluations involving disabled infants or children with life-threatening conditions, including any infant who is born alive at any stage of development, the worker will do the following.

- Contact the hospital or appropriate medical personnel to coordinate interviews and information-gathering, including the obtaining of medical records.
- Contact the medical personnel and any other relevant persons who can provide the information necessary to evaluate the alleged medical neglect. If the child is in a hospital and there is a designated hospital liaison for these cases, then that person should be contacted. If the hospital has a review committee and a meeting regarding this child has taken place or one is scheduled, then contact should be made with the review committee chairperson or designee. If there is not a designated hospital representative, or review committee, contact the child's physician and other persons involved in the child's treatment and/or the hospital social services unit. In many instances, the hospital pediatric social worker will serve as a liaison to the department.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney for assistance in gaining access to medical records if access is denied.
- Attempt to gather the following information.
  - The child's physical condition.
  - Seriousness of the current health problem.
  - Probable medical outcome if the current health problem is not treated and the seriousness of that outcome.

- o Generally accepted medical benefits of the prescribed treatment.
- o Generally recognized side effects/harms associated with the prescribed treatment.
- o The opinions of the Infant Care Review Committee (ICRC) or the Hospital Review Committee (HRC), if the hospital has one.
- o The parent's knowledge and understanding of the treatment and the probable medical outcome.
- o Arrange for a consultation with another physician not associated with the case, if indicated, to gain an independent opinion and recommendation.
- o Determine whether medically indicated treatment, including appropriate nutrition, hydration or indicated medication was withheld from the child.
- o Determine whether immediate action is necessary to assure that the child receives medically indicated treatment. If the parent is unable or unwilling to consent for medically indicated treatment, including appropriate nutrition, hydration or indicated medication, initiate the filing of a petition alleging child neglect.

The supervisor will ensure that the protocol for handling initial assessments involving disabled infants or children with life-threatening conditions was followed.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Domestic Violence***

For initial assessments when domestic violence is reported or when domestic violence is identified during the completion of the initial assessment, the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Plan for their own safety. For example, when interviewing the alleged maltreater/ batterer, have another child welfare worker or police present. (See *Section 3.2, Personal Safety*).
- Consider the safety of all family members when structuring interviews. Make reasonable efforts to interview household members separately. If domestic violence is indicated, the adult victim must be interviewed the same day as the children. The adult victim of domestic violence should never be interviewed jointly with the alleged perpetrator or while the alleged perpetrator is within close proximity.
- Gather information about the domestic violence in the home and its association to immediate or impending safety threats to the child in separate interviews with the adult victim of domestic violence.
- When possible, check with the magistrate and family court to see if a protection order has been issued to this family.
- If an immediate safety threat exists, develop a temporary protection plan with the adult victim, if possible, before leaving the interview. The temporary protection plan must include referral information about services provided by a licensed domestic violence program. (See *3.8 Immediate Safety Threat Assessment*.)
- If there is extreme danger for the adult victim and the children have learned to survive by identifying with the maltreater/batterer (i.e., cannot keep confidentiality from the alleged maltreater/batterer), then direct questioning of the children may be postponed until safety can be achieved. This same thinking applies to interviewing the alleged maltreater/batterer. If an adult victim is fearful of the consequences of questioning the alleged maltreater/batterer using

the D-LAG indicators, then it should not be done until safety can be achieved. *Safety always comes first.*

- If domestic violence is occurring in the family, provide the adult victim with information about their rights and about local domestic violence programs such as hotline, shelter, counseling, legal services and advocacy services. Services should be offered even if the client chooses to remain in the relationship. Explore with the adult victim what safety measures work best for their situation.
- *Do not* force a victim of domestic violence to select any one option for safety. Coordinate with resources for battered adults, such as the local domestic violence shelter and outreach programs. Involve an advocate from the domestic violence program as soon as possible.
- Be careful to not confuse violence involving substance use, illegal substance manufacturing/sales or mental illness as domestic violence; however, both types of violence can result in a child experiencing an immediate or impending safety threat. The child welfare worker should consult the “Power and Control Wheel” for clarification, as well as the operational definition of domestic violence. The worker should use these tools to determine if domestic violence is exacerbated by substance use, illegal substance manufacturing or sales, or mental illness.
- Remember that the adult victim is often more afraid of the batterer than of anything else. It may appear as though the adult victim is condoning the abuse and/or neglect. Being aware of this dynamic and confronting it in a supportive manner will ensure correct identification of the problems.
- Avoid blaming the adult victim for the violence committed by others.
- Present options that are available to the adult victim, which may include contacting the police department or prosecuting attorney’s office to initiate legal proceedings.
- Respond to the safety needs of all victims in the family.

If the non-maltreating parent is agreeable, a domestic violence petition can be filed in magistrate court requesting a protective order. The worker will assist the non-maltreating parent with the process. In no way, however, should the worker force the adult victim to file a domestic violence petition and/or threaten to remove the child if one is not obtained. A domestic violence protective order is not the only option and does not always guarantee safety. The child welfare worker should also be aware that *not* seeking a protective order by a non-maltreating parent in no way relieves the worker of their responsibility for protecting children.

If obtaining a domestic violence protective order is included in the temporary protection plan or safety plan, the child welfare worker must do the following.

- Notify in writing, the family court judge, advising them that CPS is involved with the family and obtaining a domestic violence protective order is part of the safety plan and/or temporary protection plan.
- Mail a copy of the temporary protection plan and/or safety plan to the family court judge and advise the court that you can be available to testify in person or by phone.
- Attend the domestic violence protection order hearing or testify by phone if requested by the family court judge.

Consider temporary protection plans or safety plans that preserve the unity of the child and the non-maltreating parent/adult victim if the child's safety can be assured. Court intervention is likely to be necessary to protect the child and the non-maltreating parent. This can be achieved through a co-petition. The department may do the following.

- File a co-petition in circuit court with the non-maltreating parent, requesting custody be retained by the non-maltreating parent. In appropriate cases, a co-petition under [Chapter 49](#), brought by both CPS and the non-maltreating parent/adult victim may offer greater protection for both the adult victim and the children. For co-petitions to work effectively, it is best that both the department and the co-petitioner agree regarding the approach to be taken.
- If this approach is agreeable to the co-petitioner, the worker will consult with the prosecuting attorney regarding filing the co-petition. The language of the co-petition should contain specific language to preclude the maltreating parent from living in the home or having contact with the child. (See [W. Va. Code §49-4-602](#)). A co-petitioning parent will be appointed separate counsel. Rule 17 (a) of *The West Virginia Rules of Practice and Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect* states that, "If one of the petitioners is a parent, then that parent shall be appointed counsel pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-602](#), separate from the prosecuting attorney."
- Co-petitions with non-offending parents may be filed with the circuit court even in circumstances where the parents or guardians are no longer living together, separated or divorced and the offending parent or guardian would be substantiated against for child abuse and/or neglect. The department shall not request physical **or** legal custody of the children as the non-offending parent will maintain care, custody and control of their children. If the non-offending parent or guardian does not have physical **or** legal custody of the children, the department can request physical or legal custody to be placed with the non-offending parent. (See *Section 9.6 Filing a Petition* for additional information.)

If a co-petition is not feasible, but an abuse/neglect petition is filed in circuit court by the child welfare worker, a no fault finding of "battered parent" may be applied to the non-maltreating parent during court proceedings. The language of the co-petition should employ specific language to preclude the maltreating parent from living in the home or having contact with the child, outside a court-sanctioned visitation plan. (See [W. Va. Code §49-4-602\(a\)](#)) The child welfare worker will consider the following.

- If the adult victim is not ready or able to accept services and/or the dangerousness of the alleged maltreater/batterer renders services insufficient to protect children from the threat to child safety, explore other options in consultation with the supervisor. The child welfare worker should consult with a domestic violence advocate for guidance in helping develop a safety plan with the non-maltreating parent/adult victim of domestic violence. Domestic violence advocates are experts in assisting with safety planning for adult victims and can be a valuable resource for child welfare workers.
- If the adult victim presents as severely depressed, assess carefully for suicidal ideation. Do they present as passive and cooperative, yet nothing changes in the home? Depression is symptomatic of trauma and may not subside until safety is achieved. Interventions and services should be decided in partnership with the adult victim to promote a personal sense of

competence and power.

In completing the initial assessments in CCWIS, the worker must do the following.

- Document the presence of domestic violence in the maltreatment, nature, and adult general functioning in the initial assessment areas.
- Identify the batterer as the maltreater.
- Avoid identifying the adult victim as the maltreater (see above).

The supervisor will ensure that the initial assessment is completed with due consideration of all the dynamics related to domestic violence.

In cases of domestic violence, the worker should guide their interview to seek information from the reporter regarding any steps that the alleged victim of domestic violence has taken in order to protect the child(ren) given the threat posed by the batterer to the non-abusing parent or caregiver in the home in order to determine if the victim of domestic violence knowingly allowed the other parent or caregiver to abuse the child(ren). It is important that workers, when completing referrals, gather as much information as possible about patterns of coercive behaviors by the alleged perpetrator. Answering the question of who is doing what to whom and with what impact, will guide the worker on gathering information in regards to the context of the abuse and the effects of the abuse on the adult victim and the child(ren). It is imperative that the adult victim be documented as “Adult Victim of Domestic Violence” and the alleged perpetrator be documented as both the “Alleged Batterer” and “Alleged Maltreater”.

The “knowingly allows” standard for parents who are victims of domestic violence should be carefully analyzed. When an adult victim takes “steps to protect” their children that are reasonable in light of the threat posed by the batterer to the adult victim and does not defend the abuser’s actions or condone the abusive conduct, then the individual does not “knowingly allow” the abuse.

It is important that workers, when completing assessments, guide the interviews to gather as much information as possible about the abuse dynamics. Direct questions should probe about the non-abusive parent or caregiver’s knowledge of the abuse and any action or inaction about which the non-abusive parent or caregiver is aware, as well as thoroughly screen for any indications of domestic violence including D-LAG indicators.

When assessing for “knowingly allow” in assessments involving domestic violence some things should be considered.

- Determine whether there is domestic violence within the family dynamics. If the worker finds the presence of domestic violence, they cannot find that the non-abusive parent or caregiver “knowingly allowed” the abusive behavior unless the non-abusing parent or caregiver did not take any steps to protect the child that were reasonable given the threat posed by the batterer to the non-abusing parent or caregiver.
- In assisting with determination of “knowingly allows” use the following questions to guide your

decision:

- o What was the overall threat posed by the perpetrator to the adult victim's physical, emotional, and/or economic security?*
  - o What steps did the adult victim take to protect the child?*
  - o Were the steps reasonable considering the overall threat of harm to the adult victim?*
- Choose the "maltreatment type" that the parent/caregiver knowingly allowed to occur *if one of the above-listed criterion has been met*. The substantiation of maltreatment will be assigned to this parent/caregiver, as another maltreatment type would be assigned for the parent/caregiver perpetrating other form(s) of abuse and/or neglect.
- Include "knowingly allowing abuse and/or neglect" in the petition, as well as the other forms of abuse and/or neglect that were substantiated, if the worker must file a petition to either compel compliance with CPS recommendations, or to remove the children from the parent(s)' custody.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Substance Use, Misuse or Substance Use Disorder***

For initial assessments and safety evaluations involving parents who are alleged to be creating an unsafe living environment for their children due to their substance or alcohol use, misuse or substance use disorder the worker will:

- Assess the physical appearance and behavior of the parent.
- Assess the living environment for cleanliness, lack of food, lack of utilities, items in the home being sold, substance use paraphernalia, abundance of prescribed medications.
- Talk with additional collaterals such as extended family, neighbors, and law enforcement regarding how a parent's substance use impacts their parenting and safety of the child.
- Ask the children additional questions about their parents taking medicine, giving themselves shots, sleeping during the day or being hard to wake up.
- Observe and address sleeping arrangements of young children in a parental substance use, misuse or substance use disorder referral.
- Educate the family about safe sleep practices for infants and children and document in CCWIS.
- Gather information from the parent and collaterals about any substance use treatment including medication assisted treatment (MAT) that the parent may be involved with or has accessed previously for substance use treatment. *Note that a worker cannot discriminate against a parent based upon the history of substance use disorder (SUD). This includes a parent participating in a MAT program that is not currently engaged in the illegal use of drugs, as this is a protected class under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 504 Title II.*
- Not all referrals alleging parental substance use, misuse or substance use disorder result in a finding of a drug affected-infant however, parental substance use, misuse or substance use disorder, may still be creating an unsafe environment for an infant. Some cases will need to be opened for abuse or neglect due to parental substance use even though the child is not identified as drug affected.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Substance Use, Misuse or Substance Use Disorder, Specific to Newborns and Infants (Drug Affected Infants)***

For referrals received from medical staff or hospital social workers acting on behalf of medical staff on children under the age of one year who are exposed to and/or test positive, or exhibit withdrawal symptoms due to legal or illegal substances or alcohol or prescribed medication (including medications used to treat addiction), the worker will do the following.

- Since most children are released within 24 hours of birth, the child welfare worker must meet face to face with the infant and infant's family to begin the assessment and implement a temporary protection plan if needed. The child welfare worker should obtain identifying information about the father. Hospital Staff should be asked if paternity declaration was established.
- Thoroughly assess the family, gathering information from the parents, and other pertinent collaterals. Suggested collaterals are, but should not be limited to; hospital staff, social worker, pediatrician, substance use disorder counselors, therapist, and teachers. Both mother and child(ren) records from the hospital must be obtained. This could include toxicology reports and withdrawal scores of the infant, and nurses/doctors progress notes.
- Obtain information about the parents' interaction with the infant and any relevant statements the parents revealed to staff about the ability to properly care for the child(ren).
- Upon the child's discharge from the hospital, the child welfare worker should visit the family's home to assess for safety and continue the initial assessment process. The worker should consider the parent's preparedness for the child as evidenced by the presence of adequate baby supplies, sleeping arrangements and intentions/beliefs the parents have regarding sleeping arrangements should also be discussed with all caregivers.
- Assess the caretakers/parent's ability to parent the child(ren), and if the caretakers/parents have made strides to correct the substance use disorder- This could include what methods of treatment intervention the parent chose, and compliance with those treatments. When assessing a parent who has a history of an opioid use disorder (OUD), it is essential that the child welfare worker understands that participating in a MAT program that complies with [W. Va. Code §16-5Y](#), regardless of the length of time, is not the same as the use of illegal opioid drugs or the illegal use of prescription opioid drugs. It does not indicate that an individual has chosen to "trade one addiction for another" or is using the MAT program to "get high". Treatment in a MAT program can be time-limited for life-long. Workers must set aside their personal bias regarding the use of a MAT program in the treatment of an OUD when assessing a parent.
  - A worker cannot discriminate against a parent based upon the history of SUD. This includes a parent participating in a MAT program, regardless of the time in treatment, as this is a protected class under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 504 Title II. To be considered a disability under this protected class, an individual must qualify as having a drug addiction or substance use disorder that substantially limits a major life activity when:

- Individuals have successfully completed a supervised drug rehabilitation program or have otherwise been successfully rehabilitated and are not currently engaged in the illegal use of drugs.
- Individuals are participating in a supervised substance use rehabilitation program and are currently not engaged in the illegal use of drugs.
- Individuals are erroneously regarded as engaging in such use but are not engaging in such use.
- If maltreatment has not occurred and there are no impending safety threats identified, the worker must develop a *Plan of Safe Care* (see below).
- If maltreatment has occurred and no other impending safety threats are identified, a case will be opened and appropriate services put in place to address the substance use, misuse or substance use disorder and/or any other contributing factors. The case plan will serve as the *Plan of Safe Care*.
- If there are impending safety threats identified, a safety plan will be developed.

When working with a parent/caregiver in a MAT program, it is crucial that toxicology reports are not the only piece of information that a child welfare worker uses to determine if a parent/caregiver is adhering to the use of a prescribed medication. Due to many factors that may affect a drug's metabolism in the body, it is best practice to look at the entire clinical picture of the parent/caregiver in their MAT program and consult with their treatment team when determining their adherence to a prescribed medication. It is also very important to have confirmatory lab testing results when a urine drug screen is completed due to the occurrence of “false positive” results from this type of test. Child welfare staff are required to make serious case decisions based on collective information and not solely based on drug testing results.

When staff receive a toxicology report, it is never appropriate for child welfare staff to attempt to interpret the report; such as, attempting to interpret “levels” of a substance that is found to be “positive” in an individual’s toxicology screen. Child welfare staff are not trained to interpret toxicology reports and therefore prohibited from making client decisions based on their own interpretation of such results. This can be especially important when working with a parent/caregiver participating in a Medication-Assisted Treatment Program (MAT).

In situations where the mother has been prescribed medication due to a physical illness or mental illness, including medications to treat addiction, it is very important for the child welfare worker to do the following.

- Obtain documentation from the mother’s medical or mental health providers regarding prescribed medication.
- Review records and consult with their treatment team regarding adherence to a prescribed medication.
- Obtain records and consult with the mother’s obstetrician to determine the mother’s cooperation with prenatal appointments, if available.
- Obtain confirmatory lab testing results when a urine drug screen is requested.

*For Example: A mother is in a severe car wreck while pregnant and has several surgeries due to injuries. The mother takes medication as prescribed by a physician. Upon delivery, a safety plan/protection plan may not need to be developed. A full assessment should be completed to determine the mother's ability to parent is not compromised.*

In situations where the department has knowledge of a drug affected infant, a referral to [Birth to Three](#) must be initiated and clearly documented.

As indicated, all infants who are exposed to and/or test positive, or exhibit withdrawal symptoms due to legal or illegal substances, alcohol, or prescribed medication, including medications used to treat addiction, require a *Plan of Safe Care* according to CAPTA. However, not all infants identified as such are maltreated. An assessment needs to be completed to make that determination.

For those infants who need a *Plan of Safe Care* due to being identified as exposed to and/or test positive, or exhibit withdrawal symptoms due to legal or illegal substances, alcohol, or prescribed medication, and if the assessment indicates a case should be opened due to maltreatment occurring and/or impending safety threat has been identified, the ongoing assessment and case plan is their *Plan of Safe Care*.

### ***Plan of Safe Care***

A *Plan of Safe Care* is not to be viewed concretely, as a singular document. It is fluid and functions on a continuum. It will change as the needs of the child and family change. A child welfare worker's responsibility is to complete an initial assessment after the receipt of a referral when a child is born drug-affected and/or exposed to legal or illegal substances, or alcohol, to determine the needs of the family and provide the appropriate services.

There are three potential populations of mothers who are recommended to participate in a plan of safe care. The three groups are:

1. Mothers who are using legal or illegal substances, have been prescribed an opioid medication for chronic pain, anxiety medication (e.g., benzodiazepines), or alcohol that result in withdrawal symptoms but do not have a substance use disorder.
2. Mothers receiving medication assisted treatment (MAT) for an opioid use disorder (Buprenorphine or Methadone), mothers who are actively engaged in treatment for a substance use disorder, or treatment for an alcohol misuse disorder.
3. Mothers misusing prescription medication, using legal or illegal substances, or misusing alcohol, and meet the criteria for a substance use disorder, but are not actively engaged in a treatment program.

If the child is born testing positive or suffers withdrawal from substances used during pregnancy, the child is drug-affected. If maltreatment is substantiated or an impending safety threat identified, a case will be opened, needs will be identified, and services will be put in place to address those needs of the child and family. Needs will vary from family to family, but Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) require that we address substance

use disorders, other mental health needs and the medical needs of the infant and their caregivers. A *Plan of Safe Care* will be documented in our normal case work process. It will be reflected in temporary protection plans, petitions, safety plans, and case plans. The work we already do will reflect the *Plan of Safe Care*. Examples of interventions that may be necessary include but are not limited to the following.

- Temporary protection plan
- Safety plan
  - Socially Necessary Services Safety Services
  - Informal safety resources
- Drug/alcohol assessment
- Drug/alcohol treatment
- Medication assisted treatment (MAT)
- Mental health assessment/psychological evaluation
- Psychiatric evaluation
- Counseling
- AA/NA
- Birth to Three services
- Right from the Start
- Home visitation
- Medical Services
- Education
  - Safe Sleep
  - Drug-affected infant needs

### ***Plan of Safe Care with No Maltreatment and No Impending Safety Threats***

If an infant is drug affected or exposed to legal or illegal substances, or alcohol, and the assessment determines that no maltreatment has occurred and there are no impending safety threats identified, the worker will document a *Plan of Safe Care*. The documentation of the *Plan of Safe Care* can be done in the service log and contacts. The child welfare worker should document all services that the family currently receives in the community and any additional resources that the worker may refer the family to for additional support. Once the *Plan of Safe Care* is documented, the worker can submit the initial assessment for closure immediately.

The worker may document such things as if the parent is in a substance use disorder treatment program, community and family supports that are already in place, AA/NA, referrals for Birth to Three services, referrals for other services such as housing, clothing, food banks. The worker will document services already being received such as TANF, WIC, HUDD, SNAP. This meets the requirement for having a *Plan of Safe Care*.

*Example: An expecting mother is prescribed suboxone and is currently in a MAT program for the treatment of a substance use disorder. The mother is taking the medication as prescribed. The infant and mother test positive for suboxone at delivery and the infant is now considered to be drug-affected. The hospital makes a CPS referral. The child welfare worker finds that the mother has*

*no other substance use or misuse at the time of delivery or CPS history, the medication is prescribed, the mother is using it as prescribed, and the medication does not affect their ability to care for the infant. No maltreatment has occurred. No Impending Safety Threats were identified. A CPS case must be opened in order to put the Plan of Safe Care in place. The worker will open a case for “Plan of Safe Care Only”, document the Plan of Safe Care in the Service Log, document other services put in place on the service log screen and close the case immediately.*

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Children Found at Clandestine Drug Laboratories and/or Exposed to Methamphetamine Residue Contamination***

If a child welfare worker discovers a methamphetamine lab or suspects that they have come across chemicals being used to produce methamphetamine during a home visit or child maltreatment assessment, **or** if law enforcement contacts CPS regarding children located during a methamphetamine lab seizure and needs immediate response, the worker will do the following.

- Leave the property, depart the immediate area, and contact law enforcement.
- Remain away from the property until law enforcement has responded to the call and secured the house and the people.
- Respond to the scene.
- Facilitate appropriate safe placement of child(ren) including children who are not on the premises.
- Arrange for decontamination of the child. Provide clean clothing and wash exposed skin, using either paper towels and soap/water or packaged pre-moistened wipes.
- Facilitate the transportation of the child to a medical facility for evaluation. The child’s personal items (clothes, toys, book bags, etc.) need to remain at the because they are presumed to be contaminated.
- If an emergency medical examination is required, the medical staff will perform it immediately.
- If a non-emergency medical examination is required, the medical staff shall collect a urine sample using proper protocol, conduct medical examination and perform the Early Periodic Screening, Detection and Treatment (EPSDT) exam.
- Conduct the initial interview with the child and forward the reports to law enforcement and the prosecuting attorney.
- Advise resource parents or relative placement of the immediate needs of the child because of the meth contamination.
- Follow medical care needs to be scheduled and maintained.
- Follow up with court proceedings on behalf of the child.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Drug Testing***

The [W. Va. Code §9-3-6\(h\)](#) requires abuse and/or neglect referrals to be made by TANF staff if an individual has had their benefits suspended and has not designated a protective payee; or an individual’s benefits have been terminated due to failure to pass a drug test.

### ***Initial Assessments Investigations Involving Informal, Unlicensed/Unregistered Child Care Settings***

Reports of suspected child abuse or neglect in informal, unlicensed/unregistered child care settings are assessed in a different manner than reports of suspected child abuse or neglect in intra-familial settings. Investigations involving private family child care settings are not focused on family functioning and family preservation and for that reason; the initial assessment process is not used for assessing suspected child abuse and neglect in these “out-of-home” settings. The worker will complete the maltreatment and nature initial assessment sections. The process used for these investigations is one that focuses on the determination of whether maltreatment occurred.

For investigations involving informal, unlicensed/unregistered child care settings, the worker will take the following steps.

- Review the report and all previous reports, records, and documentation on the facility/provider which are relevant to CPS. Develop a plan for completion of the investigation, considering the response time indicated at intake. It is the position of the department that the choice of the site of the interviews and who is present during an interview is left to the discretion of the CPS staff.
- Contact law enforcement, the prosecuting attorney, or the medical examiner if the report involves serious physical injury, sexual abuse, sexual assault, or death of a child, to coordinate any arrangements for a joint investigation. If the prosecuting attorney and/or law enforcement official declines to proceed with a joint investigation/assessment, CPS must proceed as the sole entity conducting the investigation. The failure of law enforcement or the MDIT to conduct an investigation of reports of suspected child abuse or neglect does **not** relieve the department of its responsibilities to protect children.

In completing the investigation, the worker will take the following steps.

- Make face-to-face contact with the identified child(ren) in the time indicated as the response time on the intake. If unable to do this, the worker must document the reasons in CCWIS.
- Privately interview all parties in the following order:
  - identified child(ren)
  - other witnesses, including other children in the facility/home
  - employees
  - administrative personnel (if applicable)
  - maltreater
  - any other collaterals, as appropriate.
- Ask the parties if they are represented by legal counsel. If the parties are represented by legal counsel, then the worker should not continue the interview without first obtaining the permission of counsel to do so. If permission to conduct the interview is denied, then the worker will discuss this situation with their supervisor. Once the supervisor has reviewed this situation, the supervisor or the worker must contact the prosecuting attorney or Regional Assistant Attorney General for consultation on how to gain access so that the parties may be

interviewed;

- There is no requirement that interviews with children or with maltreaters be audio or video taped. However, some local MDITs have found audio or video taping interviews to be effective in reducing the number of times that a child is interviewed, especially when there are criminal allegations as well as civil allegations of child abuse or neglect. Local MDITs are encouraged to become informed about the advantages and disadvantages of audio and video taping of interviews. If the team decides to use either audio or video taping as part of their MDIT protocol, then the department may participate. It is recommended that the tapes become part of the criminal investigative file to be located with the law enforcement agency records, and not with CPS records maintained by the department.
- Document the sources of information.
- Determine whether maltreatment occurred, utilizing the legal and operational definitions for child abuse or neglect.

When completing the interviews, the worker will attempt to specifically gather information in the following areas.

- The types of maltreatment apparent; this includes all types of maltreatment, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Include any physical description of maltreatment.
- The surrounding circumstances which accompany the maltreatment; this should always include the explanation of the circumstances related to the alleged maltreatment. (*Note: although the setting of the investigation is different from an intra-familial initial assessment and safety evaluation, the basic format and techniques for interviewing which are taught in training still apply.*)
- Indicate whether maltreatment occurred.
- Complete the investigation within 30 days of the receipt of the report, unless extenuating circumstances prevent the completion. If so, request the approval of an extension from the supervisor.
- Electronically transmit the investigation to the supervisor for review and approval.

The supervisor will complete the following steps.

- Notify the informal child care provider, if different than the maltreater, in writing, of the findings and recommendations resulting from the investigation. (The alleged maltreater will receive an automatically-generated letter regarding the disposition of the investigation).
- Ensure that the informal child care provider's notification letter is imported into the CCWIS file cabinet to document that notification has been made.
- Contact the child victim's parent or appointed counsel (guardian ad litem) to explain the allegations made, the findings of the investigation and the outcomes. If there are other children within the informal provider's home that may be unsafe, notify the parents of those children and inform them of the allegations, the findings of the investigation and the outcomes, without revealing any confidential identifying information. It is expected that parents will make alternative child care arrangements.

Cases on informal child care providers will not be opened for ongoing CPS.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Abusive Interactions Between Children***

For initial assessments and safety evaluations involving sexual or abusive interactions between children the worker and supervisor will do the following.:

- Determine whether the alleged incident was a result of the parent knowingly allowing abuse or neglect to occur.
- Determine whether the alleged incident occurred within the realm of normal, natural child play or exploration between children of the same age. If so, there will be no finding of maltreatment.
- Determine whether the parent responded appropriately to the child's needs for medical or mental health treatment, including the need for emotional support.

In assessing for a parent or caregiver "knowingly allowed" another person to inflict sexual abuse or exploitation it must be determined that the parent or caregiver has knowledge (or should have had knowledge) that this has occurred and has not yet taken any action to intervene or to ensure the child's safety. The term "knowingly" does not require that a parent or caregiver actually be present at the time the abuse occurs, but rather that the parent or caregiver was presented with sufficient facts from which they could have or should have recognized that abuse has occurred. In assessing for knowingly allow involving sexual abuse or exploitation consider the following.

- A parent should have known their child was being abused and/or neglected. It may be difficult, at first, for staff to determine whether a parent could have known that their child was being abused or neglected. To use this finding, the worker must find sufficient evidence that the parent was presented with information that would have led them to know:
  - When determining if a parent should have known, the worker will need to employ very specific questioning of the child's behaviors or symptoms of the abuse; who the child may have told about the abuse or how they told of the abuse. Often, children may not tell anyone in an actual disclosure but may hint or tell stories. Other children may never say a word, but their behavior changes drastically.
    - For example: A parent tells the worker that they didn't know their child was being sexually abused by an older sibling, yet the children disappeared for several hours at a time daily; the abused child told their mother that they hated their older sibling and wished the older sibling would die; and the abused child was acting out sexually toward other children.
- The parent knew but took no action to prevent or stop the abuse. The worker must find that this parent supported and/or condoned the abusive behavior.
- The parent supports the explanation of the abuse, but the evidence suggests that the abuse did not occur in the fashion that is described. The worker must determine, sometimes with the assistance of a medical professional, that the abuse could not have occurred according to the explanation given.
- Both parents or caregivers refuse to identify the abuser, and/or both deny that the abuse has occurred. The worker must determine if the parents or caregivers really do not know what has occurred or are simply covering for one another or someone else. The worker will need to use

the child's statement, if possible, as well as other collateral information.

- o For example: A child is admitted to the hospital for high fever and vomiting. Blood work reveals that the child is infected with an STD. Blood work conducted during previous medical exams reveal that the child was not infected in the past. Both parents deny that the child has been sexually abused but refuse to disclose the names of individuals with whom the child has spent time.
- Choose the "maltreatment type" that the parent/caregiver knowingly allowed to occur *if one of the above-listed criteria has been met*. The substantiation of maltreatment will be assigned to this parent/caregiver, as another maltreatment type would be assigned for the parent/caregiver perpetrating other form(s) of abuse and/or neglect; and
- Include "knowingly allowing abuse and/or neglect" in the petition, as well as the other forms of abuse and/or neglect that were substantiated, **if** the worker must file a petition to either compel compliance with CPS recommendations, or to remove the children from the parent(s) or caregiver(s)' custody.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Individuals on Registries***

#### ***Child Sex Offender Registry***

For initial assessments involving registered child sex offenders who are on probation or parole or only on the sex offender registry, the worker and supervisor will do the following.

- Determine the status of the registered child sex offender's parole or probation. Each convicted sex offender is required to fulfill a period of parole or probation. The length of time is individualized, and dependent upon specifics of time served and good behavior. The state code stipulates that if the sex offense was committed against a child under the age of 18, that individual will not be allowed around children under the age of 18 during their parole/probation period.
- Notify the probation or parole officer that the department has received a referral that the registered sex offender has violated the terms written in [W. Va Code §62](#). [W. Va. Code §49-5-101\(c\)\(1\)](#) provides that information can be disclosed to "Federal, state or local government entities, or any agent of such entities, including law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys, having a need for such information in order to carry out its responsibilities under law to protect children from abuse and neglect". This allows for CPS to share specifics of the referral with the parole or probation officer.
- If the worker determines that the registered child sex offender is (1) on parole or probation, and (2) being allowed unlimited and/or unrestricted access to a child under the age of 18, that worker must address this issue with the custodial parent(s) and/or the non-child sex offender parent.
- The worker must inform the non-sex offender parent of the registered child sex offender's status on the *West Virginia State Police Sex Offender Registry* as well as actively serving a parole or probation period which prohibits them from being around children under the age of 18. The worker must emphasize that the offense was child sex abuse.
- If the non-sex offender parent makes no effort to change the circumstances once they have been made aware of the child sex offender's status on the registry, this parent is knowingly allowing

(See Section 1.9 General Definitions) their child to continue in a situation that poses potential harm to the children. The worker must then notify the non-sex offender parent that the prosecuting attorney will be contacted.

- Contact the prosecuting attorney to file a petition for either removal of the children or to compel compliance from the non-sex offender parent ([W. Va. Code §49-1-204\(B\)](#)) definition of parent: “Parent” means an individual defined as a parent by law or on the basis of a biological relationship, marriage to a person with a biological relationship, legal adoption or other recognized grounds.
- Notify both parents, that due to the parent that is on the sex offender registry for an offense against a child, the worker is required to contact the prosecuting attorney and request to file a petition with the circuit court for a circuit court judge to determine if it is in the best interest of the child(ren) for the parent or child(ren) to remain in the home. (For more information on filing a petition due to a parent being a registered sex offender see [W. Va. Code §49-4-604.](#))
- If a petition is filed, the court will consider the nature and circumstances surrounding the prior charges of the parent of the sexual offense against a child and the court will determine if the “child’s interests would not be promoted by preservation of the family” ([W. Va. Code §49-4-604.](#)).
- If the prosecuting attorney refuses to file the petition, the worker and supervisor must consult with the SSM or designee, regional program manager or designee and the Regional Assistant Attorney General to determine an approach to assure the child(ren’s) safety.

### ***Child Abuse and Neglect Registry***

For initial assessments involving individuals on the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry who reside with children, the worker will do the following.

- Contact the registrant’s probation or parole officer, if applicable, to determine if the registrant is in violation of their probation/parole due to residing with a minor.
- Notify the non-offending custodial parent(s) of the registrant’s status on the Child Abuse and Neglect Registry.
- Contact the appropriate officials to gather more detailed information regarding the registrant’s actions that led to the conviction in order to assess safety and to determine if aggravated circumstances exist. (For information see *Section 3.14, subsection Completing Initial Assessments When Reasonable Efforts to Prevent Removal is not Required.*)

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Educational Neglect***

To determine if a child is educationally neglected, the following must be considered by the child welfare worker and supervisor will do the following.

- The child’s caregivers are getting the child’s schoolwork and is the child turning in the schoolwork.
- The child’s current and past grades to assist in determining if the current absences are directly related to the child’s school performance.
- A school official’s perceptions of how the child’s absences are the cause of the child failing school.

- The reason for the absences, to determine if the caregiver is presently refusing, failing or unable to get the child to attend school and in turn supply the child with an appropriate education.
- Reasons for absences that may indicate a child’s caregiver is able to supply the child with an education include but are not limited to:
  - suspension,
  - sickness of the child, or
  - legitimate family emergencies.
- Reasons for absences that may indicate a child’s caregiver is unable to supply the child with an education include but are not limited to:
  - chronic oversleeping by the parent;
  - the child does not wish to go to school and the caregiver does not enforce school attendance;
  - the caregiver has not or will not participate in school efforts to address the child’s absences; or
  - substance usage, mental health issues, or other characteristics that indicate the caregiver will be unlikely to supply the child with a necessary education

If a child’s physical or mental health is harmed or threatened by a present refusal, failure or inability of the child’s caregiver to supply the child with necessary education, then a finding of educational neglect should occur, and the case opened for ongoing CPS.

If the child is deemed safe and not neglected at the conclusion of the initial assessment, the child welfare worker must refer to the appropriate community-based resource(s) that can assist the family in addressing the child’s absences. These resources include, but are not limited to, Family Resource Networks (FRN), the local school social worker or attendance director, or community behavioral health center.

***Initial Assessments Involving Human Trafficking***

Identifying victims and assessing the needs of human trafficking victims is vital to effective services and treatment. [W. Va Code §49](#) requires that services be provided to minor trafficking victims and those where an attempt to traffic is determined, as they are defined as abused and/or neglected children. The victim’s immediate needs should be assessed first. Immediate needs would include their safety, any medical treatment they may need for physical or sexual trauma, as well as food, clothing, and shelter. Other needs of trafficking victims may include, but are not limited to, mental health needs that can include comprehensive trauma-informed services that are specialized to the needs of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation or child sex trafficking victims legal services, education services, and possibly life skills for teens. The ongoing needs of trafficking victims are just as important as their immediate needs. Many victims have deeply rooted psychological trauma that will require months, if not years of treatment and management.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway, along with the collaboration with other agencies, has provided specific signs to look for in aiding to identify potential sex trafficking victims:

- a history of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse;
- signs of current physical abuse and/or sexual abuse;
- history of running away or current runaway status;
- the sudden onset of expensive property, such as cell phones, jewelry, clothing or tattoo markings; or
- the sudden withdrawal or lack of interest in activities previously interesting in.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway has also provided specific signs to look for in aiding to identify potential labor trafficking victims:

- the lack of freedom to come and go;
- the lack of payment or very little pay;
- excessive or unusual work hours;
- no breaks at work, including lunch;
- excessive amount of debt that cannot be paid off;
- recruitment based on false promises related to the conditions of the work;
- heightened security measures at work or place of residence; or
- unable to communicate their whereabouts and lacking sense of time.

It may be necessary for the child/youth trafficking victims to be removed from their home due to their parent's involvement in trafficking the child. It is imperative to assess the child/youth's needs and begin appropriate services as quickly as possible. The [Comprehensive Human Trafficking Assessment](#) can be completed with the child/youth by the worker to determine possible trafficking victimization.

It is vital to understand and remember that all children/youth who are trafficking victims are considered abused and neglected children by law, and they are entitled to receive services for the treatment of their victimization. Therefore, it is important to distinguish the difference in circumstances of how a child/youth becomes a victim of trafficking. The worker must take the necessary steps to ensure the situations, where parents are found not to be abusive or neglectful in their child/youth's trafficking victimization, are not entered as maltreaters in the abuse and neglect referral entered in CCWIS or while completing the assessment. The child/youth may be released to the non-abusive parent. In these cases where the parents are not the maltreater, the individual(s) accused or charged with trafficking the victim(s) is entered in CCWIS as the maltreater. If the parents are found to be the traffickers, they will be entered as the alleged maltreater in CCWIS and the referral will be assigned and assessed as an abuse and neglect referral. Law enforcement must be notified within 24 hours of receiving any human trafficking referral.

*Example: Children involved in the child welfare system may have also been trafficked by their own parents. An example of this would be: A thirteen year old youth is living with their father, who has a substance use disorder, is unemployed, and has no income. The father owes the drug dealer three hundred dollars and has no way of paying the drug dealer. The drug dealer informs the father that they will consider the debt settled if the father allows them to have sex with the daughter. The father*

*agrees. The father then sees this situation as an opportunity to get illegal substances for free and begins to advertise the daughter for sex in exchange for illegal substances. This child is an abused and neglected child in two ways. The child is abused and neglected by the father, and the child is abused and neglected as a victim of trafficking. This child would become involved with the child welfare system, as a petition would be filed against the father and the child would be removed from the home.*

For initial assessments involving human trafficking, the worker will:

- Open a case in CCWIS in the name of the trafficker.
- Choose the “Maltreatment Type” of *Abuse/ Human Trafficking/ Sex Trafficking by Parent, Sex Trafficking by Non-parent or Labor Trafficking by Parent, Labor Trafficking by Non-parent*. The substantiation of maltreatment will be assigned to trafficker or parent, non-parent or both in some cases.
- If an emergency ratification or emergency petition requesting custody is needed, the ratification or petition must indicate that the child/youth is a victim of trafficking.
- An *Emergency Ratification* would allow the department to assume temporary custody of a trafficking victim and allow time for the non-abusive parent to be contacted. The parent may assume custody of the child/trafficking victim so long as abuse or neglect has not been alleged against that parent. In this instance, the worker would not file an emergency petition following the ratification.
- If it is discovered that the parents have abused or neglected the child, a separate CPS referral on the parents will be entered and identifying the types of maltreatment discovered during the assessment.
- If a petition has been filed against the trafficker and removal has been documented but a petition is also necessary against the parent for abuse and/or neglect, the removal in the traffickers open case should be end dated in CCWIS and a removal episode should be documented in the open case of the parent.
- If the trafficker has children of their own, a separate referral must be made on the trafficker and their family if abuse and/or neglect has been alleged.
- If human trafficking was discovered *during* the initial assessment and law enforcement was not the original source of the referral, the worker will notify law enforcement within 24 hours of becoming aware of the trafficking.
- For assessments on the home of the trafficker, the worker will complete maltreatment, nature and child functioning assessment areas. Gather as much information about the trafficker as possible from law enforcement and other collaterals. Complete maltreatment/findings and contacts in CCWIS. Any police reports or investigation findings that can be obtained should be uploaded to the file cabinet.
- Services will be put in place to address the issues around the abuse and/or neglect suffered by the child victim of trafficking.

In situations requiring an incomplete assessment, the supervisor must ensure that a finding of

maltreatment in the form of trafficking is selected before submitting to the child welfare consultant (CWC) for approval.

### ***Initial Assessments Involving Unaccompanied Children in Disasters***

In the event of any natural disaster, the department will assist in community efforts, when needed, to assure unaccompanied children remain safe. For those children who do not have family, friends or community resources to assure their safety, the department will use the following procedures.

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-303](#) authorizes, prior to the filing of a petition, a child welfare worker to take the child or children into their custody (also known as removing the child) without a court order when one of the following occurs.

- In the presence of a child welfare worker a child or children are in an emergency situation which constitutes an imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child or children.
- The worker has probable cause to believe that the child or children will suffer additional child abuse or neglect or will be removed from the county before a petition can be filed and temporary custody can be ordered.

***The worker should always receive prior approval from their supervisor before taking custody of the child(ren).***

If a child or children should appear to be abandoned due to a natural disaster, emergency or accident, the worker will assume emergency custody of the child/children.

- The worker will follow established procedures and policies for other abandoned children if possible.
- Gather as much information about the parent, children, and current situation as possible.
- After taking emergency custody of the child(ren), the worker must request an order ratifying emergency custody with the magistrate or file a petition alleging child abandonment pursuant to [W. Va. Codes §49-4-601](#) and [§49-4-602](#):
  - In order to request an order ratifying emergency custody, the worker will take the child(ren) immediately to a circuit court judge or a magistrate, acting as the juvenile referee, in the county in which custody was taken, or if no such judge or magistrate/juvenile referee be available, before a circuit court judge or magistrate/juvenile referee of an adjoining county, and make application for an order ratifying the emergency custody. Note: *If a circuit court judge is available, you must approach the court with a request for an order of ratification before you approach the magistrate or juvenile referee.*
  - The worker will receive the order giving custody from a magistrate/juvenile referee or judge after filing the application. The application does not serve as the order; they are two different documents. If seeking emergency custody through a magistrate/juvenile referee, the worker is not to leave the magistrate's/juvenile referee's office without the order.

- The worker does not need to take a template of the custody order with them but will need to ensure that certain language is contained in the order:
  - specifically, the following language must be covered in the order.
- Remaining in the home is contrary to the welfare of the child(ren).
- Reasonable efforts are not required due to imminent danger to the child(ren).
- Physical and legal custody are being granted to the Department of Human Services.

If the emergency custody is granted then the worker will initiate placement of the child in emergency family care, foster/adopt care or emergency shelter care.

- If placement with family members, foster care or emergency shelter is not possible during a natural disaster or emergency situation, the child/children will be taken to an established disaster relief site by the worker.
- Workers will provide supervision to the unaccompanied children at the disaster relief site as needed.
- The worker will see that the children's basic needs are met during the disaster or emergency situation to the best of their ability.

*(Please review Foster Care Policy for more information concerning the court process when a child has been abandoned.)*

### **Time Limits on Worker Custody**

*When a request for emergency custody is ratified, the worker can retain custody of the child until the end of the next two judicial days unless a petition requesting temporary custody pending a hearing has been filed and custody of the child has been transferred to the department by court order.*

- If the child's parents or family members are located before the end of the two judicial days, the child may be returned to the family at that time.
- If the family cannot be located, the worker will file the petition requesting temporary custody.
- If the family is located after the department has requested and received custody of the child/children, the worker can return the child/children to the parent or family members and then request that the petition requesting custody be dismissed at the first court hearing.

## **3.18 Investigations Involving Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU)**

### ***Child Maltreatment in Foster/Resource Homes, Certified and Pending Certification Kinship/Relative Homes, In State and Out of State Facilities, Shelter, or Other Placement Pre-Investigation***

The primary purpose of investigation is to determine whether the child's needs for safety have been met, whether the incident occurred, whether child abuse or neglect occurred and whether the agency or provider is culpable.

For investigations of suspected child abuse or neglect involving a group residential facility or resource family care home the IIU worker will complete the following steps.

- Review the report and all previous reports, records and documentation on the agency or

provider, alleged maltreater and identified child(ren) which are relevant to CPS/IIU.

- Notify the following from the district of the alleged victim's origin: social services manager (SSM); child welfare worker/adoption worker, regional program manager and Bureau for Social Service (BSS) Licensing Specialist (when involving a licensed agency), by email;
  - In the case of a resource family home managed by the department's Home Finding Unit, include the Home Finding program manager in lieu of the Licensing Specialist.
  - The notification email to the district must include a statement that the child welfare worker must notify the prosecuting attorney via the *Notification to Prosecutor of Serious Incident* form, that the child is subject to an IIU investigation place who has been placed with a foster/resource provider, kinship/relative caregiver, in-state or out of state facility, shelter or any other foster care placement type that falls under the purview of the IIU.
- Notify the BSS commissioner, appropriate deputy commissioner and the deputy commissioner of Programs and Policy of all out of state group residential investigations.
- Notify the BSS commissioner, appropriate deputy commissioner and the deputy commissioner of Programs and Policy of any investigations regarding allegations of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse.
- Notify the licensed agency that a report has been received and will be investigated, providing their name and contact information and direct any actions to ensure safety of the resident(s) pending the completion of the investigation whenever sexual abuse or serious physical injury has been alleged.
- Contact the agency or identified child's child welfare worker (depending upon whereabouts of the child) to verify current safety and well-being.
- Verify whether the agency and/or child welfare worker has obtained a medical examination of the child, transferred or suspended the alleged maltreater, contacted law enforcement, removed or transferred identified child or changed or ceased a particular practice.
- Require immediate removal of the foster children and prohibit any contact with the children and any new placements in the home until the investigation is completed whenever the report involves sexual abuse or serious physical injury to a child, or if there is any other indication the home is unsafe.
- Require immediate removal of the alleged maltreater(s) and prohibit any contact with the children in placement in the residential facility (See *Homefinding Policy* for further details regarding the process and procedures for investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect in resource homes and group residential settings).
- Determine whether there are additional actions that should be taken to ensure safety of the identified child and proceed as indicated.
- Develop a plan for completion of the investigation.
- In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IIU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney's office where the arrest was made.
- Forward a copy of any report of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse or assault to the appropriate law-enforcement agency, the prosecuting attorney or the coroner or medical examiner's office, per [W. Va. Code §49-2-809\(c\)](#).

- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive written or verbal notification if an investigation into the reported suspected abuse or neglect has been initiated. Document the notification in CCWIS on the contact screen identifying “reporter” as the *non-client/non-collateral participant*.

*Note: If the agency refuses to participate in an investigation, the IIU worker will immediately notify the Residential Licensing Specialist for further regulatory action. If the investigation involves a resource family home, the IIU worker will send written notification to the foster family informing them of the referral and if they fail to contest the allegation within twenty calendar days of receiving written notice, all foster care arrangements with them will be permanently terminated.*

### **Investigation**

In completing the investigation, the IIU worker will conduct interviews with:

- administration,
- identified child,
- staff,
- other residents,
- any other collaterals, as appropriate, including identified child’s worker, and
- alleged maltreater. (In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IIU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney’s office where the arrest was made.)

*Note: All interviews should be conducted privately. Whenever interviews are conducted within the same setting, all should be done on the same day and in sequential order, insofar as possible. The IIU worker must provide identification to the interviewee and explain reasons for the interview and process for completing the investigation. The IIU worker must inform the agency and alleged maltreater of the alleged child abuse or neglect. In those instances, in which it is known the alleged maltreater is represented by legal counsel in the matter, the worker must have the consent of such counsel to conduct the interview. If so, the worker should not continue the interview without first obtaining the permission of counsel to do so. The IIU worker may ask for assistance from the child welfare worker and/or the home finder when arranging interviews with resource parents and children.*

The worker will also do the following.

- Review the agency or provider records.
- Document the interviews and other appropriate information within CCWIS by describing in as much detail as possible the information obtained from the interviews.
- Determine whether maltreatment occurred, utilizing the legal and operational definitions for child abuse or neglect and the preponderance of evidence standard.
- Take appropriate action at any point in the process to assure the safety of the child, pending the final outcome of the investigation. Possible actions may include the removal of the child or removal of alleged maltreater’s access to children.

### ***Conclusion of Investigation***

To conclude the investigation, the IIU worker will do the following.

- Complete the investigation, including all documentation, within sixty days of the receipt of the report.
- Prepare a copy of the *IIU/CPS Summary Report* (IIU-0527). Save the report within the CCWIS file cabinet.
- Electronically transmit the investigation and report to the IIU supervisor for review and approval.

The IIU supervisor will review and approve the investigation and report, as indicated.

### ***Corrective Action Plan***

The IIU worker, upon supervisory approval, will complete the following steps.

- Provide a copy of the *IIU/CPS Summary Report* (IIU-0527) to the agency or Home Finding program manager.
- Notify the following from the district of the alleged victim's origin: SSM, child welfare worker/adoption, and Bureau for Social Services (BSS) licensing specialist (when involving a licensed agency) by e-mail of the findings of the investigation;
  - in the case of a resource family home managed by the department's Home Finding Unit, include the home finding program manager in lieu of the Licensing Specialist).
- The home finding unit or residential licensing specialist will determine policy or licensing violations based on the information provided within the *IIU/CPS Summary Report*;
- Ensure that the child(ren)'s immediate needs for safety, medical care and/or removal are addressed, especially whenever the report involves sexual abuse or serious physical injury to a child(ren) or the home is unsafe (*See Home Finding Policy*).
- If non-compliance is identified in group residential facilities or specialized foster care agencies the residential child care licensing specialist will direct the child placing agency (CPA) or group residential facility to develop a time limited *Corrective Action Plan*. For department resource family homes the home finding supervisor will direct the home finder to develop a time limited *Corrective Action Plan*. The development of all *Corrective Action Plans* must be time limited with clear and specific objectives to be accomplished (*See Home Finding Policy*).
  - Note: failure of the group residential facility or resource family to cooperate with the terms of the corrective action plan and/or to correct existing situations identified in the *Corrective Action Plan*, will result in the closure of the home or group residential facility (*See Home Finding Policy*);
- Send each maltreater a findings letter in accordance with policy. When maltreatment has been substantiated, this letter must be sent certified. Save a copy of each *Findings Letter* and certified mail receipt to the file cabinet in CCWIS.
- Notify the resource family home in writing that foster care arrangements are being terminated and provide a copy of the IIU summary report when it is determined that child abuse or neglect occurred in a resource family home, per [W. Va. Code §49-4-111\(a\)](#).

- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive written notification of when the investigation has been completed. Document the notification in CCWIS by saving the written notification to the file cabinet.

*Note: Upon closure of the investigation, a notification letter will be sent to the alleged maltreater, informing them of the official findings, how the findings may be used and right to appeal.*

### **Corrective Action and Monitoring**

The primary purpose of corrective action and monitoring is to ensure that any factors contributing to the occurrence of child abuse or neglect and/or non-compliance with regulations or policies are rectified.

For investigations resulting in a *Corrective Action Plan*, the residential licensing unit or home finding unit will ensure that all the problems identified in the investigation that contributed to abuse or neglect or non-compliance with regulations or policies are adequately addressed in the *Corrective Action Plan*.

### **Child Maltreatment in School Settings**

#### **Pre-Investigation**

For investigations of suspected child abuse and neglect perpetrated by school personnel, the worker will do the following.

- Review the report and all previous reports, records, and documentation on the school personnel which are relevant to CPS.
- Contact the child’s parent or guardian to advise them of the report, verify the child’s immediate condition and make arrangements for completion of the investigation.
- Contact the school principal to advise them of the report and to verify the current safety of the child in the school setting.
- Determine whether there are additional actions that should be taken to ensure safety of the identified child and proceed as indicated.
- Develop a plan for completion of the investigation.
- In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IJU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney's office where the arrest was made.
- Forward a copy of any report of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse or assault to the appropriate law-enforcement agency, the prosecuting attorney or the coroner or medical examiner’s office, per [W. Va. Code §49-2-809\(c\)](#).

Forward a copy of the report to the MDIT. Ensure that all mandated reporters receive written or verbal notification if an investigation into the reported suspected abuse or neglect has been initiated. Document the notification in CCWIS on the contact screen identifying “reporter” as the **non-client/non-collateral participant**.

#### **Investigation**

In completing the investigation, the worker will conduct an interview with:

- school administration
- identified child
- other children
- any other collaterals, including identified child’s parent or guardian
- alleged maltreater. (In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IIU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney’s office where the arrest was made.)

*Note: All interviews should be conducted privately. Whenever interviews are conducted within the same setting, all should be done on the same day and in sequential order, insofar as possible. The IIU worker must provide identification to the interviewee and explain reasons for the interview and process for completing the investigation. The IIU worker must inform the school and alleged maltreater of the alleged child abuse or neglect. In those instances, in which it is known the alleged maltreater is represented by legal counsel in the matter, the worker must have the consent of such counsel to conduct the interview. If so, the worker should not continue the interview without first obtaining permission of counsel to do so.*

The IIU worker will do the following.

- Review school records relevant to the investigation of the alleged incident.
- Document the interviews and other appropriate information within CCWIS by describing in as much detail as possible the information obtained from the investigation.
- Determine whether maltreatment occurred, utilizing the legal and operational definitions for child abuse or neglect and the preponderance of evidence standard.

***Obtaining Video Recordings From Schools for Completion of the Investigation***

IIU workers may request to view or to be provided a copy of video recordings from a public school or school district to complete an IIU investigation of allegations of child abuse or neglect. The IIU worker may verbally or in writing make a request to the superintendent or designee to view or be provided a copy of video recordings. Within seven days of the request, the school or school district must allow the worker to view the requested video or provide the requested video recording to the IIU worker. The IIU worker will take the following steps.

- Will not distribute any video recording provided by a school or school district.
- Keep all video recordings in a secure, locked location during an investigation.
- View video recordings in a private location.
- Will not delete, destroy or dispose of any video recordings as they are a part of the IIU record; and
- send all video recordings to the IIU supervisor with an attached designated cover letter, “Investigation Face Sheet”, at the completion of an investigation.

If a request for viewing or a copy of the video is denied or not provided by the school or school district, the IIU worker will do the following.

- Provide a written request to the school superintendent or designee which includes the investigation number, name/contact information of IIU worker and supervisor, and what is being requested.
- Notify the IIU supervisor.
- Submit a summary of the allegations and reason for requesting to view the video recording or obtain a copy of the video recording to the IIU supervisor;
  - include when and to whom the request was submitted; and
  - include any information as to why the request was denied, if known.

Once the IIU supervisor has received the summary, the IIU supervisor will do the following.

- Review the allegations and reason for requesting to view the video recording or obtain a copy of the recording from the IIU worker.
- Determine if the video recording is necessary for completion of the investigation.
- submit a summary to General Counsel for review, if the request to view or obtain a copy of the video recording is denied.
- Request General Counsel to assist in obtaining the video recording that was requested per [W. Va. Code §18-20-11\(l\)\(1\)](#).

### ***Conclusion of the Investigation***

To conclude the investigation, the IIU worker will do the following.

- Complete the investigation, including all documentation, within sixty days of the receipt of the report.
- Prepare a copy of the “IIU/CPS Summary Report for Schools”. Save the report within the CCWIS file cabinet.
- Electronically transmit the investigation and report to the IIU supervisor for review and approval.

The IIU supervisor will do the following.

- Review and approve investigation and report, as indicated.
- Store all video recordings from schools or school districts in a secure, locked location; and
- Must confidentially maintain any video recording, and may not delete, destroy, or dispose of any video recordings as they are part of the IIU record.

The IIU worker, upon supervisory approval, will:

- Provide a copy of the “IIU/CPS Summary Report for Schools” to school administration (the school principal and the county Superintendent of Schools) and to the identified child’s parent or guardian.
- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive written notification of when the investigation has been completed. Document the notification in CCWIS by saving the written notification to the file cabinet.

If the parent does not believe a resolution has been reached, the worker or supervisor will advise the parent to do the following.

- Contact the school principal.
- Contact the school principal's superior at the county board of education office.
- Contact the president of the county board of education.
- Contact the state Department of Education.

*Note: Upon closure of the investigation, a CPS notification letter will be sent to the alleged maltreater, informing them of the official findings, how the findings may be used and right to appeal.*

### **Child Maltreatment in Licensed Child Care Centers/Registered Family Child Care Facilities/Registered Family Child Care Homes**

#### **Pre-Investigation**

The primary purpose of investigation is to determine whether the child's needs for safety have been met, whether the incident occurred, whether child abuse or neglect occurred and whether the agency or provider is culpable.

For investigations of suspected child abuse or neglect involving a licensed child care center or registered family child care home, the IIU worker will complete the following.

- Review the report and all previous reports, records, and documentation on the center/facility, alleged maltreater and identified child(ren) which are relevant to CPS/IIU.
- Notify the regulatory program manager, supervisor, regulatory specialist and the child care licensing program manager and child care licensing specialist by email that a report has been received and will be investigated, providing the IIU worker's name and contact information and whether a copy of the report will be forwarded to law enforcement and the prosecuting attorney.
- Notify the licensed child care center or registered family child care home that a report has been received and will be investigated, providing their name and contact information and direct any actions to ensure safety and well-being of the children. At this time, the IIU worker can arrange for the most desirable location to conduct interviews with the child care provider(s).
- Verify whether the center/facility removed the alleged maltreater from access to the child, transferred or suspended the alleged maltreater, contacted law enforcement, changed, or ceased a practice.
- Contact the identified child's parent or guardian to advise them of the report, verify the child's immediate condition and make arrangements for completion of the investigation.
- Determine whether there are additional actions that should be taken to ensure safety of the identified child and proceed as indicated.
- Develop a plan for completion of the investigation.
- In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IIU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney's office where the arrest was made.

- Forward a copy of any report of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse or assault to the appropriate law-enforcement agency, the prosecuting attorney or the coroner or medical examiner's office, per [W. Va. Code §49-2-809\(c\)](#).
- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive notification if an investigation into the reported suspected abuse or neglect has been initiated.

*Note: If the center/facility/home refuses to participate in an investigation, the IIU will immediately notify the child care Licensing program manager or Regional Child Care supervisor for further regulatory action.*

### **Investigation**

In completing the investigation, the IIU worker will conduct interviews with the following:

- administration;
- identified child;
- staff;
- other children;
- any other collaterals, as appropriate, including identified child's parent or guardian, the child care Regulatory Specialist or child care Licensing Specialist; and
- alleged maltreater. (In the event that one or more of the alleged maltreater(s) have been arrested or charged with a crime, the IIU worker must contact the county prosecuting attorney's office where the arrest was made.)

*Note: All interviews should be conducted privately. Whenever interviews are conducted within the same setting, all should be done on the same day and in sequential order, insofar as possible. The IIU worker must provide identification to the interviewee and explain reasons for the interview and process for completing the investigation. The IIU worker must inform the agency and/or alleged maltreater of the alleged child abuse or neglect. In those instances, in which it is known the alleged maltreater is represented by legal counsel in the matter, the worker must have the consent of such counsel to conduct the interview. If so, the worker should not continue the interview without first obtaining the permission of counsel to do so.*

The IIU worker will complete the following.

- Review the center/facility records.
- Document the interviews and other appropriate information within CCWIS by describing in as much detail as possible the information obtained from the interviews.
- Determine whether maltreatment occurred, utilizing the legal and operational definitions for child abuse or neglect and the preponderance of evidence standard.
- Take appropriate action at any point in the process to ensure the safety of the child, pending the outcome of the investigation, including the removal of the child.

### **Conclusion of Investigation**

To conclude the investigation, the IIU worker will do the following.

- Complete the investigation, including all documentation, within sixty days of the receipt of the report.
- Prepare a copy of the *IU/CPS Summary Report (IU-0527)*. Save the report within the CCWIS file cabinet.
- Electronically transmit the investigation and report to the IU supervisor for review and approval.

The IU supervisor will review and approve the investigation and report, as indicated.

The IU worker, upon supervisory approval, will do the following.

- Provide a copy of the *IU/CPS Summary Report (IU-0527)* to the center/facility administrator or regulatory child care program manager, supervisor and regulatory specialist.
- Notify the child care licensing program manager and the child care licensing specialist or the regional child care supervisor and child care regulatory specialist by email of the findings of the investigation and provide a copy of the *IU/CPS Summary Report (IU-0527)*.
- The regional child care supervisor or child care licensing specialist will determine policy or licensing violations based on the information provided within the *IU/CPS Summary Report*.
- If noncompliance is identified in a child care center the child care licensing specialist will address the need for a corrective action plan with the child care center. For registered family child care facilities/registered family child care homes the regional child care supervisor will direct the child care regulatory specialist to develop a *Corrective Action Plan*.
- Ensure that all mandated reporters receive written notification of when the investigation has been completed. Document the notification in CCWIS by saving the written notification to the file cabinet.

*Note: Upon closure of the investigation, a CPS notification letter will be sent to the alleged maltreater, informing them of the official findings, how the findings may be used and right to appeal.*

### ***Corrective Action Plan and Monitoring***

The primary purpose of corrective action and monitoring is to ensure that any factors contributing to the occurrence of child abuse or neglect and/or non-compliance with regulations or policies are rectified.

For investigations resulting in a *Corrective Action Plan (CAP)*, the child care licensing or regional child care unit will ensure that all the problems identified in the investigation that contributed to abuse or neglect or non-compliance with regulations or policies are adequately addressed in the CAP.

Whenever a CAP has been approved and implemented, the child care licensing or regional child care unit will verify through written documentation and/or on-site reviews whether the steps of the CAP have been carried out and whether the desired results have been achieved.

## **SECTION 4 - CASE TRANSFER TO ONGOING SERVICES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The determination that a family requires ongoing child welfare involvement should be made immediately upon conclusion of the initial assessment process. The decision to provide ongoing child welfare services means a likely transfer from an initial assessment child welfare worker to an ongoing child welfare worker, requiring a meeting between the two (2) workers and their supervisors and decisions about how best to proceed to ongoing assessment and case planning. Transferring cases from the initial phase of child welfare to the ongoing phase of child welfare services requires the following.

- The physical transfer of all documentation of the initial assessment child welfare worker to the ongoing child welfare worker.
- A case transfer meeting by the initial assessment child welfare worker with the ongoing child welfare worker and appropriate supervisors.
- Review of the appropriateness of the current safety plan, if applicable.

There may be situations in which a child has been maltreated but there are no ongoing safety threat(s). In these instances, it will not be feasible to complete a safety plan. However, the department has a codified responsibility to provide services to these children and families. In these specific situations please review *Section 4.3 Ongoing Services to Maltreated Children but Safe*.

### **4.2 Case Transfer Meeting**

The intent of the case transfer meeting is to ensure that there is adequate attention to child safety at the initiation of ongoing child welfare services, and to prepare the ongoing child welfare worker for the completion of the ongoing assessment and case plan.

#### 1) Case Transfer Timeframe

- a. The initial assessment child welfare worker's supervisor must arrange for scheduling the case transfer meeting within three calendar days of the approval of the initial assessment and the safety plan.
- b. The ongoing supervisor will notify the prospective ongoing child welfare worker of the transfer, so the worker may review the case prior to the staffing.
- c. The case transfer meeting must occur within seven calendar days of the disposition of the initial assessment process but can occur during the implementation of the safety plan.
- d. The case transfer meeting must occur between the initial assessment child welfare worker and ongoing child welfare worker. The initial assessment worker's supervisor and the ongoing supervisor should attend and participate in the case transfer meeting.
- e. The initial assessment child welfare worker must maintain responsibility for managing the safety plan until the case transfer meeting occurs with the ongoing child welfare worker and the case transfer is complete.

## 2) Documentation Review and Supervisor Consultation

- a. The ongoing child welfare worker must review the initial assessment, safety plan and case decision-making prior to the case transfer meeting. Initial assessment information collected, and documentation related to safety about the family together, caregivers, and children inform decision-making for the case plan and serves as the fundamental basis for discussions during the ongoing assessment and case planning process.
- b. When reviewing documentation, the ongoing child welfare worker must seek to identify and understand the following:
  - i. The sufficiency of information necessary to assess safety, maltreatment, nature (surrounding circumstances), and each family member within the household.
  - ii. How the information gathered indicates the need for action.
  - iii. The safety plan identified safety resources, and its sufficiency in controlling for identified safety threat(s).
- c. In certain circumstances, the initial assessment supervisor, if applicable, or initial assessment child welfare worker may need to be contacted prior to the case transfer meeting to reconcile significant questions regarding case information and/or decision-making including but not limited to:
  - i. quality and quantity of assessment information;
  - ii. clarity and justification of decision making;
  - iii. clarity regarding safety threat(s) identified;
  - iv. basis for safety decisions;
  - v. safety plan approach, rationale, and responsibilities;
  - vi. rationale for the decision to open the case for ongoing services; and
  - vii. nature and quality of client response to CPS.

## 3) Case Transfer Meeting Content

Content to be addressed during the case transfer meeting between workers and supervisors must include:

- a. Significant information collected during the initial assessment process and the meaning and relationship between pieces of information.
- b. Any gaps in information and rationale for decision-making.
- c. A thorough review of the initial assessment.
- d. Review of current safety plan and identified safety resources.
- e. Discussion of existing family and individual strengths, if known.
- f. Status of caregiver involvement with CPS.
- g. Anticipation of how caregivers will react to ongoing CPS and likelihood to participate and engage in the ongoing assessment and case planning process.
- h. Suggestions for how to best proceed in engaging the family in completing the ongoing assessment and case planning process.
- i. Review of existing court orders, upcoming court obligations and timeframes for the completion of court reports if applicable.

- j. Review of visitation schedule and logistics, if applicable.
- 4) Safety Management Responsibilities at Case Transfer
- a. While safety plans that were developed during the initial assessment process may have been determined to be sufficient, it is important to recognize that even a slight shift in circumstances or caregiver perception and commitment can render a safety plan ineffective or unnecessary.
  - b. As the ongoing child welfare worker assumes responsibility for safety management, it is crucial that safety plan sufficiency is thoroughly evaluated to determine if CPS must act promptly to begin adjusting a safety plan. The initial assessment child welfare worker and supervisor must:
    - i. Determine that the safety plan is sufficient prior to a case being transferred and assigned to the ongoing child welfare worker.
    - ii. If it is determined that adjustments must be made, it is the responsibility of the initial assessment child welfare worker to contact the necessary safety resources (formal and informal) to make the required adjustments.

#### ***Determining Safety Plan Sufficiency at Case Transfer***

By the conclusion of the case transfer meeting, it must be reconfirmed that the safety plan is sufficient. Confirmation of safety plan sufficiency must include a consideration of the following.

- The initial assessment supports the decision to keep a child separated from their caregiver or keep them in their home.
- The safety plan is the least intrusive means possible for controlling and managing child safety based on the results of the initial assessment.
- Identified safety actions match up with how safety threat(s) are occurring in the family.
- Clarity regarding who is responsible for each of the identified safety activities.
- Safety resources are available and implemented at the frequency and level of effort required to control safety threat(s).

#### ***Modifying the Safety Plan at Case Transfer***

If it is determined during the case transfer process that a safety plan may need modified, the ongoing worker must complete the ongoing assessment to justify any changes in safety planning or the need for ongoing CPS intervention.

If a petition has been filed for the removal of the children, then the prosecuting attorney must be consulted if the ongoing assessment does not indicate the need for court intervention. and if already convened, the MDT must be advised of the results of the ongoing assessment for placement decisions.

### **4.3 Ongoing Services to Children Abused or Neglected but Safe**

Following the completion of initial assessment, certain cases may have a finding that child abuse or neglect occurred but there will be no identified impending safety threats. In those situations, the case **must** be open for ongoing child protective services for 92 days (unless services are required longer).

Before the case transfer meeting, the child welfare worker and supervisor will determine if there is a SNS provider who can complete a Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan. If so, the child welfare worker will complete the referral process for the Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan, Case Management, and Agency Transportation and send the SNS provider a copy of the initial assessment, SNS referral form, and communicate with the provider that the needs assessment must be completed within 30 days and the family referred to community services to address the problems that lead to the maltreatment.

The child welfare worker and supervisor will staff the case as per *Section 4.2* with the ongoing worker and supervisor. If no SNS provider is available to complete a needs assessment, the ongoing worker will contact the family within five working days, explaining the purpose of the case plan and complete the case plan with the family based upon information collected during the initial assessment and ongoing assessment. The case plan must be completed within 30 days of the findings of maltreatment, signed, and uploaded to the CCWIS filing cabinet. *(Note the ongoing assessment will substitute for the needs assessment)*

The ongoing child welfare worker will continue to monitor the case and make monthly face to face contact with the family, whether a SNS Family Needs Assessment is being done by a provider or the ongoing worker is doing a case plan. Prior to the end of the 92 days, the ongoing worker will complete the following.

- Ensure that the Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan done by the SNS provider, monthly reports, and Service Plan have been completed, reviewed, and uploaded to the CCWIS filing cabinet.
- Services have been end dated for the SNS Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan, Case Management, and Agency Transportation.
- Follow up with service providers regarding their contact with the family during the last 92 days and document all contacts.
- Ensure all monthly face to face contacts with the family by the ongoing worker have been documented within three business days of the completion of the contact.
- Ensure no new referrals or safety concerns have arisen during the 92 days by reviewing the ongoing assessment or any Family Needs Assessment/Service Plan completed by a SNS provider.
- End date any services listed in the service log.
- Request the case to be closed.

**At any time during the 92 days that the case is open, any new concerns for maltreatment or safety require a new intake assessment to be completed and appropriately screened.**

## SECTION 5 ONGOING SAFETY MANAGEMENT

After case transfer, it is the responsibility of the ongoing child welfare worker to ensure the continued safety of the child(ren) going forward. Ultimately, it is the mission of CPS to enable the child's known caregivers to provide a safe environment for their child(ren). However, until caregivers can restore the necessary protective factors to ensure child(ren) safety themselves, the ongoing child welfare worker will manage child(ren) safety through the implemented safety plan. The requirement of the ongoing child welfare worker to effectively manage safety and related resources, is a continuous ongoing responsibility throughout the life of the case. The ongoing child welfare worker will utilize the initial assessment and the ongoing assessment once completed, to help evaluate changes within the family as it relates to safety. (See *Section 7*.)

### 5.1 Managing Safety and the Safety Plan

Ongoing workers are accountable, among other things, for the ongoing assessment and analysis of safety threat(s) and the management of safety plans. Generally, managing a safety plan requires:

- continually evaluating the sufficiency and ongoing commitments of current safety resources;
- continually evaluating safety threat(s);
- revising safety plans when necessary; and
- ensuring open communication with families and safety resources.

To ensure the ongoing sufficiency of safety plans, the ongoing worker must do the following.

- Have frequent contact with caregivers, children, and with formal and informal safety resources to ensure the safety plan is being followed as detailed and it is continuing to provide safety.
- Have face-to-face contact at least once per month with all household members. More frequent contact may be necessary and/or directed at the discretion of the supervisor.
- If there is an infant in the home under age one, the ongoing worker should observe the sleeping conditions of the infant and review safe sleep practices with the parent or caregiver.
- Have contact monthly with all identified safety resources:
  - all safety resources must be informed of their requirement to report safety threat(s) as they arise.
- Immediately contact family, caregivers, children, and safety resources should there be an indication of a need to make changes to the safety plan.

Based on discussions with caregivers and safety resources, the ongoing worker must decide the appropriateness of the level of involvement needed to assure child safety. If changes in case circumstances indicate that a less intrusive safety plan can ensure child safety, the ongoing worker must consult with a supervisor about modifying the safety resources in the safety plan. Likewise, if the worker discovers a safety plan must be intensified, by adding safety resources or frequency of safety related services, revisit the ongoing assessment to reevaluate the identified impending safety threats. Although

the case plan and the safety plan are two distinct and separate plans, they are reevaluated concurrently at least every 90 days (*See CPS Policy Section 7.3 Case Plan and Safety Plan Review*).

### ***Managing Safety Plans that Include the Safety Resource of Foster Care Services***

Safety plans which utilize foster care as a safety resource, have the additional requirement of ensuring the child's safety in the placement environment. The standard for managing safety in placement is consistent with requirements set forth in the Adoption and Safe Families Act. The ongoing child welfare worker should continuously assess is responsible for a child's safety by ensuring the absence of a safety threat(s) or indications of maltreatment in the placement setting. Ensuring the child is safe in the placement environment is part of evaluating the ongoing effectiveness of the safety resource. To properly evaluate the effectiveness of the placement safety resource, the worker must do the following.

- Ensure adequate contact with each child and substitute caretaker.
  - Face-to-face contact by the child welfare worker must occur no less than once per calendar month.
  - Telephone contact must occur at least two times each calendar month, with each substitute caretaker and child, as age appropriate.
  - If a child is placed through a child placing agency (CPA), the child welfare worker must make telephone contact with the child at least once during a calendar month.
  - If the child is placed through a CPA, the child welfare worker is responsible for making face to face contact with the child at least once every three calendar months.
  - Contacts must include private and individual discussion with each child.
  - All face to face contacts should be entered into the electronic database within three business days of the completion of the contact.
- Discuss with their supervisor the adequacy of established frequency of telephone and face-to-face contact.

Ongoing workers must also ensure safety plans which utilize foster care as a safety resource, include a visitation plan enabling face-to-face and/or telephone contact between the child(ren) and their respective caregiver(s). Visitation plans should utilize the least intrusive options, while ensuring safety. Thus, visitation plans may include supervision by an appropriate individual. If it is believed that visitation with the caregiver will compromise the child's safety, then the ongoing worker must document on the visitation plan that visitation will not occur and the reasons safety is of concern.

Worker contacts with children who are receiving foster care services, must consider a myriad of factors to determine the appropriateness and effectiveness of the safety resource. These considerations include:

- the child's adjustment to the placement setting;
- the child's needs and the extent to which needs are being met;
- changes in the placement setting that may influence the sufficiency of the safety plan; and
- concerns or issues being expressed by the child(ren) or placement provider that require a prompt response and/or additional support for the placement.

### ***Requirements for Immediate Contact with a Child in the Placement Setting***

Ongoing workers must make immediate contact with the placement provider and children in the placement setting if there is an indication of maltreatment or safety threat(s). A new intake assessment must be completed and screened appropriately by Centralized Intake in these situations.

If the placement setting is a certified resource home or non-certified placement and general concerns or issues arise, the ongoing worker should address this with the resource parent(s). If there are conditions where abuse or neglect has occurred or is likely to occur as defined by statute, a new intake assessment must be completed and screened appropriately by Centralized Intake at that time.

### ***Supervisor Consultation***

Supervisor consultation and approval of the safety resource for foster care services must occur anytime a safety decision is being made. These consultations must:

- occur at least monthly;
- confirm the continued need for placement;
- determine whether the intrusiveness of the safety plan continues to be necessary; and
- reconfirm that the placement setting continues to be a safe environment.

Supervisor consultation must occur any time concerns for child safety emerge in the placement setting.

Supervisory approval of the safety plan and the placement, if applicable, must occur every 90 days (following placement) as part of updating the ongoing assessment.

## **SECTION 6 ONGOING ASSESSMENT**

The ongoing assessment process is a structured interactive process that is intended to build partnerships with caregivers to engage, identify and seek agreement regarding what must change related to child safety. This allows for the meaningful development of family case plans that will effectively address caregiver protective factors and meet child needs. The ongoing assessment should be completed within the first 15 days of case transfer to ongoing services. When caregivers are reluctant or uncooperative in the ongoing assessment process the worker should review *Section 7.2, Uncooperative Caregivers* and consult with their supervisor on how best to proceed.

The ongoing worker will need to review the safety plan and complete the ongoing assessment process to determine if all safety threat(s) are being adequately addressed and identify additional family needs and strengths which may need to be addressed in case planning. The worker will complete the following:

- Make face-to-face contact with all family members.
- Interview each family member and gather information to adequately complete the ongoing assessment.
- Interview collaterals, as necessary.

- Enter all face to face contacts into the electronic database within three business days of the completion of the contact.
- Review relevant documentation.
- If there is an infant in the home under age one, the ongoing worker should observe the sleeping conditions of the infant and review safe sleep practices with the parent or caregiver.

Once the ongoing assessment is completed, the worker will utilize this information throughout the life of the case. The ongoing assessment must be revisited at least every 90 days, or sooner due to a change in circumstances

### 6.1 Identifying Protective Factors

Several concepts are central to effective case planning; family centered practice, a safe home environment and caregiver protective factors. The identification of protective factors is central to the development of an effective case plan. Caregiver protective factors are personal and parenting behavior and cognitive and emotional characteristics that can be associated with being protective of one’s child(ren). Caregiver protective factors are “strengths” that are specifically associated with one’s ability to perform effectively as a caregiver and to provide and ensure a safe environment. Likewise, the absence of caregiver protective factors, or a substantially diminished factor may be viewed as a “need” which would require case planning to enhance. The charts below identify protective factors and provide examples:

<b>Cognitive Factors</b>	
<b>Caregiver Understands Protective Role</b>	The caregivers understand their protective role, understand why it is important, and can articulate a plan to protect the child(ren). The caregiver(s) that can understand there are certain responsibilities and obligations in protecting the child(ren).
<b>Caretaking Knowledge</b>	The caregiver(s) have adequate knowledge to fulfill caretaking responsibilities and tasks. The caregiver(s) knows how to provide basic care to keep the child(ren) safe.

<b>Caregiver Oriented</b>	The caregiver(s) is reality oriented and perceives reality accurately. The caregiver(s) possess mental awareness and accuracy about one's surroundings. The caregiver(s) demonstrates they are alert to, recognize, and respond to threatening situations and people.
<b>Caregiver Perceptions of Child</b>	The caregiver(s) has accurate perceptions of the child(ren). The caregiver sees and understands the child(ren)'s needs, strengths, and limitations. The caregiver(s) can explain what a child(ren) needs for protection and why.
<b>Caregiver is Self-Aware</b>	The caregiver(s) can understand the cause and effect relationship between their own actions and how the results will affect their child(ren).

<b>Emotional Factors</b>	
<b>Caregiver Emotional Needs</b>	The caregiver(s) is reasonably able to meet their own emotional needs in a way that does not endanger the child(ren) safety. The caregiver(s) emotional stability and resiliency allows them to recover quickly and to protect the child(ren). The caregiver(s) needs, and feelings do not immobilize them or reduce their ability to react promptly and appropriately with respect to protectiveness.
<b>Tolerant Caregiver</b>	The caregiver(s) can articulate that they see the "big picture". The caregiver(s) do not overreact to situations and are able to accept, understand, and respect their caregiving role.
<b>Emotionally Protective and Attached</b>	The caregiver(s) has a strong bond with their child(ren). The caregiver(s) shows affection, warmth, and empathy and shows compassion through sheltering and soothing the child(ren). The caregiver(s) makes it clear through their words and actions that their child(ren) is their top priority.

## Behavioral Factors

<b>Protective Caregiver</b>	The caregiver(s) demonstrate clear and reportable evidence of protective behavior.
<b>Caregiver Action</b>	The caregiver(s) uses a positive course of action to resolve issues.
<b>Impulse Control</b>	The caregiver(s) think about consequences prior to reacting and act accordingly and appropriately.
<b>Caregiver Skills</b>	The caregiver(s) possesses skills and demonstrates those necessary skills to provide basic care to their child(ren).
<b>Prioritizes Child's Needs</b>	The caregiver(s) prioritizes their child(ren)'s needs above their own.
<b>Adaptive Caregiver</b>	The caregiver(s) adjusts to changing situations and environments and can be creative and flexible in safely and positively caring for the child(ren).
<b>Assertive Caregiver</b>	The caregiver(s) is positive and assertive in advocating for their child(ren).
<b>Caregiver Resources</b>	The caregiver(s) uses resources, including community, public, and private resources to meet child(ren) needs.

<b>Supportive Caregiver</b>	The caregiver(s) consistently demonstrates actual and observable acts of sustaining, encouraging, and maintaining a child(ren)'s psychological, physical, and social well-being.
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Ongoing worker's assessment of families should be focused on identifying which of these factors are diminished causing the identified safety threat(s). Ongoing workers will also identify those Protective Factors which are strengths and may be leveraged to support safety while enhancing those factors which are needs.

In addition to identifying the caregiver's needs, the ongoing worker must be vigilant in understanding and identifying each child's needs. Children are often left traumatized by the abuse and neglect they experience. Identifying needs and case planning for the abused or neglected child is critical to assuring the child's well-being. While the central goal of CPS is to enhance caregiver's protective factors to such an extent that they can provide for their child's needs themselves, it is the responsibility of the ongoing worker to ensure the child(ren)'s needs are met until the caregiver(s) can sustain this role themselves.

## 6.2 Identifying the Child's Needs

Child and family wellbeing are an important part of ensuring sustainable safe living environments. Ongoing workers should focus on assessing educational, physical, and mental health needs and ensuring child(ren) receive adequate services. Similar to assessing caregiver protective factors, workers will utilize face-to-face contacts, collateral interviews, and relevant documentation review to identify a child(ren)'s needs. The chart below provides examples of information gathering areas to adequately assess a child's needs.

<b>Educational Needs</b>	
<b>School Attendance</b>	The school-age child regularly attends school and is on time.
<b>Academic Achievement</b>	The child is academically progressing and is not in jeopardy of failing. A child has a special education plan that is working and is achieving and progressing.

<b>School Relationships</b>	The child has appropriate and reliable relationships with school teachers and administrators.
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## Physical Health Needs

<b>Health Screenings</b>	The child has access to medical and dental treatment and vision screenings when needed and has regular well-child visits.
<b>Immunizations</b>	The child is up to date on all necessary immunizations and receives immunizations when they are due.
<b>Nutrition</b>	The child who receives proper nutrition.
<b>Auxiliary Aids</b>	The child, who has physical health limitations including physical disabilities, has the necessary aides or devices to meet needs.
<b>Developmental Milestones</b>	The child is achieving developmental milestones on time.

## Mental Health

<b>Behaviors</b>	The child's behavior is age and developmentally appropriate.
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<b>Mental Health Diagnosis</b>	The child does not have a mental health diagnosis; or the child has a mental health diagnosis and is receiving the necessary and proper treatment.
<b>Substance Use</b>	The child is not using or abusing substances.
<b>Social Relationships</b>	The child has appropriate and healthy social relationships and connectedness.

The ongoing worker must ensure adequate information collection when assessing children’s needs. Obtaining the names and contact information for a child(ren)’s physical and mental healthcare providers is essential in ensuring continuity in care. The ongoing worker must request available health and educational records for review and may need to obtain the caregiver consent. The review of all available records will allow the worker to fully assess the physical, mental, and educational needs of the child(ren). It will also be necessary to identify the child’s health insurance status and help the family obtain insurance when needed.

### 6.3 Ongoing Assessment Decisions

Once the ongoing worker has completed the ongoing assessment process the worker will need to make decisions necessary to facilitate the case planning process. The worker should review the assessment and decide the following.

- If all safety threat(s) have been identified.
- Which diminished protective factor(s) is responsible for each identified safety threat(s).
- Are there existing protective factors that can be leveraged to enhance caregiver protectiveness?
- What types of formal and informal resources are necessary to enhance diminished factors and child(ren)’s needs?

As the ongoing worker evaluates this information and prepares to engage the family in developing and implementing an effective case plan, it will be important to consider whether there are resources or services which could enhance multiple diminished factors or if there are diminished factors which will take priority in the case plan development. The ongoing worker may need to revisit the safety plan, if the identified safety threats have changed. Supervisor consultation should be sought to assist in clustering diminished protective factors and determine which resources or services may be most effective.

A child or youth who is an identified victim in a civil abuse and neglect case may be entitled to benefits from the Crime Victim’s Compensation Fund. For additional information, see *Foster Care Policy* and [W. Va. Code §14-2A-11a](#).

## SECTION 7 CASE PLANNING

### 7.1 Definitions

The definition used below is specific to this section and is a supplement to the general definition section.

<p><b>Foster Care Candidacy</b></p>	<p>A child, under the age of 21, who is at imminent risk of foster care entry or re-entry and who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● has not been removed from their home and placed in foster care; or</li> <li>● is not under the placement and care of the title IV-E agency and is residing with a relative or an individual with whom the child has an emotionally significant relationship characteristic of a family relationship (fictive kin); or</li> <li>● has returned home on a trial home visit; or</li> <li>● has returned from a foster care placement and is residing with their parent or a non-paid kinship relative caregiver; or</li> <li>● has been adopted or is in a legal guardianship arrangement.</li> </ul>
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As mentioned in *Section 6*, one of the three concepts central to case planning is family centered practice. The importance of engaging the family in goal development and service planning is critical to effectuating change. Sometimes CPS will encounter caregivers who are unable or unwilling to participate in this process. When this occurs, ongoing workers should attempt to understand their unwillingness or inability and break down barriers to enable participation and thus ownership of the family’s case plan. When all attempts fail, ongoing workers will have to develop the case plan with willing members or by themselves. The ongoing worker will still be required to discuss the ongoing assessment findings and the necessary services to address the diminished protective factors or needs that have been identified. Upon completion of the case planning process the ongoing worker will be required to receive the signatures of the caregivers identifying that the caregivers have received and understood their plan, and whether they have participated in the plan’s development.

### 7.2 The Case Planning Process

The case plan is an organized, written agreement between the child welfare worker and the caregivers, and children when appropriate. The case plan is a deliberate, reasonable, mutually agreed upon strategy to address identified needs and safety threat(s). It involves planned action to support the family toward

achieving outcomes and goals designed to elevate the caregiver's protective factors to such an extent that the caregiver can create and sustain a safe living environment for their child(ren). The likelihood of achieving the desired outcome of a safe and permanent home for the child(ren) is directly related to the appropriateness of the case plan. The most difficult and most critical aspect of case planning involves engaging the family and seeking agreement from caregivers regarding the identification of goals for change. The case plan should be completed and signed by the family within 30 days of case transfer to ongoing services.

### ***Developing the Case Plan***

Engaging the family is not only central to building rapport but to effective case planning and a family's success. At every juncture, including when there is court involvement, the ongoing worker should be including the family and asking their thoughts and feelings about the process and request ideas and suggestions on solutions to the identified problems. However, some caregiver(s) may be reluctant or uncooperative in this process, regardless of the worker's level of effort to build rapport and engage them in the process. In these instances, the worker should review the below subsection "Uncooperative Caregivers" and consult with their supervisor for guidance on how best to proceed.

Once the worker begins to develop the case plan with the family the worker must do the following.

- Document each child in the home, their birthdate, and the associated court case number if applicable;
- Identify and document all the adults living in the home, their date of birth, and their relationship to the child.
- Document the reason CPS is involved with the family.

Once the worker completes the ongoing assessment they will speak honestly with the family about the identified diminished protective factors or needs and the resulting safety threat(s) it has caused. Then the worker will engage the family to develop the goals for treatment in the case plan. Each caregiver should have their identified diminished protective factors/needs and safety threat(s) and corresponding goals documented separately in the case plan.

Each protective factor or associated factors or needs, the resulting safety threat(s), and the corresponding goals and services must be consistently linked together. The worker will proceed through these same steps until all the caregivers' diminished factors or needs and safety threat(s) have been addressed. If a caregiver has associated diminished protective/ factors or needs and safety threat(s), it is possible the caregiver will only need one treatment service to address the identified problems. The treatment services chosen, in any case, must be known and have shown effectiveness in resolving the identified problems.

Once each caregiver has identified treatment goals, the worker must proceed to documenting the identified child's needs for each child utilizing a similar process as when developing the caregiver's goals.

It is critical the worker helps the family prioritize which goals will be worked on first. Some families may only need a couple of goals and some may have an extensive list of problems and goals to work through. How this is approached will need to be individualized to the family. The worker should always prioritize those most pressing protective factors or needs and if possible, allow the caregiver or child to identify a goal which may be easier to meet. Each goal the caregiver or child can meet will provide encouragement and a sense of accomplishment. This will allow the caregiver to feel empowered to accomplish more difficult goals.

Once the case planning process is completed the worker will request the signatures of the caregivers and, if appropriate, the child(ren). The family will be requested to sign two different statements. The worker must explain to the family what each statement means and why they are requested to sign.

The first signature requires the caregiver(s) to identify whether they were provided an opportunity to participate in the case planning process with the worker. This includes goal development, prevention service provision, and chosen providers. There is no penalty to the caregiver by selecting that they were not given the opportunity to participate. In some instances, the worker may have provided the opportunity to participate, but the caregiver(s) either were unable to develop goals that were relevant to CPS involvement or that they were uncooperative in the process. The caregiver(s) may choose in those instances to select the option “No, I was not provided the opportunity to participate in this plan” and then provide their signature. When this occurs, the worker must document in case contacts the specific efforts which were made to engage the family in participation and mediate the disagreements.

Children who are of sufficient maturity and capacity aged 14 and over must be offered the option to sign the case plan. Children under the age of 14 who are sufficiently mature and able to intelligently express their agreement or disagreement with the identified needs and necessary services through the assessment and planning process may sign the plan.

In situations when children are considered of appropriate age, developmental maturity, and capacity refuse to sign the case plan, the worker will indicate the child “refused to sign” in place of the signature line and document in the case record the reasons for the child’s disagreements and the worker’s efforts to mediate or mitigate these concerns.

In situations when a child is not of appropriate age and lacks the developmental maturity or capacity to intelligently participate in the casework process the worker will indicate on the signature line for that child the child “lacks decision making ability at this time”. A redetermination of the child’s ability to intelligently express their agreement or disagreement with the identified needs and necessary services, must be revisited at every case review, and in no case greater than 90 days, for a child aged 10 and over.

The second signature which is required informs that prevention services are being offered, the caregiver elects to participate in those services, and the caregiver(s) understands that absent the preventative services the identified child(ren) is at imminent risk of foster care placement. Prevention services are services which help keep the child out of foster care placement. Children whose caregiver(s) are

involved with CPS due to substantiated abuse and neglect are at imminent risk of foster care placement should the caregiver(s) participation, or refusal to participate, in needed services not result in their ability to safely care for their child.

If in any case the caregiver refuses to sign their plan, the worker may simply write “Refuses to Sign” in the appropriate signature space and document in the case contacts the reasons the caregiver(s) refused to sign the case plan. A copy of the completed case plan will be provided to the family timely and the original signed copy uploaded to the electronic filing cabinet.

### ***Uncooperative Caregivers***

When a caregiver(s) refuses to cooperate with the ongoing assessment or in developing the case plan the worker should try to understand why they are refusing and mediate the disagreements. When there are safety threat(s) and the caregivers are refusing to cooperate with the case plan the worker must complete the following.

- Thoroughly document all efforts to engage the caregiver and mediate disagreements.
- Consult with their supervisor to determine the immediate response needed.
- Consult with the regional child welfare consultants, the regional program manager, or regional assistant attorney general for further guidance, if necessary.

Consultation with the prosecuting attorney will likely be needed when caregivers are uncooperative, and safety is of concern. When this is necessary, the worker must do the following.

- Thoroughly explain the safety threat(s) which have been identified, and any additional needs identified that the caregivers are refusing to address.
- Discuss the engagement efforts with the family and attempts to mediate the disagreements.
- File a petition with the court. The petitioner may seek a court order requesting that the family cooperate with the case plan or request legal custody for removal of the children.

### ***Foster Care Candidacy***

A foster care candidate is a child, under the age of 21, who is at imminent risk of foster care entry or re-entry, and who meets at least one of the criteria below.

1. Has not been removed from their home and placed in foster care.
2. Is not under the placement and care of the title IV-E agency and is residing with a relative or an individual with whom the child has an emotionally significant relationship characteristic of a family relationship (fictive kin).
3. Has returned home on a trial home visit.
4. Has returned from a foster care placement and is residing with their parent or a non-paid kinship relative caregiver.
5. Has been adopted or is in a legal guardianship arrangement.

These children(ren) are considered at imminent risk of foster care entry, or re-entry, if at least one of the following conditions exist.

1. The child has been abused or neglected or has been identified as unsafe and without intervention is likely to be removed.
2. The child suffers a serious emotional, behavioral, or mental disturbance and without intervention will be unable to reside in their home.
3. The child has committed a prosecutable offense in which the state has filed, or is considering filing, a juvenile petition and the planned out of home living arrangement is a foster care setting.
4. The child is a runaway or homeless youth.
5. The child is, or will be born, to a youth residing in foster care.
6. The child is an adopted child(ren) or in a legal guardianship arrangement which is at risk of disruption.

When a child welfare worker is working with a foster care candidate, workers must develop a case plan and utilize preventative services designed to mitigate the problems identified through the assessment to prevent removal from the home or re-entry into foster care. The BSS has chosen to use the case plan, described in *Section 6*, as the case plan for all children who have not been removed from their home and children who have returned from a foster care placement to their home or the home of an appropriate kin/relative.

The parent(s) and caregiver(s) in the home will sign the case plan, acknowledging that they understand that should the family not be able to comply with the case plan and meet the goals laid out in it, their child(ren) may be removed from the home.

### **7.3 Case Plan and Safety Plan Review**

While the status and sufficiency of services and family progress is informally evaluated at every contact made with the family and/or service providers, the ongoing worker must formally measure and evaluate family progress and the case plan and safety plan sufficiency **every ninety (90) days**, or sooner when significant change in the family circumstance occurs.

To effectively review the case plan and safety plan, the worker will need to make observations and have discussions with the family and safety resources and service providers about the family's progress towards achieving their goals. After meeting and discussing progress with the family, safety resources and providers, the worker will need to make independent judgements as to the effectiveness of the case plan and safety plan and the family's progress. Additionally, the worker will do the following.

- Meet with all family members to revisit the ongoing assessment, screen the child(ren) for any mental health needs and update any changes in strengths and needs identified.
- Revisit the initial case plan to provide a baseline for progress comparison.
- Utilize the *Progress Evaluation Tool* to evaluate the progress on each family member's goal achievement.
- Document the date and progress in the appropriate sections of the case plan.
- Make any adjustments to the case plan goals that are necessary.
- Make any revisions to the safety plan that are needed.

- Obtain the caregiver(s)' signature.

The worker will proceed to determine whether adjustments to the safety resources, services or goals are necessary. This may be required if, for instance, a caregiver(s) completes a goal and is ready to start a new one or a service is completed. Sometimes goals may have been too large and need to be adjusted to be more focused or an ineffective safety resource, service or service provider is being utilized and will need changed. When adjustments are necessary the worker will indicate as such on the case plan or safety plan. If goals need revised or safety resources, services or providers need modified, then the worker should consult with the family and obtain their thoughts or feelings on the changes.

Supervisory consultation and approval are required when reviewing the case plan and safety plan, and should occur prior to discussing with the family. The worker and supervisor must discuss the following.

- The status of the identified safety threat(s).
- The worker's analysis of family progress in goal achievement and how the worker has come to make this determination.
- Whether the plan will be modified and the changes which may be necessary.

Once the supervisor has reviewed and agrees with the discussed changes, the worker will complete the revised case plan or safety plan, if necessary, and visit the family to review and obtain signatures.

The case plan and safety plan will then be uploaded to the electronic filing cabinet, indicating the date of evaluation. The worker will also add the documents to the paper case record.

## **7.4 Case Closure**

The decision to close a case is based on a variety of factors, with child(ren) safety being the predominant factor. The worker will utilize the formal evaluation process to aid in the decision to close cases. The worker must be able to conclude the following.

- The caregivers have made sufficient progress in addressing the case plan goals.
- Caregivers can adequately meet the needs of their families.
- Safety threat(s) become controllable without child welfare intervention for a period of no less than 90 days, it may be an indication that case closure could be appropriate.

If the worker recognizes that the family will need ongoing support to ensure a safe living environment and well-being for their children, the worker should assist the family in establishing the necessary long term support. This may come in the form of referrals to formal community programs or connections to informal supports like a local church, a summer camp program, or to recreational activities for the child(ren).

The worker may never close a case without seeking supervisory consultation and approval to do so. Should the decision to close the case occur in between the formal evaluation periods, the worker must still review and update an ongoing assessment. The ongoing assessment will officially document the

supporting factors leading to case closure. The formal evaluation, through revisiting the ongoing assessing, of the safety plan and the case plan is required to occur every ninety (90) days.

## SECTION 8 – GENERAL INFORMATION

### 8.1 Definitions

The definitions used below are specific to this section and are a supplement to the general definition section.

<b>Hearing Request Form</b>	A document created by the Board of Review that initiates the administrative hearing process.
<b>Recovery Residences</b>	A single-family, drug-free, and alcohol-free residential dwelling unit, or other form of group housing, that is offered or advertised by any person or entity as a residence that provides a drug-free and alcohol-free living environment for the purposes of promoting sustained, long-term recovery from substance use disorder.

### 8.2 Grievance Procedure to Contest the Substantiation of Maltreatment Findings of Child Abuse or Neglect

If a child welfare worker or IIU worker, through an assessment or investigation, finds that a parent, guardian, or custodian abused or neglected a child as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-2-101](#), then the Bureau for Social Services (BSS) shall provide written notice of the maltreatment substantiation to the parent, guardian, or custodian.

The maltreater may contact the supervisor of the child welfare worker or IIU worker to discuss the maltreatment substantiation. The contact information of the supervisor must be included in the notice. The maltreater also has the right to protest the maltreatment substantiation through the Board of Review’s grievance process. The maltreater has the right to request a copy of their file at no charge to the maltreater. The only information not available, is the identifying information of the reporter of any child protective service referral of abuse and/or neglect. The maltreater has the right to appeal any adverse decision of the Board of Review to the circuit court, pursuant to [W. Va. Code §9-2-13](#).

Maltreatment substantiation grievance procedure:

- The maltreater must complete the [hearing request form](#) and return the form to the supervisor or send the form to the Board of Review within 60 days of receipt of the notice of substantiation of maltreatment.

The supervisor will do the following:

- Review the assessment or investigation and determine if the maltreatment substantiation is appropriate.
- If appropriate, overturn the child welfare worker or IIU worker's decision after consultation with program managers, child welfare consultants, or management deemed appropriate by the department.
- Complete the Bureau's section of the [hearing request form](#), if the maltreatment substantiation is appropriate.
- Send the completed [hearing request form](#) to the Board of Review. The form shall be sent to the Board of Review within 30 days of receipt.

All hearings shall be held by the Board of Review in accordance with [W. Va. Code §29A-5-1, et seq.](#) and 69 CSR 1.

Procedure for overturning a maltreatment substantiation:

- When a maltreatment substantiation is overturned, the Bureau shall ensure that the decision is recorded within 60 days of the signed order. If the Bureau elects to appeal such an order, the time to record the decision is stayed.

### **8.3 Confidentiality**

The confidential nature of child abuse and neglect records is governed by [W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#). In general, the child welfare records of the department must be maintained in a confidential manner. The information generated by the department belongs to the client. Therefore, they have the right to read their case record in accordance with law and policy. Copies of court records and other records *not generated* by the department must be requested from the originating source. Information, judgments, and beliefs about clients should be shared with them in an honest, respectful and confidential manner. The information generated within the department pertaining to a child belongs to the child, and therefore, the child, and specified others have the right to have access to the record, except for:

- adoption records;
- juvenile court records; and
- records disclosing the identity of a person making a complaint of child abuse or neglect.

#### ***Record Requests***

Records requests concerning child welfare records may be made under various circumstances and come in a variety of forms. These include the following requests from:

- Clients.
- Attorneys.
- Governmental entities; and,
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Client requests will be handled at the district level. For the purposes of records requests, clients who are entitled to their case record information are:

- Parents in possession of their parental rights requesting records on their children.
- Children requesting their own records.

When a client's record contains information about an additional minor child that the requesting parent does not have parental rights to, all information concerning the other minor child must be redacted.

The district shall handle requests from other states' child welfare agencies. The requestor from the prospective state agency must send a copy of their state identification badge along with the request.

All records requests other than: (1) requests submitted by other state child welfare agencies, or (2) requests submitted by clients entitled to their records shall be handled by the Office of General Counsel.

When receiving requests in-person or over the telephone, the worker shall obtain important information from the requestor, including contact information for the requestor, identifying information for any child(ren) concerned by the request, and the scope and purpose of the request. The information gathered shall immediately be emailed to the Office of General Counsel at [DoHSGeneralCounsel@wv.gov](mailto:DoHSGeneralCounsel@wv.gov).

Records concerning a child or juvenile shall be made available under the following circumstances. However, child welfare staff must follow the steps outlined above based on who is requesting the record and if the request must go through the General Counsel's Office.

- To the child or the child's parent or the attorney for the child or the child's parent whenever they choose to review the record.
- With the written consent of the child or of someone authorized to act on behalf of the child.
- Pursuant to an order of a court of record.
- To a child fatality review team.
- To the Citizen Review Panel.
- To multidisciplinary investigative and treatment teams.
- To a grand jury, circuit court or family court upon a finding that information in the record is necessary for the determination of an issue before the grand jury, circuit court or family court judge.
- Federal, state or local government entities, or any agent of such entities, including law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys, having a need for such information to carry out its responsibilities under law to protect children from abuse and neglect.
- In the event of a child fatality or near fatality due to child abuse and neglect, information relating to such fatality or near fatality shall be made public by the department. Near fatality means an act that, as certified by a physician, which places the child in serious or critical condition. Any request for a public release of information under this provision must be referred to the commissioner of the Bureau for Social Services to determine what information may be released.

Non-custodial parents, with parental rights to their child, may request child welfare records concerning their child. When a non-custodial parent requests their child's record, the following must occur prior to releasing the record.

- Determine if releasing the record would pose a serious threat to the custodial parent, other adults in the home, children, or collaterals. If so, seek legal advice immediately prior to releasing the record. It may be necessary for the non-custodial parent to seek a court order to get a copy of the record.
- Redact all information pertaining to the address, telephone numbers, employment information, etc. of the custodial parent and all other household members from the record.
- Redact any information that may lead to the identity of the reporter.
- Do not release any medical or psychological records produced by other entities to the non-custodial parent.
- Determine if there are children in the home who are not a child of the non-custodial parent. If so, those children's information must be redacted unless their behaviors pose a threat to the non-custodial parent's child.

***Note: The identity of a reporter, or information which could lead to the identity of a reporter, is not to be released to anyone including law enforcement officials or the prosecuting attorney.***

Alleged maltreaters who are subject to an investigation by the Institutional Investigative Unit, but are not biological parents to the children involved, have a right to due process and the investigative report. The identity of the reporter, the alleged victim, other children identified in the report, and the parents/families of the children identified in the report must be redacted prior to releasing the information. The redaction would include removing names, addresses, telephone numbers, and other potentially identifying information.

### ***Releasing of Information and/or Records***

Whenever a request for the release of child welfare records is received, the worker will inform the supervisor of the request.

The supervisor will do the following.

- Determine whether the release of information should be made available under the provisions of [W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#) and according to the information above.
- If the request is from anyone or entity **other** than the client, a parent with parental rights, or another state's child welfare agency, then the request must go through the General Counsel's Office via [DoHSGeneralCounsel@wv.gov](mailto:DoHSGeneralCounsel@wv.gov).
- Determine if the entire record or a specific piece of information is being requested.
- Send the records securely to the requesting state child welfare agency once identification has been verified.
- Arrange for the client requesting the information to come to the office at an appointed time, if possible.
- Review all information within CCWIS and all written/paper records.

- Prepare the requested information that is contained in CCWIS by printing the relevant reports.
- Prepare the requested information that is contained in paper records, if any exists.
- Ensure that there is no information concerning the identity of the reporter on any of the documents.
- Allow the client to review the documents/information within the office at the appointed time. If the client wants copies of information generated by the department, provide the copies as requested.
- Request assistance from the General Counsel's Office e at any time there is uncertainty about whether to proceed with a request for release of information.

The department may share information with the West Virginia Crime Victims Compensation Fund ([W. Va. Code §49-5-101](#)), to review allegations of injurious conduct committed against a child with child welfare involvement and, if appropriate, to make a determination for award of benefits to the victims. For further information on when and how the Crime Victim's Compensation Fund should be utilized, see *Foster Care Policy*.

When a subpoena or subpoena duces tecum for child welfare records regarding a school employee is issued by the State Superintendent of the West Virginia Department of Education, the subpoena or subpoena duces tecum should be forwarded to the appropriate deputy commissioner of Field Operations.

### ***Request for Records from the Foster Care Ombudsman***

The [W. Va. Code §49-9-101](#), expands the duties of the West Virginia Foster Care Ombudsman within the Office of Inspector General, to investigate and resolve complaints filed on behalf of a child who is subject to reported allegations of abuse and neglect and a child who has died or sustained a critical incident. Child welfare staff shall follow the same procedure outlined in the section titled, *Foster Care Ombudsman Program*, found in Foster Care policy. It's essential for child welfare staff to understand that any willful interference or obstruction that impedes the foster care ombudsman in the performance of their official duties shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined not more than \$100.00. Any and all records pertaining to a child subject to reported allegations of abuse and neglect shall be made available to the foster care ombudsman upon request, during any stage of the referral or case process.

## **8.4 Payment Guidelines and Use of Certain Services**

### ***Gibson Payments***

In the late 1970's a class action lawsuit was filed in federal court. The lawsuit was settled by a consent decree, an agreement between the department and the plaintiffs, in 1984. For simplicity's sake, the decree has always been referred to as the Gibson Decree.

The essence of the lawsuit was the allegation that the department did not explore alternatives to the removal of children when there were allegations of child abuse and/or neglect. The department agreed

in the consent decree to explore the provision of certain services as an alternative to removal. The department decided later to also consider certain services to facilitate the reunification of children with their family. Collectively, these services have become known as Gibson services and the payments associated with them as Gibson payments.

The Gibson decree allows the department to purchase services for families if:

- their child is unsafe, and will be removed from the home if a service is not obtained; or
- their child has been removed but will be returned home if a service is obtained.

The service that is to be purchased must be part of either a documented safety plan or case plan for reunification. Gibson payments are restricted only to those CPS cases that will be opened for ongoing services or are already opened for ongoing services. No other services shall be approved as a Gibson type payment. Prior to requesting that the department pay for the purchase of a service, the child welfare worker will assist the family in exploring other alternatives for payments. Examples of other resources that are expected to be contacted are, TANF, Medicaid, CHIP, food stamps, food pantries, clothing closets, homeless shelters and services, emergency assistance, LIEAP, the Salvation Army, community action agencies, local behavioral health centers, local health departments, WIC, churches, and other community organizations and agencies. In addition, the department may have contracts with certain agencies to provide the services that are needed. For example, homeless services are available in multiple counties funded by grants from the department. If the service that is necessary is available in the family's county of residence through a grant-funded agency, that agency service must be utilized in place of using a demand payment.

Medical services, including mental health services and prescription medications, that meet the other Gibson requirement (prevention of placement or reunification) shall be paid for by using the Special Medical Card. (See below) All other resources shall be contacted by the child welfare worker prior to requesting the use of a Special Medical Card. If the family has Medicaid or third-party insurance, that form of payment must be utilized first. If the family does not have a Medicaid card, but may be eligible for one, arrangements must be made for application for Medicaid and/or CHIP. Local behavioral health centers must be contacted for indigent mental health and substance use disorder services. Only if the local behavioral health center cannot or will not provide services, shall Special Medical Cards be authorized for payment of mental health and substance use disorder services. Similarly, the local health department, low-income clinics, and hospitals must be contacted for indigent health-related services, prior to using the Special Medical Card.

For CPS cases involving a child who is unsafe and will be removed from the home if a service is not obtained or a child has been removed, but will be returned home if a service is obtained, the worker will do the following.

- Complete the safety plan or the case plan, including the permanency plan.
- Refer family to appropriate providers to implement the safety plan, as indicated.
- Seek and arrange for other needed safety resources or reunification services, as indicated, within the community.

- Determine whether there are other resources available to pay for safety resources (those outside of home-based family preservation services) or reunification services, or resources to receive those services without charge or at limited costs.
- Complete the necessary information within CCWIS to execute a demand payment.

The supervisor will do the following.

- Ensure that the case meets the eligibility criteria for Gibson services as they must be part of a safety plan or case plan for reunification.
- Ensure that all other resources for payment have been explored and utilized, as indicated.
- Ensure the payment has been marked as Gibson for funding stream appropriation.
- Approve the payment within CCWIS.

### ***Medical and Mental Examinations***

Medical and/or mental examinations may be ordered by the court in two situations concerning child abuse and neglect proceedings.

1. Pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-603\(a\)\(1\)](#) at any time during child abuse and neglect proceedings, the court may order the child or other parties to be examined by a physician, psychologist or psychiatrist, and may require testimony from such expert.
2. Pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-603\(b\)\(1\)](#), any person who has authority to file a petition may also request an order for a medical examination from a judge or juvenile referee to secure evidence of child abuse or neglect.

The availability of Medicaid, CHIP, private insurance or other third-party payment shall first be explored and utilized for payment for the examination. The services of the local behavioral health center and local health department shall also be explored and utilized. If the child, parent or custodian is indigent, and there are no other resources for payment for the examination or evaluation, the cost of the examinations shall be paid by the department. The cost of the service shall be paid by using the Special Medical Card. The department will reimburse providers at Medicaid rates only.

For cases involving an examination by a physician, psychologist or psychiatrist ordered by a court, the worker will do the following.

- Determine whether there are other resources available to pay for the examination, and make arrangements, as necessary.
- If no other resources are available, complete the necessary information within CCWIS to issue a Special Medical Card.

The supervisor will do the following.

- Ensure that the case meets the eligibility criteria for use of a Special Medical Card e.g. a court has ordered an examination by a physician, psychologist or psychiatrist.
- Ensure that all other resources for payment have been explored and utilized, as indicated.
- Approve the creation of a Special Medical Card within CCWIS.

### ***Photographs and X-rays***

Pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-2-808](#), any person required to report cases of children suspected of being abused and neglected may take or cause to be taken, at public expense, photographs of the areas of trauma visible on a child and, if medically indicated, cause to be performed radiological examinations of the child.

If a child who is the subject of an initial assessment has been photographed by a mandated reporter, reimbursement for the cost of the film and film development may be made by the department, upon request. The reporter should provide the worker with the receipts for the film and film development. The worker can then enter a demand payment to reimburse for the cost. The payment type which shall be used is the court costs, advertisement and related fees.

If a child who is the subject of an initial assessment has been x- rayed or was caused to be x-rayed by a mandated reporter, reimbursement for the cost of the x-rays may be made if there are no other resources available for payment. The worker will approve a Special Medical Card for the child for that service.

For cases involving *photographs* of a child who is the subject of an initial assessment, the worker will do the following:

- Complete the necessary information in CCWIS to execute a demand payment for the cost of the film and film development.

The supervisor will do the following:

- Ensure that the case meets the eligibility criteria for payment, e.g. a child who is the subject of an initial assessment was photographed by a mandated reporter.
- Approve the demand payment in CCWIS.

For cases involving *x-rays* of a child who is the subject of an initial assessment, caused to be done by a mandated reporter, the worker will do the following.

- Determine whether there are other resources available to pay for the x-ray, and make arrangements, as necessary.
- If no other resources are available, complete the necessary information within CCWIS to create a Special Medical Card.

The supervisor will ensure that the case meets the eligibility criteria for payment, e.g. a child who is the subject of an initial assessment.

### ***Recovery Residences for Substance Use Disorder***

Recovery residences must be certified by the Bureau for Behavioral Health (BBH) to obtain referrals or state funds. Uncertified recovery residences **may not** receive state funding or any referrals from a

medical or clinical treatment facility that receives any state funding. See [W. Va. Code §16-59-1 et seq](#) and the accompanying legislative rule, [W. Va. Code St. R. §69-15-1 et seq](#).

The West Virginia Alliance of Recovery Residences (WVARR) is the agency that certifies recovery residences in West Virginia. [WVARR](#) maintains a list of recovery residences that have obtained certification. Any non-certified recovery residence may not receive any funds from any source within the State Treasury even if it is court ordered.

Child welfare workers must make referrals to those certified recovery residences listed on the [WVARR's](#) website. The website should be checked each time a referral is made to ensure that the recovery residence is certified.

Child welfare workers can only make payments to a certified recovery residence. To submit payment for a certified recovery residence, the child welfare worker will enter a demand payment under "Other Approved Payment" type, for "in-patient substance use treatment".

Note: At any time a court orders the department to make a payment to an uncertified recovery residence, immediately notify and, if available, forward the accompanying court order, according to the staff's chain of command, to the appropriate Bureau for Social Services regional attorney and deputy commissioner.

### ***Special Medical Card***

The Special Medical Card may be provided to eligible clients to obtain services from a medical provider within a specified date range. However, resources must first be explored before authorizing a Special Medical Card. The child welfare clients who may be eligible to obtain medical services through authorization of the Special Medical Card include:

- Children of families receiving child protective services.
- Children with whom the department is involved through CPS that have medical needs and there is no other way to pay for this need, i.e., Medicaid, CHIP, or other third-party coverage. (This only applies to non-custody cases that are currently active and open for ongoing services.)
- Gibson (medical only).
- Either a child or parent, that requires medical services, and if not provided, will result in a child's removal or prevent the return of a child into custody.

Please refer to the version notes in CCWIS for information about issuing a Special Medical Card.

### ***Expert and Fact Testimony***

Some professionals may be subpoenaed to testify in a child abuse or neglect proceeding. If the professional is being asked to testify as an expert witness, concerning information regarding such things as an illness, child abuse injury or mental health issue, the witness may receive compensation for expenses associated with their testimony through the Supreme Court of Appeals Administrative Office.

The person providing the testimony should inquire with the circuit court for the necessary information about submitting claims for compensation.

Other professionals may be subpoenaed to testify concerning their own involvement in evaluating or providing treatment or services to a child and/or family in a child abuse or neglect proceeding. Fact witnesses may receive compensation for expenses associated with their testimony through the department. The person providing the testimony should submit a copy of their subpoena and their invoice to the Department of Human Services, Bureau for Social Services, Accounts Payable, 350 Capitol Street, Charleston, WV 25305. The rates of payments made will be according to those rates established by the legislature.

## **SECTION 9 - CPS LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESSES**

In some cases, the different statutes, and court Rules and Procedures may appear to be confusing, overlapping, or difficult to follow. To provide guidance for child welfare staff, the requirements and accompanying procedures have been set out in the following parts of this section. Some of these parts contain requirements which can be applied at different points in the life of a case while others are applicable at a single point. It is the responsibility of the worker and supervisor to ensure that all applicable procedures are followed.

### **9.1 Reasonable Efforts**

State statute requires that court orders issued after certain judicial proceedings have been held must contain a finding on reasonable efforts. Those proceedings include: [W. Va. Code §49-4-602](#), temporary custody pending a hearing; [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#), dispositional hearing; and, [W. Va. Code §49-4-110](#), foster care review.

Reasonable effort is the term used to describe those actions which are taken prior to the placement of a child in substitute care in order to prevent or eliminate the need for removing the child from the child's home; and, those actions necessary to ensure that the safety of the child will be maintained if the child is returned home.

Reasonable efforts must be made in child welfare cases to prevent the removal of children from the home as well as to safely reunify children with their families once they have been removed from the home.

As the result of the court's determination about reasonable efforts, the court order must include one of these findings.

- Reasonable efforts were required, and that the department made such efforts
- Reasonable efforts were required, and that the department did not make such efforts.
- The child was in imminent danger and that reasonable efforts were not possible.
- Reasonable efforts were not required because of aggravated circumstances or other situations as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#).

## **9.2 Aggravated Circumstances and Other Situations Where Reasonable Efforts are not Required**

Aggravated circumstances is the term used in state statute to define certain conditions in which the department is not required to make reasonable efforts to prevent removal of a child and to provide reunification services once a child has been removed. This term is found in [W. Va. Code §49-4-604\(b\)](#).

The department is not required to make reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of a child or to reunite a child with their parent if the court determines the parent has subjected the child to aggravated circumstances which include but are not limited to abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse.

Other instances when reasonable efforts are not required are when the parent has committed or attempted to commit any of the following:

- Committed murder of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed voluntary manslaughter of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter or been an accessory before or after the fact to either crime.
- Committed a malicious assault that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, to another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit malicious assault, or been an accessory before or after the fact to the same that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, to another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed sexual assault or sexual abuse of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit sexual assault or sexual abuse, or been an accessory before or after the fact to the same of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Has been required by state or federal law to register with a sex offender registry, and the court has determined in consideration of the nature and circumstances surrounding the prior charges against that parent, that the child's interests would not be promoted by a preservation of the family.
- The parental rights of the parent to another child have been terminated involuntarily.

*Note: the definition of aggravated circumstances is not exhaustive. That is, a worker can present to the court information about the acts of a parent other than those described above and ask that the court consider these acts as aggravated circumstances.*

### **9.3 Imminent Danger**

Imminent danger to a child is defined in state statute. The definition is contained in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#). The purpose of this statute is to provide a clear definition of those situations which place children at the greatest risk of serious harm.

In situations of imminent danger, the safety of the child is in question and it may be necessary to remove the child(ren) to protect them. Because of the need for immediate protection, removal in situations of imminent danger is usually accomplished by the filing of a petition requesting temporary custody pending a hearing.

#### ***Emergency Custody of a Child in Imminent Danger without Prior Judicial Authorization***

State statute [W. Va. Code §49-4-303](#) authorizes child welfare workers to take a child into custody absent a court order and to remove that child from their home in certain limited circumstances. According to the statute:

- The child must be in an emergency situation which constitutes imminent danger.
- A worker must have personally witnessed that the child is in imminent danger.
- The worker must have probable cause to believe that the child will suffer additional child abuse or neglect or be removed from the county before a petition can be filed and temporary custody can be ordered.

Whenever possible the worker should receive prior approval from their supervisor before taking custody of the child.

When a child welfare worker determines that a child is in imminent danger and requires immediate protection, then the child welfare worker must take the following actions.

- The worker should contact the prosecuting attorney to file a petition requesting temporary custody if time permits.
- If the worker has probable cause to believe that the child will suffer additional harm, or the parents will flee while a petition is being prepared then the worker may take the child into custody.
- In cases in which there is more than one child in the home the worker must determine if all of the children are in imminent danger and assess if they should take immediate custody of all of the children.
- If the parents are present when the worker takes custody, then the worker must inform the parents that they can be present when the emergency custody ratification order is requested and the name of the person to whom the request will be made.
- If the parents are not present, then the worker must leave a note in the residence describing the actions taken and the name of the person and place where the application for emergency

custody ratification will be made.

- After taking custody of the child(ren) the worker must take the child(ren) immediately to a circuit court judge or a magistrate, acting as the juvenile referee, in the county in which custody was taken, or if no such judge or magistrate/juvenile referee be available, go before a circuit court judge or magistrate/juvenile referee of an adjoining county, and make application for an order ratifying the emergency custody. Note: *although the statute permits ratification by either a magistrate acting as the juvenile referee or circuit court judge, whenever possible the worker should approach the circuit court judge with the request for an order of ratification.*
- The worker will receive the order giving custody from a magistrate/juvenile referee or judge after filing the application. The application does not serve as the order; they are two different documents. If seeking emergency custody through a magistrate/juvenile referee, the worker is not to leave the magistrate's/juvenile referee's office without the order.
- The worker does not need to take a template of the custody order with them but will need to ensure that certain language is contained in the order. Specifically, the following language must be covered in the order:
  - that remaining in the home is contrary to the welfare of the child(ren);
  - that reasonable efforts are not required due to imminent danger to the child(ren); and
  - that physical and legal custody are being granted to the Department of Health and Human Resources;
- If the request for an order ratifying emergency custody is not granted then the worker must return the child to their caretakers; or
- If the emergency custody is granted, then the worker will place the child in care.

*Note: at the time, an order of ratification is sought the worker can also request an order for a medical examination for evidentiary purposes.*

When a request for emergency custody is ratified, the worker can retain custody of the child until the end of the next two judicial days, unless a petition requesting temporary custody pending a hearing has been filed and custody of the child has been transferred to the department by court order.

### ***Circumstances Where Custody is Taken During the Pendency of a Child Abuse or Neglect Hearing***

There may be instances when a child abuse or neglect case is pending in court and the department must take emergency custody of a child from a parent. This includes situations when the court orders a child in the department's legal custody, but places the child in the physical custody of a parent and the child must be removed from that parent. Regardless of whether the court has previously granted the department custody of the child, if the department takes physical custody of a child due to a change in circumstances and without a court order issued at the time of the removal, the department must immediately notify the court and a hearing must take place within ten days to determine if there is imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child and there is no reasonably available alternative to removal of the child.

The child welfare worker must follow the CPS process, which includes obtaining supervisory approval at certain intervals, to determine if the child must be removed. Depending upon the specific situation, this could mean completing an *Immediate Safety Threat Assessment* and temporary protection plan, or completing the initial or ongoing assessment which includes the safety analysis. When a child must be taken into custody without a court order during a pending child abuse or neglect case, the child welfare worker must:

- Consult with the prosecuting attorney about why the department feels the child must be removed. If circumstances do not allow consultation with the prosecuting attorney prior to removal, notify the prosecuting attorney as soon as possible that the removal occurred and provide copies of documentation supporting the removal within three days.
- Request that the prosecuting attorney notify the court and other parties that the child was removed and request that the date for the next hearing be scheduled within ten days of the removal.

### ***Custody of a Child Taken by a Law Enforcement Officer***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-301\(a\)](#), authorizes a law enforcement officer to take a child believed to be abused or neglected into custody without a court order if:

- the child is abandoned; or
- the child requires emergency medical treatment by a physician and the child's parents, parent, guardian or custodian refuses to permit such treatment or is unavailable to consent.

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-301\(b\)](#), allows the department, in its discretion, to accept custody of a child from a law enforcement officer who has taken custody of a child in either of the circumstances described above. This statute also contains explicit requirements for both law enforcement officers and department staff when this section of the code is used to provide protection for children.

A child welfare worker may determine that a child is abandoned or is in a condition requiring emergency medical treatment and the child's parents refuse to secure such treatment or are unable or unavailable to consent. In all such situations, the worker must take the actions necessary to protect the child. If the child welfare worker decides to contact a law enforcement officer, then the worker should do the following.

- Provide the law enforcement officer with a thorough description of the situation as the worker understands it to be.
- Discuss the emergency provisions with the law enforcement officer as necessary without requesting or directing the officer to take custody as that decision must be made solely by the officer.

If the law enforcement officer takes custody of the child then the child welfare worker may, at their discretion, accept custody of the child. If the child welfare worker accepts custody of the child, then the worker must:

- Request a typed or legibly handwritten statement from the officer containing the officer's name, address, and office telephone number.
- Gather pertinent information that led to the decision to take the child into protective custody, including the date, time, and place where custody of the child was taken.
- Provide for the care of the child in accordance with the provisions in the following subsection *When a Child is Determined to be Abandoned*.

*Note: In order to assist law enforcement officers with the preparation of the necessary information the worker can provide the officer with a copy of the SS-CPS-4, WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS EMERGENCY PLACEMENT CONTRACT for their use. If it is not possible to obtain this form or other similar written information at the time the worker accepts custody, the worker MUST obtain this information as soon as possible and no later than the next day.*

### ***When a Child is Determined to be Abandoned***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-301](#), prohibits the removal of an abandoned child from the child's home until **all** reasonable efforts to make inquiries and arrangements with neighbors, relatives and friends have been exhausted, and the department has explored the possibility of placing a worker in the home to care for the child **for a period not less than** 12 hours to await the caregiver's return.

#### **1. Reasonable Efforts to Make Inquiries:**

In order to demonstrate that a reasonable effort to make inquiries and arrangements has been completed, the worker will need to determine if the child and their family have a history of child welfare involvement. If the family has a history, then the worker will:

- a. Review the case record to determine whether there are names and addresses of any persons known to have previously cared for the child:
  - i. if there are such persons, then contact them to discuss their willingness to care for the child; and
  - ii. if an appropriate caregiver is willing and able to meet the needs of the child, the worker may consider placement for the child, place the child with one of these persons.
- b. Develop a plan to provide supervision with the appropriate caregiver until the child is returned home or a petition is filed:
  - i. inform the person with whom the child is placed those conditions under which the child may be released to their parents.

If the family does not have a history, then the worker will:

- a. ask the child, if appropriate, if they can provide the name and address of someone who has cared for them:
- b. if a name is provided contact that person and discuss possible placement with them; or,
- c. if a name is not provided, proceed with the steps in Item B.

#### **2. Placement of a Home Services Worker**

Whenever it appears that the parents will be gone for 12 hours or less, or whenever the worker is unable to initially determine how long the parents will be gone, then department staff may be placed in the home for the initial 12 hour period.

Whenever the need for this type of care arises the worker will:

- a. Arrange for two persons, one of whom is a child welfare worker, to stay with the child.
- b. If the child's caretakers return before 12 hours have elapsed, then staff may leave at that time.
- c. Before leaving, staff must review the situation with the caretakers including whether there will be any follow-up activity on the part of the department;
  - i. if at the end of 12 hours the child's caretakers have not returned then the child may be placed in emergency shelter care or another suitable facility.

### ***Exceptions***

Whenever a child has been abandoned it will not be necessary to maintain the child in their own home under either of the following circumstances:

- The parent or parents are known to be violent or it is anticipated that the parent or parents may be incapacitated, using alcohol or other legal or illegal substances and would pose a threat to the safety of department staff.
- The child cannot be maintained safely in their own home because of conditions in the home which pose a substantial risk of harm to the child.

### ***When a Child is in Need of Emergency Medical Care***

When a child welfare worker accepts custody of a child in need of emergency medical care from a law enforcement officer then the worker will do the following:

- Take the child to a hospital or a physician for treatment.
- Attempt to locate the child's caretakers if medical care was a result of the caregiver's absence.
- Discuss the child's illness or injury with the physician to determine if a petition should be filed.
- As necessary, inform the physician that the child can be held in a hospital under the physician's care and against the will of the parents for a period of up to 96 hours if the physician considers it necessary to do so.
- Visitation by the caregiver may not be denied while the child is receiving emergency medical care.

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-301](#) defines a condition requiring emergency medical treatment as a condition which, if left untreated for a period of a few hours, may result in permanent physical damage; such a condition includes, but is not limited to, profuse or arterial bleeding, dislocation or fracture, unconsciousness and evidence of ingestion of significant amounts of a poisonous substance.

### **Family Courts ordering Children into Department Custody**

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-302](#) requires the department to respond immediately and assist a family court judge in the emergency custody and placement of a child when there is clear and convincing evidence that one or more of the following.

- There exists an imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#).
- The child is not the subject of a pending action before the circuit court alleging abuse and neglect of the child.
- There are no reasonable available alternatives to the emergency custody order.

The statute also directs the circuit court to enter and serve an administrative order that directs the department to submit, within 96 hours from the time the child was taken into custody, a *Disposition of CPS Initial Assessment Report To Family and Circuit Courts*, to the circuit and family court. A copy should be sent to the prosecuting attorney as well. The report shall include a statement of whether the department intends to file a child abuse and neglect petition.

When the department receives a written order from family court requiring the department to respond immediately and take custody of a child due to the conditions outlined above, the following must occur.

- A child welfare worker or supervisor must immediately respond to the situation based upon what is learned from the order. It may be necessary to call the family court judge, or their designee, to determine the location of the child or children as well as determine if any family members or responsible adults were considered for placement.
- Contact the caregiver(s) who had custody at the time of the removal, notifying them that the department has been court ordered to assume custody of the child(ren) and the reasons why the department was ordered to assume custody. If their whereabouts are unknown, attempt to notify the child's nearest known relative that the child(ren) is being placed into state custody and request that they inform the parents, guardians or custodians to contact the department as soon as possible.
- Follow the placement procedures of any child who is placed in foster care.
- Within 96 hours of the time the child was placed into protective custody, notify the appropriate family court judge and circuit court judge in writing using the *Disposition of CPS Initial Assessment Report for Family and Circuit Courts* form. This notification must include whether CPS intends to file a child abuse and neglect petition in circuit court and applicable information gathered up until that point.
- If the family court finds that a child was in imminent danger and the only safe solution is custody with the department, a child abuse and neglect petition must be filed in circuit court unless CPS can clearly determine and document within 96 hours that the child(ren) would be safe in their home with a safety plan, or safe (no imminent, impending or immediate safety threats) without any type of safety plan if they were to be returned to one or both of to their caregivers. The factors supporting this decision must be clearly documented in the *Disposition of CPS Initial*

*Assessment Report to Family and Circuit Courts* and provided to the family and circuit courts.

- If the children must remain in custody longer than 96 hours from the time the child was placed in protective custody rather than return to their parent(s), guardian(s) or custodian(s) who had custody at the time of the removal, a petition **must** be filed as soon as possible but no later than 96 hours from the time the child was placed in protective custody.
- If CPS is unable to clearly determine within 96 hours that a child abuse or neglect petition is not required for child protection, a petition must be filed in circuit court due to the family court judge finding that the child(ren) were in imminent danger. If at the conclusion of the initial assessment, CPS feels that the children are not required to be in state custody (a safety plan is not required for protection), then CPS must motion the circuit court requesting that the child(ren) be returned to the custody of their parent(s).

See *Section 3* for more information regarding completing the initial assessment.

## 9.4 Multidisciplinary Investigative Teams

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-402\(a\)](#) requires the prosecuting attorney to establish a Multidisciplinary Investigative Team in every county.

The purposes of the multidisciplinary investigative team is:

- to ensure that children are safe from abuse and neglect; and
- to coordinate investigations of alleged abuse and neglect and criminal prosecution of offenders.

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-402\(a\)](#) provides for the establishment of a Multidisciplinary Investigative Team (MDIT) in every county. The prosecuting attorney is the head of the team and the permanent members are the prosecuting attorney, local child welfare services staff and local law enforcement staff. In addition to members required by statute, other persons who may contribute to the MDIT's efforts may be appointed by the prosecuting attorney.

The statute designates the prosecuting attorney as the head of the multidisciplinary investigative process. The prosecuting attorney has the ultimate authority to decide how the team will function. Also, because the statute does not describe in detail the duties of the MDIT, procedures may vary from county to county.

The department representative for CPS should contact the prosecuting attorney to discuss any questions about the operation of the MDIT.

The team should address:

- the types of cases which will be jointly investigated by child welfare staff and law enforcement;
- the procedure for initiating a joint investigation;
- the procedures for sharing information;
- the procedures for interviewing the parties in a case; and

- any other procedures the parties believe should be addressed.

Although child abuse and neglect cases should be investigated jointly by both law enforcement and child welfare staff, it may not always be possible for the initial investigation to be handled jointly. See *Section 3.2 Initiation of the Initial Assessment, Preparation*.

## **9.5 Medical Examination of a Child for Evidentiary Purposes**

The [\*W. Va. Code §49-4-603\*](#), allows any person with authority to file a petition to request an order for a medical examination from a judge or juvenile referee to secure evidence of child abuse or neglect.

### ***Worker Actions in Requesting an Order for a Medical Examination***

Whenever a child welfare worker determines that an examination under this statute is necessary then the following must occur.

- The worker will discuss the case with their supervisor and request supervisory approval to proceed.
- If supervisory approval is given, the worker will prepare and submit the necessary request to a judge or juvenile referee.
- If the request is granted the judge or juvenile referee will issue an order directing a law enforcement officer to take the child into custody and deliver the child to a physician or hospital for examination.
- The worker will inform the parents of the examination, and the parents may accompany the officer to the examination.

After the examination, the law enforcement officer may return the child to the custody of the parents, or the officer may retain custody themselves, or the officer may give custody to the department.

### ***Time Limits for Department Custody after a Medical Examination***

If a law enforcement officer gives custody of a child to the department after a medical examination, such custody may be maintained only until the end of the next judicial day unless a petition requesting temporary custody pending a hearing has been filed and custody transferred to the department by court order.

## **9.6 Filing a Petition**

The initiation of judicial proceedings in cases of abuse and neglect always begins with the filing of a petition with the circuit court. A petition may be filed by the department or any reputable person who has knowledge of the alleged abuse or neglect. A petition may be filed where the child resides, where the alleged abuse or neglect occurred, where the custodial respondent or one of the other respondents resides, or to the judge of the court who is in vacation. A petition may be filed in only one county.

Two or more parties, including the child welfare worker and a non-offending parent or reputable person, may also file a co-petition jointly alleging a child is abused or neglected against the offending parent. The department, a parent, or reputable person may move to be joined as a co-petition after the filing of the initial petition.

A co-petition with the non-offending parent may be filed with the circuit court even in circumstances where the parents or guardians are no longer living together, separated or divorced and the offending parent or guardian would be substantiated against for child abuse and/or neglect. The department **will not** request physical **or** legal custody of the children as the non-offending parent will maintain care, custody, and control of their children. If the non-offending parent or guardian **does not** have physical **or** legal custody of the children, the department **can** request physical **or** legal custody to be placed with the non-offending parent.

Both [W. Va. Codes, §49-4-601](#) and [§49-4-602](#) for example, as well as the Court Rules and the Gibson Decree address the contents of a petition and specify the procedures that must be followed in initiating judicial proceedings.

The purposes of a petition and the procedures accompanying its use are to inform the child's caretakers of the specific allegations concerning their conduct towards their child(ren); ensure that all required legal procedures are followed; and, ensure that all legal rights and protections are extended to the child and the child's caregivers.

### ***Role of the Prosecuting Attorney***

The Supreme Court of West Virginia addressed the role of the prosecuting attorney in child abuse and neglect cases in its ruling in the cases styled, "In Re: Jonathan G" and "In Re: Diva P." The ruling is as follows: "Based on our conclusion that the prosecuting attorney's role as related to DoHS in an abuse and neglect proceeding is that of a traditional attorney-client, we further determine that a prosecuting attorney has no independent right to formulate and advocate positions separate from its client in these cases." This ruling means that the prosecuting attorney is supposed to represent the position of the department throughout the stages of all judicial proceedings.

Child welfare sStaff involved in judicial proceedings should always be willing to discuss any and all aspects of a case with the prosecuting attorney, but must remember that the final recommendations about the case are the responsibility of the department. If the prosecuting attorney will not assist the department in filing a petition, the department must initiate the provision for Dispute Resolution, pursuant to [W. Va. Code §49-4-501\(c\)](#).

### ***Initiation of an Abuse/Neglect Petition***

Petitions are initiated in cases where one or more of the following exist.

- A report of suspected abuse or neglect has been received and the parents refuse to allow access to the children in order to ensure that the children are safe.

- The child is unsafe and there are no available or appropriate in-home safety responses.
- The child is in imminent danger and there are no appropriate or available safety responses.
- The parent(s) has committed an act which meets the definition of aggravated circumstances or other situations as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#).
- The child is unsafe, a safety plan with services in the home controls the safety threat, but the parents have demonstrated that they are incapable of or unwilling to take the actions necessary to reduce the threat to their child so that safety does not have to be controlled by external means.
- Someone other than the department files a petition alleging abuse or neglect.

Whenever the worker determines that it is necessary to file a petition, the following must occur prior to filing.

- The worker will discuss the case with their supervisor since no petition may be initiated without supervisory approval.
- If the worker is unable to contact their immediate supervisor then the worker will discuss the case with a supervisor in a related unit, the social services manager, or the deputy commissioner of field operations.
- The supervisor will review the record to determine that all alternative and supportive services were pursued.
- If the supervisor does not agree with the worker then the supervisor must assist the worker in developing an appropriate safety plan.
- If the supervisor agrees with the worker, then the supervisor will direct the worker to contact the prosecuting attorney to request that a petition be filed and this decision will be documented in CCWIS.

Whenever someone other than the department files a petition, the circuit court may order the department to complete an initial assessment or be a party to the petition. If an initial assessment is ordered, the child welfare worker and supervisor must follow the same rules and procedures for initial assessment as other assessments of suspected child abuse or neglect and adhere to the requirements of the court order. If an initial assessment is not ordered but the judge rules that the department must be a party to the proceeding, the child welfare worker must adhere to the court order and follow applicable CPS and Foster Care policies. The department may also be given notice of the preliminary hearing and must attend the hearing and be prepared to report the results of the initial assessment. If an order is not issued requiring the department to conduct an initial assessment, the department must commence an initial assessment immediately upon receiving notice of the preliminary hearing. The department may also be required to provide services to the family by the court.

### ***Worker Actions: Placement***

When placement options are located the following should be considered.

- Placement preference should be given to relatives and fictive kin of the child(ren).
- Grandparents of the child must be considered for placement first, as mandated by [W. Va. Code §49-4-114\(a\)\(3\)](#), for purposes of adoption of the child should reunification become

unachievable. The department should make every effort to ensure that a diligent search for all grandparents is completed prior to initial placement.

- The department must diligently search for relatives, fictive kin and previously placed/adopted siblings (if applicable).
- The department must identify and provide notice of the child's need for placement to grandparents, other relatives, fictive kin and caretakers of previously placed/adopted siblings (if applicable) of the child(ren) known to the department whether or not they have expressed a willingness to provide care or take custody of the child(ren).

See *Section 10.2 Non-Discriminatory Placement Protocol* for information regarding non-discriminatory placement practice for placement providers.

*Note, as a reminder to staff, though resource parents have been trained in safe sleep practices, it is important and necessary to discuss safe sleep at the time of placement of an infant and during future visits in the home.*

Within seven days of filing a petition, the department must file a written report with the court, a list of all of the grandparents, other relatives, fictive kin, and caretakers of previously placed/adopted siblings (if applicable) known to the department, whether or not the grandparents, other relatives, fictive kin or caretakers of previously placed /adopted siblings (if applicable) have expressed a willingness to provide care or take custody of the child(ren). See *Foster Care Policy* for information regarding relative/kinship and relative foster/adopt placements for detailed instruction on relative/kinship placement requirements; and *Foster Care Policy* for information regarding sibling placement for detailed instruction on sibling placement requirements.

Within 45 days from filing the petition, the department must also file a written report of individuals identified who are willing and able to act as resource or kinship parents to the child with the court. [W. Va. Code § 49-4-601](#).

#### ***Worker Actions: Contact with the Prosecuting Attorney***

When approval for the filing of a petition has been given by the supervisor, the worker will contact the prosecuting attorney to:

- discuss the case including any questions the prosecuting attorney may have; and
- request that the prosecuting attorney prepare the petition.

#### ***Worker Actions: Summary of the Facts and Items for Inclusion in the Petition***

To enable the prosecuting attorney to prepare the petition, the worker may be required to prepare a *Summary of the Facts and Other Items* for use by the prosecuting attorney. The summary must include specific information, the information must be arranged in a specific format and the summary must be reviewed and approved by the supervisor prior to submission to the prosecuting attorney.

### **Format of the Summary of Facts**

The information in a petition may vary from case to case depending on the circumstances in a case and the judicial hearing that the worker is requesting has asked the prosecuting attorney to initiate. The worker must include the required information in each of the following sections as appropriate.

- **Identifying Information** - List the names, address and relationship (parent, stepparent, custodian, etc.) of the child(ren)'s current caretaker(s). In addition, list the name and address, if known, of any absent parent. Finally, list the names, current address, sex, and age of all the children who are to be included in the petition. Note, in situations of imminent danger all children in the home must be included in the petition and the petition must clearly indicate whether all or some of the children are threatened. Also, in cases of domestic violence, the worker should know that to stay safe some victims will use the Address Confidentiality Program out of the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office ([W. Va. State Rule §153-37](#).) Additionally it is prohibited by [W. Va. State Rule §191-2-3](#), for a domestic violence program to disclose personally identifiable information of a program participant.
- **Conduct** - The conduct of the child's caretakers which the worker considers to be maltreatment and/or a threat to child safety must be described in specific detail and must be related to the appropriate conditions in [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#). In addition, this description must include the time(s) and place(s) where the conduct occurred. If this is a case requiring termination, or a case in which there are aggravated circumstances, then the conduct of the child's caretakers which meet either of these two conditions must be described in specific detail.
- **Supportive Services** - List the safety threats which place the child(ren) in danger and all supportive services directed at remedying them. This description should include services provided by the department, services referred to other agencies, and services which were offered but not accepted. In addition, the worker should state the reason(s) why the supportive services were not successful in controlling the safety of the child.
- **Alternatives to Removal** - If the worker has determined that the child cannot be safe in their home then the worker must state why there is no alternative to removal. That is, the worker must explain why there are no available safety resources which can control safety to the point that the child can remain in their home.
- **Alternative Placement** - If the worker believes that the child cannot be protected in their own home, then the worker must describe why it was not possible to protect the child by developing a safety plan with safety resources such as relatives or neighbors instead of filing a petition. See *Sections 3.9 Temporary Protection Plans* and *3.12 Safety Analysis and Planning*.
- **Witnesses** - List the names, addresses, telephone numbers and relationship to the child's caretakers, if any, of those persons who could testify to the facts.
- **Number of Contacts** - List the number and the dates of the contacts the worker had with the child and the child's caretakers.
- **Relief** - List the relief and the actions, which the child welfare worker will ask the prosecuting attorney to request the court to order. The relief requested must be one that is available under the provisions of the statutes and is designed to meet the specific circumstances of each individual case. As a part of the relief the worker must ask the court to address the issue of the

child(ren)'s placement. The worker must have a specific placement in mind or a plan to develop one and this information must be included in the petition so that the court can rule on it. *Note: [W. Va Code §49-4-602\(a\)\(2\)](#) prohibits the court, in cases of temporary custody pending a hearing, from permitting the placement of the child(ren) in their own home unless the abusing parent has been precluded by court order from visiting or residing in that home.*

- **Child Support** - In every case in which a petition asking for the removal of a child is requested the worker must ask the prosecuting attorney to include the issue of child support. Specifically, the worker must include as part of the relief a request that the court:
  - order each of the parent(s) to complete a financial disclosure statement; and
  - order the parent(s) to pay child support.

The worker should also ask the court to address, as part of its order, other forms of support such as medical insurance which the parents may have in place for their child.

- **Findings Regarding Continuation in the Home and Reasonable Efforts** - Whenever there is a request for the removal of a child from their home as a part of the relief being requested, the worker must include in the summary a request that the court, as a part of the order in the case, state the following.
  - Continuation in the home is contrary to the best interests of the child(ren) and why this is so.
  - Whether or not the department made a reasonable effort to prevent removal or that the situation is an emergency and such efforts would be unreasonable or impossible.
  - Whether or not this is a case in which there are aggravated circumstances or other situations as defined in [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#) and as a result reasonable efforts are not required.

*Note: The Supreme Court has developed and distributed a set of model orders for use in these types of cases. To ensure the inclusion of all necessary findings, the worker should encourage the prosecuting attorney to have these orders used by the court.*

### **Worker Actions: Review and Verification of the Petition**

After the prosecuting attorney has prepared the petition, the worker will review it for accuracy and content. If the petition is accurate and complete and contains all required information, then the worker will sign it. If the petition contains any inaccurate information or if it is incomplete, then the worker **must** not sign it. Instead, the worker must describe the inaccuracies or omissions to the prosecuting attorney and request that they be corrected. Once the necessary corrections have been made then the worker will sign the petition. If the prosecuting attorney refuses to correct the petition, then the worker must refuse to sign it and must discuss the matter with their supervisor.

### **Worker Actions: Prior Notice of the Filing of a Petition**

Once the decision to file a petition has been made the worker must make a reasonable effort to notify the child's caretakers of the day of presentation of the petition to the court. Prior notice is not required when the caretakers are:

- likely to flee;

- hiding;
- attempting to force the child to deny that they have been harmed or threatened with harm; or
- when the whereabouts of the caretakers are unknown.

Whenever prior notice is not provided for one of these reasons, the worker must document this decision in CCWIS.

*Note: A reasonable effort to notify means that the worker can inform the caretakers of their intention to file a petition even though supervisory approval has not yet been granted; or, the worker can wait until supervisory approval has been granted and then telephone the caretakers or go to their home to notify them.*

### **Amendments to a Petition**

The Rules of Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings allow a petition to be amended at any time until the final adjudicatory hearing begins; provided that an adverse party is granted sufficient time to respond to the amendment. If a new allegation or threat to child safety arises after the final adjudicatory hearing, the allegations should be included in an amended petition rather than a separate petition in a new civil action, and the final adjudicatory hearing shall be reopened for hearing evidence on the new allegations in the amended petition. If allegations arise against a co-petitioner during a court case, then the petition may be amended which may include a realignment of the parties.

*Note: Many times, the full scope of what is occurring in a family may not be evident prior to the initial filing of a petition. Allowing petitions to be amended assures the safety of children be safeguarded when new, pertinent information is discovered.*

### **Worker Actions: Requesting to Amend a Petition**

Whenever a child welfare worker determines that a petition should be amended, the following must occur.

- The child welfare worker will discuss the case with their supervisor and request supervisory approval to proceed.
- If the supervisor agrees, the child welfare worker or supervisor will contact the prosecuting attorney advising why the department is requesting the petition be amended.
- The child welfare worker will provide the prosecuting attorney with supportive documentation when applicable.

## **9.7 Temporary Custody Pending a Preliminary Hearing**

Under certain circumstances, a child welfare worker may need to implement a temporary protection plan or a safety plan that requires foster care services to ensure safety. [W. Va. Code §49-4-601](#), provides the worker the opportunity to file a petition with the court requesting an immediate transfer of custody until a hearing can be held when:

- there exists imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child; and
- there are no reasonably available alternatives to the removal of the child.

***Worker Actions: Preparation for Temporary Custody Hearing***

Prior to the hearing on imminent danger the worker will:

- arrange for the preparation and presentation of a petition; and
- provide notice of the hearing to the appropriate parties.

***Worker Actions: During the Temporary Custody Hearing***

During the hearing, the worker will be present in court in order to respond to any questions or requests for information from the circuit court judge or other parties.

***Worker Actions: After the Temporary Custody Hearing***

Once the court has ruled on the petition, the worker will proceed to implement the order of the court including removing the child from the home of the child’s caretakers.

**9.8 Placement Requirements**

When a judge grants the department temporary custody pending a hearing and the child is placed outside their home, the child welfare worker must ensure that the following placement requirements are met unless they are modified by court order.

***Visitation***

Visitation with the child shall be allowed on a regular scheduled basis at any reasonable time requested by the parents or legal guardian. Visitation can only be limited or denied if there is a likelihood of danger of physical violence to the child or another person, or if custody was obtained because of physical or sexual abuse, and it is determined that it is necessary to deny, limit, or supervise visitation to protect the child. Whenever visitation is denied or limited, the parents must be informed by the worker of the reasons why and the worker must document these reasons in CCWIS on the visitation plan screen. Visitation is never to be limited or denied due to the child’s inability or lack of motivation to progress in a placement program’s treatment process.

***Placement Facility***

Children shall only be placed in those facilities which meet the department’s standards for adequate food, clothing, shelter, and supervision as defined by the department’s Homefinding Policy, Child Placing, or Group Residential Licensing regulations. In addition, children shall only be placed in a facility which has no more than the number of children for which it has been approved or licensed.

***Placement of Siblings***

Children must be placed with siblings whenever possible and in the best interest of the child(ren).

### ***Worker Contact***

The worker will maintain regular contact with the child and foster placement. The worker shall maintain contact with the child or foster placement at least bi-weekly until the adjudicatory hearing, unless modified by court order. The child welfare worker will have face-to-face contact with the child at least once per calendar month or more frequently and additional contact with the child or foster placement may be by telephone or virtual conference. Contact may be either a face-to-face meeting or can be a telephone call. Workers shall notify the foster placement of all court hearings, including the preliminary hearing.

### ***Transportation***

When a parent or legal guardian wants to visit their child(ren) and cannot make reasonable arrangements to do so, then the worker shall arrange the necessary transportation.

### ***Telephone Calls***

Phone calls between the parents or legal guardians and the child will be permitted daily at least five days a week at the option of the parent or child. There will be no charge to the parent or child when the child is placed outside the calling area of the parent. Telephone calls may be denied or limited when custody has been obtained because of physical or sexual abuse and denial or limitation of contact is necessary to protect the child. Whenever phone contact is denied or limited, the parents must be informed by the worker of the reasons why and the worker must document this in CCWIS on the visitation plan screen. An itemized telephone bill must be presented to the worker for verification of the expenses incurred in order for the foster parents or the placement facility to be reimbursed through a demand payment in CCWIS.

See *Foster Policy* regarding placement requirements and general placement activities for more information.

### ***Placement of a Child Whose Siblings are Already in Foster Care***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-111](#), requires the department, when placing a child in foster care who also has siblings in care or previously adopted, to notify the caretakers of the siblings of the availability of this additional child for possible placement in their home.

The purpose of the statute is to ensure that a child who is placed in foster care after other siblings already in care or previously adopted shall be placed with those other children where possible and in the children's best interest.

In all cases in which a child is to be placed, the worker must ask the child's caregivers at the time of placement if they have other children in foster care or other children for whom their rights have been terminated. If the answer is yes to either question, then the worker must:

- Notify the resource or adoptive parents of the sibling(s) that this child is available for placement;
- Discuss with the foster or adoptive parents their interest in caring for this child;

- Refer the resource or adoptive family to the Home Finding unit as soon as possible if the resource or adoptive parents agree to care for the child coming into care; and
- Document the results of all contacts made to place children with their siblings.

*Note: Whenever siblings are not placed together, the worker must ask the court to approve the separate placement of the siblings. For more information regarding continued requirements to locate kinship and relative placement options, refer to Foster Care Policy regarding diligent search and Section 9.6 of this policy.*

## **9.9 Court Appointed Legal Counsel**

In any legal proceeding in which the department is petitioning the court in a case of child abuse or neglect, the child and their caretakers have a right to be represented at every stage of the proceedings.

A child and their caretakers may not be represented by the same legal counsel, however a legal counsel may represent all the children or both parents if both parents agree to be represented by the same person. The court must appoint legal counsel to represent the child(ren) and, if the parents cannot afford legal counsel, then the court must appoint counsel for them. Appointed counsel has a right to certain information and other materials from the department. This information should be provided to the legal counsel by the department child welfare worker who had the petition filed.

*Note: the duties and responsibilities of the legal counsel appointed to represent the child(ren) continue until the child is in a permanent placement.*

### **Access to Records**

Both the legal counsel for the child and the legal counsel for the child's caretakers have a right to review the records and other information maintained by the department about the child or the child's caretakers with one exception. The department must not allow access to records disclosing the identity of a reporter.

Whenever legal counsel makes a request to review a record, the department will make the necessary arrangements for the review. The request does not have to be honored on the same day it was made. The required information to be produced must be reviewed and identifying information must be deleted about the reporter. Once that information has been removed, then the worker should notify counsel of the availability of the record for review.

## **9.10 Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)**

The W. Va. Code [§49-4-601](#), permits the department, guardian ad litem, or parent as defined by [§49-1-204](#), to request a court appointed special advocate (CASA) be appointed by the court in jurisdictions that offer this service. Court appointed special advocates are trained volunteers who shall

remain involved in a case until further order of the court or permanent placement of the child(ren) is achieved.

### ***Access to Records***

Unlike legal counsel, a CASA volunteer does not have a statutory right to inspect the records of the child whom they are appointed to represent or the records of the child's family. According to the Supreme Court a CASA volunteer can gain access to these records either through a court order or through a waiver for the release of information from the parties, however the CASA volunteer cannot be allowed any information which discloses the identity of a reporter.

Whenever a CASA volunteer requests access to department records, the worker must verify the existence of a court order or waiver by all the parties before granting access. If there is no order or waiver, then access must be denied.

## **9.11 Discovery**

Under [Rule 10](#) of the the Rules of Procedure for Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings, the prosecuting attorney is required to provide certain information to the legal counsel for the caretakers. Most of the information which is to be provided will consist of materials developed by or in the possession of the department. The responsibility for providing this information to the prosecuting attorney for transmission to the caretakers' legal counsel rests with the child welfare worker.

Within three days of the filing of the petition the worker will provide the following to the prosecuting attorney:

- A copy of any relevant written or recorded statements made by the caretakers and the substance of any oral statements which they made, and which will be offered in evidence during the hearing (examples include, but are not limited to: the initial assessment, case contacts, and safety plan);
- A copy of any books, papers, documents, photographs, tangible objects, buildings, or places which are material to the preparation of the case or are intended to be used as evidence in the case or were obtained from or belong to the caretakers (examples include, but are not limited to: photographs, police reports or school records);
- A copy of the results and reports of physical and/or mental examinations, if any, and a copy of scientific tests and/or experiments, if any, which are used in the preparation of the case or are intended to be used in evidence during the hearing; and (examples include, but are not limited to: medical records, parental fitness evaluations or mental health records); and
- A written list of names and addresses of all witnesses who will be called to testify together with any record of prior convictions of any such witnesses (examples include, but are not limited to: law enforcement, medical professionals or relatives who can testify to the allegations).

The disclosure provided for in this rule is not intended to limit the amount or nature of the disclosure in these cases. This rule merely establishes the minimum amount of disclosure required.

If, prior to or during any hearing a child welfare worker discovers additional evidence or material that should have been disclosed, they shall promptly notify the prosecuting attorney.

## **9.12 Preliminary Hearing**

The state statute regulating the preliminary hearing is contained in [W. Va. Code §49-4-708](#) and requires that: if at the time the petition was filed, the court placed or continued the child in the emergency custody of the department or a responsible person, then a preliminary hearing on emergency custody shall be initiated within ten days after the continuation or transfer of custody.

The purpose of the preliminary hearing is to determine the following.

- Whether there is reasonable cause to believe that the child is in imminent danger.
- Whether continuation in the home is contrary to the welfare of the child and set forth the reasons.
- Whether the department made reasonable efforts to preserve the family and to prevent the child's removal from their home or whether an emergency situation made such efforts unreasonable or impossible.
- Whether efforts should be made by the department to facilitate the child's return, and if so, what efforts should be made.

### ***Worker Preparation for the Preliminary Hearing***

Prior to the preliminary hearing the worker will do the following.

- Prepare and develop general terms or requirements to offer in the event that a pre-adjudicatory improvement period is requested. Provide the terms in writing to the prosecuting attorney prior to the hearing for presentation at the hearing.
- Based upon the time that a pre-adjudicatory improvement period may be granted and the stage of the initial assessment process, the terms that are offered may only be able to address the safety needs of the child and/or placement needs of the child.
- Discuss with the parent, when possible, and the child(ren), when appropriate, to determine known prospective multidisciplinary treatment team membership. *(This does not need to be a separate meeting and should be conducted during other necessary face-to-face contact with the family prior to the hearing.)*
- Prepare and send the written notification for the date of the multidisciplinary treatment team (MDT) meeting to all the parties within seven days of the filing of the petition. In the event the membership of the MDT is not known within seven days of the filing of the petition, (for example, the guardian ad litem or the parent's attorney may not have been appointed), the MDT notification letters should be taken to the hearing and provided to members at that time.
- Notify the prosecuting attorney in writing of any information that would negatively affect the granting of a pre-adjudicatory improvement period.
- If the child is in foster care placement out of the home due to a protection plan being implemented, complete the initial assessment, safety analysis and safety planning process,

considering possible reunification if the child can be protected and safety can be maintained with a safety plan.

- Obtain a copy of the parent(s) financial disclosure statement for child support to use during the hearing as needed.
- Notify the foster placement of the preliminary hearing date, time, and place.

### ***Worker Actions: During the Preliminary Hearing***

During the hearing the child welfare worker will take the following steps.

- Be prepared to request a court order for a mental or medical evaluation if needed.
- Provide the suggested terms for a pre-adjudicatory improvement period to the court and ask that they be made part of the court record, if this is requested.
- Include safety resources in the terms recommended for the pre-adjudicatory improvement period in the event that reunification can occur with an appropriate safety plan.
- Request that the order reflect that the parent(s)/caregivers will:
  - participate with the MDT;
  - participate in the ongoing assessment and development of the case plan; and
  - participate and cooperate with the terms of the pre-adjudicatory improvement period if one is granted.
- Obtain signed releases of information from the parent(s)/caregiver(s), or request that the order reflect the appropriate language to obtain any necessary medical information.
- Request that the signed releases of information be made part of the court record.
- Request that the court order reflect financial support by the parent(s)/caregiver(s) including the requirement that the parents complete a financial disclosure form as necessary.
- Request that the date for the next hearing be scheduled, placed on the docket and reflected in the court order.
- In the order granting the pre-adjudicatory improvement period, the court must order that a hearing be held to review the matter within 60 days or within 90 days of the granting of the pre-adjudicatory improvement period.
- Request that the written order reflect the department's financial responsibility for the expenses associated with the services identified in the pre-adjudicatory improvement period terms if the court so orders at the hearing;
- If the family demonstrates to the court that they are unable to bear the cost of such expenses, the court may order the department to financially support the provision of services.

### ***Worker Actions: When a Pre-adjudicatory Improvement Period is Granted***

Following the hearing, if a pre-adjudicatory improvement period is granted, the worker will take the following steps.

- Complete initial assessment and make arrangements for transferring the case to ongoing CPS if this has not occurred.
- Convene an MDT meeting.
- Prepare and educate the members of the multidisciplinary treatment team with the ongoing

assessment process and the next steps related to the process. The MDT meeting may be an appropriate opportunity to introduce the family to the child welfare worker that will be conducting the ongoing assessment and engage the family participating in the development of the case treatment plan if the case was not active in ongoing CPS.

- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT meeting in the development of the family's case plan.
- File the unified child and family case plan with the court within 30 days of the hearing granting the pre-adjudicatory improvement period and provide all members of the MDT with a copy of the plan.
- Provide the case plan to the circuit clerk and to the prosecuting attorney to meet the requirement to "file with the court".
- Complete the initial or ongoing assessment to determine if the child can be returned to the family and if safety and protection can be maintained with safety resources and in-home services, if the child is in a foster care placement.
- Provide the record keeping for the MDT meeting.
- Provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the improvement period and family case plan.
- Ensure that the service providers indicated in the unified child and family case plan provide written reports every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each treatment team member.
- Convene the multidisciplinary treatment team to review the family case plan evaluation and provide input for the unified child or family case plan evaluation of progress.
- Submit the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress report to the court and provide copies to the MDT members within 60 days of the hearing granting the improvement period.
- Request that the unified child or case plan evaluation of progress report is entered as part of the court record.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to ensure that the 60-day or 90-day hearing is scheduled and on the court's docket.
- Provide any modification in writing to the circuit clerk and to the prosecuting attorney to meet the requirement to "file with the court".
- Contact the prosecuting attorney 15 days prior to the expiration of the improvement period to ensure that the hearing is scheduled and on the court's docket.
- The adjudicatory hearing must take place no later than 60 days after the expiration of the improvement period. The worker may be accountable for keeping track of the dates of the improvement periods, hearings, mandated reports and MDT responsibilities.
- Remind the prosecuting attorney of the court's duty to specify a future date in the order if a motion for continuance of the hearing is received and there are no objections. *(If there is difficulty with receiving sufficient notice of a continuance motion or if there are objections to the continuance, the prosecuting attorney is to be immediately advised. If the department is requesting a continuance, the prosecuting attorney must be consulted to request the written motion that must specify "good cause" for the continuance).*
- Collect progress reports from providers to furnish to the court at the adjudicatory hearing.

### ***Worker Actions: When a Pre-Adjudicatory Improvement Period is not Requested or is Denied***

Following the hearing, if a pre-adjudicatory improvement period is not requested or granted, the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Complete the initial assessment and make arrangements for transferring the case to ongoing CPS if this has not occurred.
- Convene an MDT.
- Prepare and educate the family and the members of the MDT regarding the ongoing assessment and family case plan, and the next steps related to the process. (The MDT meeting may be an appropriate opportunity to introduce the family to the worker that will be completing the ongoing assessment and participating in the development of the treatment plan if the case was not active in ongoing CPS.)
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT meeting in the development of the unified child and family case plan. (If a pre-adjudicatory improvement period was not granted, there is no requirement to file the family case plan with the court.)
- If the child is in an out-of-home placement, evaluate reunification efforts and determine if the child can be returned to the family if safety and protection can be maintained with a safety plan and services in the home by completing the ongoing assessment and safety analysis.
- Provide the record keeping for the MDT.
- Provide services and resources and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the unified child and family case plan.
- Ensure that the service providers of the unified child and family case plan provide written reports every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each MDT member.
- Complete the family case plan evaluation process with the family.
- Convene the treatment multidisciplinary team to review the family case plan evaluation and provide input regarding the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress.
- Collect all progress reports from providers and include the reports with the case evaluation of progress to provide the court at the adjudicatory hearing.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to ensure that the adjudicatory hearing is on the court's docket. (The adjudicatory hearing shall occur within 30 days of the entering of the temporary custody order unless a pre-adjudicatory improvement period is granted).

## **9.13 Child Support**

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-801](#), requires that child support be ordered in all cases in which a child is placed in foster care. The statute also requires the court to calculate child support according to the income shares formula. The purpose of these statutes is to enable the state to recover all or part of the costs of providing for the maintenance of children in foster care.

### ***Court Actions***

In deciding on the issue of child support, the court has options which it may exercise. They are:

- If the court at the initial hearing believes that it has adequate financial information from a financial disclosure statement or from testimony to determine child support, then the court should apply the income shares child support formula and include the amount(s) in the official standard form order appropriate to the proceeding.
- If the court does not have adequate financial information at the initial hearing, then the court should order that:
  - The parent or, in two parent households, each parent will complete a financial disclosure statement and a supplemental information form and submit the forms to the worker who filed the petition. *(The worker should bring a copy of the forms to the initial hearing in case they are needed.)* The order should include a date by which the forms are to be submitted;
  - The court should also order that the parent(s) pay to the Bureau for Child Support Enforcement (BCSE):
    - A minimum of \$50 per child monthly or, if the parents are living separately, \$50 monthly per parent per child **or** a higher monthly amount per child as the court deems appropriate.
    - The court may deviate from the child support guidelines according to [W. Va. Code §49-4-801\(e\)](#), when the court finds that:
      - It may assist the parent in completion of an improvement period;
      - It is in the best interest of the child due to negatively impacting the reunification process, a \$0 child support may be ordered; or
      - The parent temporarily or permanently has no income.

NOTE: The official name of the form which the parents must complete is: *“Financial Statement for Child Support (SCA-FC-10).”* Copies of this form should be available in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court or from the local child support enforcement staff. Copies of the FC-1, the Supplemental Information form and the FC-2, Foster Care Referral form, should be available from the local child support enforcement staff.

**Worker Actions: When the Income Shares Formula is Applied by the Court**

When the court has entered a child support order based on the income shares formula, then the child welfare worker should, whenever a report is made to the court or a hearing is held, report on whether or not the parent(s) are complying with the order. The worker will enter all information on parents, including absent or unknown parents into CCWIS correctly and complete all necessary screens, including the relationship screens. CCWIS will generate a referral to the Child Support Enforcement Division, ten (10) days after a placement has been entered, for the possible assessment of fees to contribute to the cost of the child’s care as defined in [W. Va. Codes §49-4-801](#), [§48-11-101](#), [§48-11-102](#) & [§48-13-101](#) and explain this process to the parents.

### ***Worker Actions: When the Income Shares Formula is Not Applied by the Court***

If at the initial hearing the court cannot decide based on the income shares formula, then the worker must do the following.

- Review the financial disclosure statement when it is submitted by the parent(s).
- Determine whether the parent(s) income meets or exceeds the income shares formula. (The level at which the parent(s) would not be responsible for child support).
- If the income is less than the threshold level, the worker will take no further action except to periodically check to ensure that the parent(s) are making payments according to the court order.
- If the income meets or exceeds the threshold level, then the worker will refer the case to the Child Support Enforcement Division so that they may take the appropriate action.
  - The referral will be sent via a DHS-1 to the Bureau for Child Support Enforcement (BCSE) in the district in which the petition was filed. The following information must accompany the DHS-1:
    - a copy of the court order transferring custody and ordering child support;
    - each parent's completed financial disclosure statement; and
    - each parent's form FC-1, containing supplemental information.

### ***Worker Actions: When a Child Returns Home***

When the child returns home and foster care payments are no longer being made on behalf of the child, the worker will notify the local BCSE office of this change. The notification should be made via a DHS-1.

## **9.14 Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Planning Process**

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-401\(2\)](#), requires the department to establish a multidisciplinary screening, advisory and planning system. The purposes of the multidisciplinary system are to:

- assist courts in facilitating permanency planning following the initiation of judicial proceedings;
- recommend alternatives to the court; and
- coordinate evaluations and the provision of services.

### ***Multidisciplinary Treatment Team***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-403](#), requires the formation of a multidisciplinary treatment team (MDT) in every case in which a petition alleging child abuse or neglect is filed. The purposes of the MDT team are to:

- assess;
- plan;
- implement; and
- monitor a comprehensive, individualized treatment and placement plan for children who are victims of abuse or neglect and their families.

### ***Multidisciplinary Treatment Team Membership***

The treatment team is composed of the following individuals.

- The child welfare worker assigned to the child or family.
- The child's custodial parents or guardian.
- Other immediate family members.
- The attorney(s) representing the parent(s) of the child, if assigned by the judge of the circuit court.
- The child if the child is over the age of 12 and the child's participation is otherwise appropriate;
- the child if under the age of 12 and when the team determines that the child's participation is appropriate.
- The guardian ad litem.
- The prosecuting attorney or their designee.
- The kinship/relative parent(s).
- Resource/foster parent(s).
- Child's residential program staff.
- Emergency shelter staff.
- An appropriate school official.
- A parent resource navigator.
- A court-appointed special advocate (CASA).
- A member of a child advocacy center.
- Managed care organization (MCO) care coordinator.
- Adult services worker (as appropriate).
- Home finding unit staff.
- Any other person or an agency representative who may assist in providing recommendations for the particular needs of the child and family, including domestic violence service providers, [W. Va. Code 49-4-406\(d\)\(2\)\(l\)](#).
- Any other agency, person or professional who may contribute to the team's efforts to assist the child and family. (This last category of membership should be interpreted to mean any professional or non-professional provider of direct and/or supportive services to the child and family.)

### ***MDT Operation and Worker Responsibilities***

Whenever a child welfare worker files a petition, that worker must take the steps necessary to initiate the multidisciplinary treatment team process and must offer to serve as the case manager during the operation of the team.

The members of the MDT must be properly notified at least 15 days prior to the MDT meeting, unless otherwise scheduled and ordered by the court, by printing the *Notification of MDT* letters from CCWIS. If five days or fewer are given to the worker, the child welfare worker must phone each member of the MDT advising that an MDT will be held and provide the date, time and location. The child welfare

worker must also send out a written notice by printing the *Notification of MDT* letter from CCWIS after they have phoned or faxed the members with the information.

During the first MDT meeting, child welfare workers should begin gathering information regarding the family and more specifically the child, using the *FC-12* and *FC-12a*.

- The birth certificate and social security card of the child, and where to obtain birth records and medical records of the child should be requested from the family.
  - If the family does not have the original birth certificate and social security card of the child, or refuses to provide it, the department will then need to apply for those documents on behalf of the child for the child's record.
- The worker must also inquire about any sources of income for the child such as:
  - SSI,
  - social security survivor benefits,
  - life insurance policies, and
  - any other assets, as well as any private or public medical insurance the family may have.

This list is not exhaustive, but it helps to better improve child and family outcomes as well as to gain information for the child summary, if it were to become necessary.

The child welfare worker must begin gathering information for the child summary at the time of removal. The child summary is a living document that contains information regarding:

- the birth parents,
- family history,
- child's race/ethnicity,
- permanency plan,
- reason child is in care,
- child's adjustment while in placement,
- previous placement history,
- reason for out-of-state placement, if required,
- child's special needs,
- goals and anticipated length of placement, and
- post placement plan.

In addition to the duties assigned to MDT teams and MDT case managers in the statute, the court rules impose further responsibilities on these teams. Specifically, the court rules require these teams to:

- Develop the unified child and family case plan.
- Submit written reports to the circuit court.
- Meet with the circuit court at least every three months until the case is dismissed from the docket.
- Be available for status hearings and conferences as required by the circuit court.

***Note: For more information regarding Multidisciplinary Treatment Teams, see Foster Care Policy.***

## 9.15 Medical and Mental Examinations

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-603](#) permits the circuit court judge or any party to the proceedings to order that the child or the child's caretakers be examined by a physician, psychologist or psychiatrist and may require the person conducting the examination to testify.

If the child's caretakers refuse to undergo an examination, the court cannot hold them in contempt nor can the court terminate parental rights because of such a refusal.

## 9.16 Adjudicatory Hearing

The state statute regulating the adjudicatory hearing is contained in [W. Va. Code §49-4-601](#). The purpose of the adjudicatory hearing is to provide the parties, the department and the child's caretakers, with the opportunity to testify and to present evidence regarding the allegations contained in the petition.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the court will make a determination based on the evidence and shall make findings of fact and conclusions of law as to whether or not the child is abused and/or neglected.

### ***Worker Preparation for the Adjudicatory Hearing***

Prior to the adjudicatory hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Prepare and develop general terms or requirements to offer in the event a post-adjudicatory improvement period is granted. The worker should provide the terms in writing to the prosecuting attorney prior to the hearing for presentation at the hearing.
- Notify the prosecuting attorney in writing of any information that would negatively affect the granting of an improvement period.
- Ensure that the MDT team has received notice of the hearing.
- Prepare any releases of information for signature.
- Prepare the MDT team notices for the next meeting.
- If the child is in a foster care placement, evaluate reunification efforts and determine if the child can be returned to the family as long as protection and safety can be maintained with a safety plan that does not include foster care services as a resource. *(This requires completion of the ongoing assessment and safety analysis.)*

### ***Worker Actions: During the Adjudicatory Hearing***

During the adjudicatory hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- If an improvement period is requested, provide the suggested terms to the court and request that they be made part of the court record *(In the event that reunification can be affected through a safety plan with services in the home, the safety resources and identified treatment services will be included in the terms of the court record.)*
- Testify regarding the worker's knowledge of the abuse and/or neglect and/or conditions threatening the child's safety.

- Request that the unified child and family case plan on case progress that was previously provided to the court and all progress reports by providers be made part of the court record (*If a pre-adjudicatory improvement period was not granted, request that the family case plan and the family case plan evaluation of progress developed through the collaboration of the MDT be entered in the court record.*)
- Request that the order reflect that the parent(s) must participate and cooperate with the terms of the improvement period, must participate with the MDT and must participate in the ongoing assessment and development of the family case plan.
- Obtain signed releases of information from the parent(s) or request that the order reflect the appropriate language to obtain any necessary medical information.
- Request that the releases of information be made part of the court record.
- Request that the next hearing be scheduled, placed on the court's docket, and reflected in the court order.
- Schedule and provide written notification to all MDT team members of the next treatment team meeting.
- Request that the MDT team notices be made part of the court record.
- Request that the written order reflect the department's financial responsibility, if any, for the expenses associated with the services identified in the improvement period terms if the court so orders at the hearing. (*If the family demonstrates to the court that they are unable to bear the cost of such expenses, the court may order the department to financially support the provision of services.*)
- Request that any medical expenses which are to be paid by the department are to be paid at the current Medicaid rates for such services.
  - Payment for medical services can be made through the use special medical card.
  - Payment for other types of services can be made through the demand payment system.
  - Payment for medical services which exceed Medicaid coverage will be made by submitting a court order with the seal of the court on the order and the invoice for services to the Bureau for Social Services, ATTN: Administrative Services. If the seal of the court does not appear on the order, then payment cannot be made.

***Worker Actions: Following the Adjudicatory Hearing***

The actions which the child welfare worker must take after the conclusion of the adjudicatory hearing depend on whether an improvement period was granted or whether an improvement period was not requested or granted.

***Worker Actions: When an Improvement Period is Granted***

Following the hearing, if a post-adjudicatory improvement period is granted, the worker will do the following.

- Complete the ongoing assessment if this has not occurred.
- Convene the MDT.

- Update and educate the family and members of the MDT team with the CPS process and the next steps related to the process.
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT meeting in the development of the family case plan.
- Provide the record keeping for the treatment team meeting.
- File the unified child or family case plan with the circuit court clerks and the prosecuting attorney within 30 days of the hearing granting the improvement period which meets the requirement of “file with the court” and provide all members of the multidisciplinary team with a copy of the plan.
- Continue the CPS process, provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the improvement period and family case plan.
- Ensure that the service providers of the unified child and family case plan provide written reports every 30 days and provide copies of the report to each MDT team member.
- Prepare the family case plan evaluation.
- Convene the MDT, provide copies of the family case plan evaluation to the members, review other relevant information and provide input for the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress.
- Provide the unified child or family case plan evaluation of progress to the court with copies to the MDT members within 60 days of the hearing granting the post-adjudicatory improvement period. *(Case evaluation is to occur every 90 days. The case evaluation date can be adjusted to occur prior to the hearing. The family case plan evaluation of progress will comply with the administrative review requirements for children in placement.)*
- Contact the prosecuting attorney 15 days prior to the 60-day or 90-day hearing for review of the parent(s) progress to ensure it is scheduled and placed on the court’s docket.
- Attend the hearing and request that the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress be made part of the court record and request the court’s signature on the signature attachment page.
- At the 60 or 90 day hearing, request that a hearing be scheduled for a review of progress which must occur every three months following the granting of an improvement period and request that it is placed on the court’s docket. *(The court may select to schedule a status conference devoted to reviewing the parent’s progress instead of a hearing.)*
- Prepare in collaboration with the MDT the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress prior to each hearing or status conference.
- If modifications are made to the unified child and family case plan as the casework process continues, file with the circuit court clerk and prosecuting attorney in writing any modifications to the family case plan which meets the requirement to “file with the court”.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney 15 days prior to all hearings or status conferences to ensure they are scheduled and placed on the court’s docket.
- Prior to each hearing or status conference, notify the members of the MDT of the dates and time of the scheduled hearing or status conference.
- Attend each hearing or status conference and provide a written report to the court of the family’s progress with the family case plan and the development in the case *(Case evaluation is to occur every 90 days. The case evaluation can be adjusted to occur prior to the hearings or*

*status conferences. The family case plan evaluation of progress will serve as the case evaluation and will comply with the administrative review requirements for children in placement.*)

- Request that the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress be made part of the court record and request the court's signature on the signature attachment page.
- At the conclusion of each hearing or status conference, request that the court schedule and place on the docket the next hearing that must occur every 90 days. *(The court may elect to schedule a status conference devoted to reviewing the parent's progress instead of a hearing.)*
- If a foster care permanency review hearing has not been conducted within the first 12 months or every 12 months thereafter, the worker will request that a hearing be scheduled to review the planning for the child and family instead of a status conference. This serves to meet the statutory requirements of the [W. Va. Codes §49-4-110](#) and [§49-4-608](#) for judicial review and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act.
- Ensure that the MDT is notified of each hearing or status conference.
- Prepare and distribute all required reports to the MDT.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney at least 15 days prior to the expiration of the improvement period to ensure that the hearing is scheduled and on the court's docket. *(The disposition hearing must take place no later than 60 days after the expiration of the improvement period.)*
- Remind the prosecuting attorney of the court's duty to specify a future date in the order if a motion for continuance of the hearing is received and there are no objections. *(If there is difficulty with receiving sufficient notice of a continuance motion, or if there are objections to the continuance, the prosecuting attorney is to be immediately advised. If the department is requesting a continuance, the prosecuting attorney must be consulted to request the written motion that must specify "good cause" for the continuance.)*
- Notify the prosecuting attorney if the client is not participating in the terms of the improvement period and request that a motion be filed, and a hearing be held to terminate the improvement period. *(The worker is responsible for providing the information that supports the request for the termination of the improvement period.)*
- Be prepared to answer the assertions if a motion is filed to extend the improvement period for a period up to three months. The motion filed for an extension of the improvement period must set forth specific assertions.
  - The family has substantially complied with the terms of the improvement period.
  - The continuation of the improvement period will not substantially impair the ability of the department to permanently place the child.
  - An extension is consistent with the best interest of the child.

The burden of proof related to these conditions rests with the family. However, the worker and MDT will closely monitor and evaluate the unified child or family case plan which provides the documentation and supportive information to provide to the court.

- Prepare and file with the circuit court clerk and prosecuting attorney which meets the requirement to "file with the court", the unified child and family case plan at least five judicial days prior to the dispositional hearing. Provide copies to the child's attorney and/or guardian ad litem, parent(s), and the parent's attorney.

### ***Worker Actions: When an Improvement Period is not Requested or Improvement Period Is Denied***

Following the hearing, if a post-adjudicatory improvement period is not granted, the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Complete the initial assessment and make arrangements for transferring the case to ongoing CPS.
- Update and educate the family and the members of the multidisciplinary treatment team with the CPS process and the next steps related to the process. *(The MDT meeting would be an appropriate opportunity to introduce the family to the worker that will be completing the ongoing assessment and participating in the development of the family case plan if the case was not active in ongoing CPS.)*
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT meeting in the development of the unified child or family case plan. (If a post-adjudicatory improvement period is **not** granted, there is no requirement to file the unified child or family case plan with the court.)
- If the child is in an out-of-home placement, evaluate reunification efforts and determine if the child can be returned to the family if safety and protection can be maintained with a safety plan and treatment services in the home through the ongoing assessment and safety evaluation process.
- Provide the record keeping for the treatment team meeting.
- Continue the CPS process, provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the unified child or family case plan.
- Ensure that the service providers of the unified child or family case plan provide written reports every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each treatment team member.
- Provide copies of the ongoing assessment and family case plan evaluation to each treatment team member.
- Collect all progress reports from providers to provide to the court at the dispositional hearing.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to ensure that the disposition hearing is on the court's docket. (The disposition hearing shall occur within 45 days of the entering of the final adjudicatory order.);
- Prepare and file with the circuit court clerk and prosecuting attorney the unified child and family case plan at least five judicial days prior to the dispositional hearing which meets the requirement to "file with the court". Provide copies to the child's attorney and/or guardian ad litem, parent(s), and the parent's attorney.

### **9.17 Dispositional Hearing**

The statute regulating the dispositional hearing is contained in [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#). This statute has been further defined and regulated by the court rules. Depending on the decision of the court there may be more than one dispositional hearing.

The purpose of the dispositional hearing is to provide all the parties to the case with the opportunity to address the court about the future care and custody of the child(ren). At the conclusion of the hearing

the court will choose from a number of specified options and enter an order regarding future care and custody.

### ***Worker Preparation for the Dispositional Hearing***

Prior to the dispositional hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Prepare themselves to testify about the disposition which they would like the court to make.
- Prepare and develop general terms or requirements to offer in the event an improvement period is granted as a disposition. Provide the terms in writing to the prosecuting attorney prior to the hearing for presentation at the hearing.
- Prepare and distribute copies of the unified child or family case plan to the parties, their counsel, and persons entitled to notice and the opportunity to be heard, at least five judicial days prior to the disposition hearing.
- Notify the prosecuting attorney in writing of any information that would negatively affect the granting of an improvement period.
- Ensure that the MDT team and all other parties with a right to be present have received notice of the hearing.
- Prepare any releases of information for signature.
- Prepare the MDT team notices for the next meeting.
- If the child is in an out-of-home placement, evaluate reunification efforts with the ongoing assessment and determine if the child can be returned to the family if protection and safety can be maintained with a safety plan and treatment services in the home.

### ***Worker Actions: During the Dispositional Hearing***

During the hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- If an improvement period is requested, provide the suggested terms to the court and request that they be made part of the court record. (*In the event that reunification can be affected through a safety plan and treatment services in the home, the safety resources and treatment services will be included in the terms recommended for the improvement period.*)
- Request that the unified child and family case plan evaluation that was previously provided to the court and all progress reports by providers be made part of the court record. (*If a post-adjudicatory improvement period was not granted, provide the family case plan to the court and request that it be entered on the court record.*)
- Request the order reflect that the parent(s) will participate and cooperate with the terms of the improvement period, will participate with the MDT and will participate in the ongoing assessment and development of the family case plan.
- Obtain signed releases of information from the parent(s) or request that the order reflect the appropriate language to obtain any necessary medical information.
- Request that the releases of information be made part of the court record.
- Request that the date for the next hearing be scheduled, placed on the docket and reflected in the court order.
- Schedule and provide written notification to all MDT members of the next treatment meeting.

- Request that the MDT team notices be made part of the court record.
- Request that the written order reflect the department's financial responsibility for the expenses associated with the services identified in the improvement period terms if the court so orders at the hearing. *(If the family demonstrates to the court that they are unable to bear the cost of such expenses, the court may order the department/Department to financially support the provision of services.)*

### **Worker Actions: Following the Disposition Hearing**

The actions which the child welfare worker must take after the conclusion of the disposition hearing depend on the decision of the court regarding the future care and custody of the child. The court may grant an improvement period, or the court may choose another option.

### **Worker Actions: When an Improvement Period is Granted**

Following the hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Convene the MDT.
- Update and educate the family members of the MDT with the CPS process and the next steps related to the process.
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT meeting in the development of the unified child and family case plan.
- Provide the record keeping for the MDT meeting.
- File the family case plan with the circuit court clerk and prosecuting attorney within 30 days of the hearing granting the improvement period which meets the requirement to "file with the court". Provide all members of the MDT with a copy of the plan.
- Continue the CPS process, provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the improvement period and unified child or family case plan.
- Ensure that the service providers of the unified child or family case plan provide written reports every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each treatment team member.
- Prepare the family case plan evaluation.
- Convene the MDT, provide copies of the family case plan evaluation to the members, review other relevant information and provide input for the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress.
- Provide the family case plan evaluation of progress to the court with copies to the treatment team members of the family's progress within 60 days of the hearing granting the improvement period. *(The family case plan evaluation of progress will serve as the case evaluation and will comply with the administrative review requirements for children in placement.)*
- Contact the prosecuting attorney 15 days prior to the 60 or 90 day hearing for review of the parent(s) progress to ensure that it is scheduled and placed on the court's docket.
- Attend the hearing and request that the family case plan evaluation of progress be made part of the court record and request the court's signature on the signature attachment page.
- At the 60 or 90 day hearing, request that a hearing be scheduled for a review of progress which must occur every three months following the granting of an improvement period and request

that it is placed on the court's docket. *(The court may select to schedule a status conference devoted to reviewing the parent's progress instead of a hearing.)*

- Prepare, in collaboration with the MDT team, the family case plan evaluation of progress prior to each status conference or hearing.
- If modifications to the family case plan occur as the casework process continues, submit to the circuit court clerk and prosecuting attorney in writing any modifications to the family case plan which meets the requirement to "file with the court".
- Contact the prosecuting attorney 15 days prior to all hearings or status conferences to insure they are scheduled and placed on the court's docket.
- Prior to each hearing or status conference, notify the members of the MDT of the date and time scheduled for the hearing.
- Attend each hearing or status conference and provide a written report to the court of the family's progress with the family case plan and the developments in the case. *(Case evaluation is to occur every 90 days. The case evaluation can be adjusted to occur simultaneously to the hearings or status conferences. The family case plan evaluation of progress will serve as the case evaluation and will comply with the administrative review requirements for children in placement).*
- Request that the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress be made part of the court record and request the court's signature on the signature attachment page.
- At the conclusion of each hearing or status conference, request that the court schedule and place on the docket, the next hearing that must occur every 90 days. *(The court may elect to schedule a status conference devoted to reviewing the parent's progress instead of a hearing. If a hearing has not been conducted within the first 12 months or every 12 months thereafter, the worker will request that a hearing be scheduled to review the planning for the child and family instead of a status conference. This serves to meet the statutory requirements of the [W. Va. Code §49-4-110](#) and [§49-4-608](#) for judicial reviews and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act).*
- Ensure that the MDT is notified of each status conference or hearing.
- Prepare and distribute all required reports for the MDT team.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney fifteen days prior to the expiration of the improvement period to ensure that the final dispositional hearing is scheduled and on the court docket. *(The final disposition hearing must take place no later than 60 days after the expiration of the improvement period at disposition.)*
- Remind the prosecuting attorney of the court's duty to specify a future date in the order if a motion for continuance of the hearing is received and there are no objections. *(If there is difficulty with receiving sufficient notice of a continuance motion or if there are objections to the continuance, the prosecuting attorney is to be immediately advised. If the department is requesting a continuance, the prosecuting attorney must be consulted to request the written motion that must specify "good cause" for the continuance.)*
- Notify the prosecuting attorney if the client is not participating in the terms of the improvement period and request that a motion be filed, and a hearing be held to terminate the improvement period.
  - The worker is responsible for providing the information that supports the request for the

termination of the improvement period.

- Be prepared to answer the assertions if a motion is filed to extend the improvement period for a period up to three months.

***Worker Actions: When the Petition is Dismissed***

If the petition is dismissed or the child, the abusing parent or other family members are referred to a community agency and the petition is also dismissed the worker will do the following.

- Return the child to the child's caretakers.
- Discuss with the caretakers any remaining service needs they may have and provide assistance to secure them.
- Proceed to close the CPS case.

***Worker Actions: Conduct When Continuing Supervision is Ordered***

Whenever the court orders the return of the child to their own home under the supervision of the department, or, orders terms of supervision which prescribe the manner of supervision and care of the child, then the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Convene the MDT team.
- Update and educate the family and the members of the MDT team with the CPS process and the next steps related to the process.
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT team in the development of a plan to implement the order of the court.
- Continue the CPS process, provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the court order.
- Obtain written reports from service providers every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each treatment team member.
- Convene the multidisciplinary treatment team to review and provide input for the case evaluation of progress.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to ensure that the case is scheduled for the permanency placement review hearing no later than 90 days from the date of the initial disposition hearing.

***Worker Actions: When the Court Terminates Parental Rights***

When the court terminates parental rights the actions the worker must take depend on the order of the court regarding the custody of the child.

If the court commits the child to the sole custody of the non-abusing parent, if there is one, or the permanent guardianship of a licensed child welfare agency, then the worker will do the following.

- Make the arrangements necessary to transfer physical custody of the child to the non-abusing parent or agency.
- Take the steps necessary to close the CPS case.

If the court terminates parental rights and commits the child to the guardianship of the department, then the worker will initiate the permanency hearing review process. See *Foster Care Policy*.

***Worker Actions: When Custody of Child is Continued with the Department***

The court may find that the parents are presently unwilling or unable to provide adequately for the needs of their child(ren) and may commit the child(ren) to the custody of the department. When the court makes this ruling then the court must also make a finding about reasonable efforts.

If the court finds that reasonable efforts were not required because of aggravated circumstances then the court must proceed to hold a permanency hearing within 30 days following the date of the entry of the order containing the finding. Whenever the court makes this finding the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Convene the MDT team to review the results of the dispositional hearing and to prepare for the permanency hearing.
- Continue to provide the appropriate services in the interim between the dispositional hearing and the permanency hearing.

If the court does not find that aggravated circumstances exist, the court should issue an order specifying under what circumstances the child's commitment to the department will continue. The child welfare worker will do the following.

- Convene the multidisciplinary team.
- Update and educate the family and the members of the MDT team with the CPS process and the next steps related to the process.
- Direct the collaborative effort of the MDT team in the development of a plan to implement the order of the court.
- Continue the CPS process, provide services and closely monitor the participation of the family with the terms of the court order.
- Obtain written reports from service providers every 30 days and provide copies of the reports to each treatment team member.
- Convene the MDT team to review and provide input for the case evaluation of progress.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to ensure that the permanency placement review is scheduled no later than 90 days from the date of the initial disposition.

***Worker Actions: Final Dispositional Hearing***

Prior to the hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Prepare to address the progress of the parent(s) related to the unified child and family case plan.
- Collect all progress reports submitted by providers.
- Prepare to address the status of the recommended permanency plan for the child.
- Notify the MDT of the date of the hearing.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney to discuss any other preparations necessary for the hearing;
- Prepare and distribute copies of the unified child and family case plan to the parties, their

counsel, and persons entitled to notice and the opportunity to be heard, at least five judicial days prior to the disposition hearing which meets the requirement to “file with the court”.

- If the child(ren) continues to be placed out of the home, determine if a safety plan and treatment services in the home can be implemented as long as safety can be assured through the use of the ongoing assessment and safety analysis.

During the hearing the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Provide provider progress reports and request that they be made part of the court record.
- Recommend the permanency plan for the child(ren) and the steps necessary to achieve the permanent plan.
- Request that the court rule on a dispositional determination consistent with the best interests of the child.
- If the permanent placement plan is for reunification with the parent(s), request that the court order the parent(s) to continue to participate in the provision of the family case plan, the treatment MDT, and the steps to achieve the permanent plan for the child(ren).

After the hearing the actions the worker must take depend on the finding of the court at the final dispositional hearing. (The various actions which a worker may be required to take are described in the previous sections under this heading.)

## **9.18 Unified Child or Family Case Plan**

A case plan for foster care is required by federal statute. [W. Va. Code §49-4-408](#), requires a family case plan whenever an improvement period is granted or there is an adjudication of abuse or neglect. In order to comply with the federal statute, the unified child and family case plan must be completed within 60 days of the child entering legal custody. Both a family case plan and a child’s case plan are required by state statute. In order to comply with the state statutes, the unified child and family case plan must be filed with the court at certain points in the legal proceedings which require a family case plan or a child’s case plan.

The family case plan will be prepared in conjunction with the members of the MDT team. The information for the family case plan will be derived from the information gathered through the ongoing assessment and any other assessments the family has completed. For more information, review *Section 7*.

### ***Family Case Plan***

The purpose of the family case plan is to clearly identify and set forth family problems and the steps necessary to resolve or lessen them. When completed, the unified child and family case plan meets all of the statutory mandates of the family case plan.

### **Child's Case Plan**

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-408](#), requires the department to prepare and submit a child's case plan including the permanency plan for every child found by the court to be abused or neglected at the end of an adjudicatory hearing.

The purpose of the child's case plan is to provide to the court information which will enable the court to determine if all appropriate actions are being taken in regard to the care and well-being of children in foster care.

### **9.19 Reunification Services**

The [W. Va. Code §49-1-201](#), contains definitions for a number of terms relating to abuse and neglect. One of these terms is reunification services. Reunification services include, but are not limited to the following.

- Individual, group, and family counseling.
- Inpatient, residential or outpatient substance use disorder treatment services.
- Mental health services.
- Assistance to address domestic violence.
- Services designed to provide temporary child care.
- Therapeutic services for families, including crisis nurseries and transportation to or from any such services.

These services are provided during 15 of the most recent 22 months a child has been in foster care, as determined by the earlier of the first judicial finding that the child is subjected to abuse or neglect, or the date which is 60 days after the child is removed from home.

The purpose of reunification services is to indicate that the process to reunify a child with their caretakers should not, in general, extend beyond 15 months. This limitation, while not absolute, is a clear statement that the permanency needs of children should be met within a reasonable period.

### **9.20 Quarterly Status Reviews**

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-110](#), requires quarterly status reviews for all children in foster care until the court files an order stating that the parents' rights have been terminated and the department is not required to make reasonable efforts to preserve the family.

The purpose of quarterly status reviews is to determine the safety of the child, the continuing necessity for and appropriateness of the placement, the extent of compliance with the unified child and family case plan, and the extent of progress which has been made toward alleviating or mitigating the causes necessitating placement in foster care, and to project a likely date by which the child may be returned to and safety maintained in the home or placed for adoption or legal guardianship. For more information on quarterly status reviews, *please see Foster Care Policy*.

## 9.21 Yearly Permanency Hearings and Permanency Hearing Reviews

The statute related to permanency hearings is contained in [W. Va. Codes §49-4-110](#) and [§49-4-608](#). The purpose of the permanency hearing is to determine the appropriate permanent placement and permanent plan for the child or transitioning adult. For more information related to yearly permanency hearings and permanency hearing reviews *please see Foster Care Policy*.

## 9.22 Change in a Child's Placement - Report to the Court

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-608\(g\)](#), requires the department to file a report with the court whenever a child in custody receives three or more placements a year. The purpose of this statute is to bring to the attention of the court those children who are placed and replaced frequently.

### **Worker Actions**

When a child is scheduled to enter a third placement during the year then the child welfare worker will do the following.

- Prepare a child and family case plan evaluation of progress report describing the child's placement history for the year in question including the reason(s) for the various placements.
- Contact the prosecuting attorney and request that the report be filed with the court and all appropriate parties and their counsel. *(If parental rights have been terminated then the unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress report is not provided to the parents or the attorney for the parents.)*

After receiving the report, the court may hold a hearing to review the child's placement history to determine what efforts are necessary to provide the child with a stable placement. The court may choose, and/or the worker may request that the court review the child's placement as a part of any other court hearing.

## 9.23 Aggravated Circumstances and Other Situations Where Reasonable Efforts are not Required

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-605](#), requires that under certain circumstances the department must: file a petition for termination of parental rights; or, must request to join in a petition for termination of parental rights filed by another party.

The department is required to file a petition or to join in a petition to terminate rights or to otherwise seek a ruling to terminate parental rights in any pending proceeding when a parent, guardian or custodian has committed any of the following.

- Subjected the child, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent to aggravated circumstances which include, but are not limited to, abandonment, torture, chronic abuse and sexual abuse.

- Committed murder of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed voluntary manslaughter of the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit murder or voluntary manslaughter or been an accessory before or after the fact to either crime.
- Committed unlawful or malicious wounding that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian or custodian, to another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit malicious assault, or been an accessory before or after the fact to the same that results in serious bodily injury to the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, to another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Committed sexual assault or sexual abuse of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Attempted or conspired to commit sexual assault or sexual abuse, or been an accessory before or after the fact to the same of the child, the child's other parent, guardian, or custodian, another child of the parent, or any other child residing in the same household or under the temporary or permanent custody of the parent.
- Been required by state or federal law to register with a sex offender registry, and the court has determined in consideration of the nature of the circumstances surrounding the prior charges against that parent, that the child's interests would not be promoted by a preservation of the family.
- The parental rights of the parent to another child have been terminated involuntarily.
- Has a child that has been removed from the parent's care, custody, and control by an order of removal voluntarily fails to have contact or attempt to have contact with the child for a period of 18 consecutive months: *Provided*, that failure to have, or attempt to have, contact due to being incarcerated, being in a medical or substance use disorder treatment facility, or being on active military duty shall not be considered voluntary behavior.

### ***Exceptions***

The department may determine not to seek termination of parental rights when one of the following applies.

- At the option of the department the child has been placed with a relative.
- The department has documented in the unified child and family case plan made available for court review a compelling reason, including but not limited to the child's age and preference regarding termination or the child's placement in custody of the department based on any proceedings initiated under [W. Va. Code §49-4-604](#), that filing a petition would not be in the best interests of the child.

- The department has not provided, when reasonable efforts to return a child to the family are required, the services to the child's family as the department deems necessary for the safe return of the child to the home.

### ***Worker Actions***

If a child welfare worker is involved in a case, or learns of a case where a petition requesting termination of parental rights was filed, because a court has determined the presence of aggravated circumstances, the worker must either file a petition or seek to join in the petition which has already been filed. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

Whenever a worker is involved in a case in which a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the worker must either seek termination of parental rights or document in the case plan a compelling reason for not requesting termination. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

### ***Compelling Reason to not Request Termination of Parental Rights***

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-605](#), requires the department to request termination of parental rights under certain circumstances unless there is a compelling reason not to do so.

The statutes do not contain a specific definition of all circumstances which can or should be considered compelling reasons. The statute does state that the age of the child and the child's preference about termination should be considered when the child entered custody through a juvenile justice proceeding initiated under [W. Va. Code §49-4-701](#).

The purpose of this term is to allow the department to exercise discretion in deciding when to request the termination of parental rights of children who have been in custody for more than 15 months. The statute allows the department to determine whether or not it will seek termination of parental rights for those cases which meet the conditions contained in [W. Va. Code §49-4-605](#).

It is the policy of the department that compelling reasons shall be **limited** to those cases described in [W. Va. Code §49-4-605\(1\)](#). Those are cases in which children have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months. In all other cases described under [W. Va. Code §49-4-605](#), the department will not exercise any discretion and will seek termination of parental rights.

## **9.24 Post-Termination Placement Plan**

Child abuse and neglect court [Rule 41\(b\)](#) requires the development and submission by the department of a post-termination placement plan within 90 days of the entry of the final termination order for both parents. The unified child and family case plan evaluation of progress report can be utilized to fulfill the requirements for the post-termination placement plan.

## 9.25 Overturning Substantiated Maltreatment Findings

The [W. Va. Code §49-4-601b](#) requires the Department to seal certain child abuse and neglect records regarding maltreatment findings for the purpose of employment only and **does not** apply to potential resource, relative, or kinship caregivers.

- If an abuse and neglect allegation is substantiated and a petition is filed, but the court does not adjudicate and no finding of abuse and neglect is made, the finding will be considered as unsubstantiated. The child welfare worker must then complete the Override Request Form within 60 days of the judicial determination of no finding of abuse and neglect, and select “no judicial finding of abuse/neglect” as the override reason and submit the form to the FACTS Help Desk by faxing it to (304)558-5868 or emailing at [DHHRfactshd@wv.gov](mailto:DHHRfactshd@wv.gov).
- When an allegation of abuse and neglect is substantiated and a petition is filed with the circuit court and the parent was adjudicated as an abusive and neglectful parent, the parent may petition the circuit court where the finding was made, no less than five years after the abuse and neglect determination to have their record sealed if there were no additional findings made.

## SECTION 10 - NONDISCRIMINATION, GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE & DUE PROCESS STANDARDS, REASONABLE MODIFICATION POLICIES, and CONFIDENTIALITY

### 10.1 Nondiscrimination

As a recipient of Federal financial assistance, the Bureau for Social Services (BSS) does not exclude, deny benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against any person on the ground of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion or creed in admission to, participation in, or receipt of the services and benefits under any of its programs and activities, whether carried out by BSS directly or through a contractor or any other entity with which BSS arranges to carry out its programs and activities.

This statement is in accordance with the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin) (“Title VI”), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (nondiscrimination on the basis of disability) (“Section 504”), the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (nondiscrimination on the basis of age) (“Age Act”), and regulations of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued pursuant to these three statutes at Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 80, 84, and 91.

The Bureau for Social Services shall not retaliate against, intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title VI, Section 504 the Age Act, or because they have made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing.

In addition, BSS will make all reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all BSS programs, services, and activities. For example, individuals with service animals are welcomed in the Department of Human Services, BSS offices even where pets are generally prohibited.

In case of questions, or to request an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a BSS program, service, or activity, please contact:

Children and Adult Services  
Section 504/ADA Coordinator  
350 Capitol St. Rm 691  
Charleston, WV 25301  
(304) 352-4429

## **10.2 Non-Discriminatory Placement Protocol**

The department ensures that all parties involved in child welfare programs have equal opportunities. All potential placement providers for children and youth, are afforded equal opportunities, free from discrimination and protected under the [American's with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA). The department will not deny a potential placement provider the benefit of its services, programs, or activities due to a disability.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act it defines a person with a disability as:

“An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”

The ADA does not specifically name all the impairments that are covered. The ADA does not allow a person to be discriminated against due to a disability in employment, state and local government activities, public transportation accommodations, telecommunication relay services, fair housing, air carrier access, voting accessibility or education. Examples of disabilities include physical disabilities which require auxiliary aids and mental health issues. Those persons with substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder, currently participating in a treatment option such as Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), are also covered by the ADA. Participation in a MAT program is not considered the illegal use of drugs. Qualifying MAT programs are defined in [W. Va. Code §16-5Y-1](#), *et seq.* The ADA also addresses the civil rights of institutionalized people and architectural barriers that impact people with disabilities.

When making diligent efforts to locate and secure appropriate placement for foster children and youths, a worker cannot discriminate against a potential placement based upon a person with a disability according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II. The department shall determine if the potential placement for the child represents a direct threat to the safety of the child. Safety threat

decisions will be based on assessment of the individual and the needs of the child, as the safety of the child always remains at the forefront of the determination of the best interest of a child, when placing a child in anyone's home. This determination cannot be based on generalizations or stereotypes of individuals.

If a provider protected under the ADA is identified as an appropriate and best interest placement for a foster child they may, at some point, require services specific to their disability in order to preserve the placement. In such situations, consideration for services must be given if it is in the best interest of the child to preserve the placement. Any specific auxiliary aids or services should be determined by the child welfare worker at no cost to the provider and should be considered on a case by case basis.

### **10.3 Complaint Procedure and Due Process Standards**

#### **A: Complaints Based on Disability or other Forms of Discrimination**

It is the policy of the West Virginia Department of Human Services (DoHS), not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion, or creed. The department has adopted an internal complaint procedure providing for prompt, equitable resolution of complaints alleging discrimination. Laws and Regulations, 28 C.F.R. Part 35 and 45 C.F.R. Part 84, may be examined by visiting <https://www.ada.gov/reg3a.html>. Additional laws and regulations protecting individuals from discrimination in child welfare programs and activities may be examined by visiting the U.S Department of Health and Human Services website at <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/adoption/index.html>.

Any person who believes someone has been subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion, or creed may file a complaint under this procedure. It is against the law for the Bureau for Social Services, (including employees, contracted providers other BSS representatives), to retaliate in any way against anyone who files a complaint or cooperates in the investigation of a complaint.

#### ***Procedure***

Complaints due to alleged discriminatory actions must be submitted to the Department of Human Services, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights Officer within sixty (60) calendar days of the date the person filing the complaint becomes aware of the alleged discriminatory action.

The complainant may make a complaint in person, by telephone, by mail, or by email. To file the complaint by mail or email, a Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form, IG-CR-3 (See Appendix A) must be completed and mailed or emailed to the West Virginia Office of Shared Administration, Office of Human Resource Management, EEO/Civil Rights Officer, One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301 or email at [OSACivilRights@WV.Gov](mailto:OSACivilRights@WV.Gov). If the complainant requires assistance completing the IG-CR-3 form, they may request assistance from the department. The complaint must state the problem or action alleged to be discriminatory and the remedy or relief sought. The complainant may also contact the WV DHS EEO/Civil Rights Officer, for more information.

West Virginia Office of Shared Administration  
Office of Human Resource Management  
EEO/Civil Rights Officer  
One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301  
(304) 558-3313 (voice)  
(304) 558-6051 (fax)  
[OSACivilRights@WV.Gov](mailto:OSACivilRights@WV.Gov) (email)

The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, affording all interested persons an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to the complaint. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer will maintain the files and records of Bureau for Social Services relating to such complaints. To the extent possible, and in accordance with applicable law, the EEO/Civil Rights Officer will take appropriate steps to preserve the confidentiality of files and records relating to complaints and will share them only with those who have a need to know.

The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall issue a written decision on the complaint, based on the preponderance of the evidence, no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing, including a notice to the complainant of their right to pursue further administrative or legal remedies. If the EEO/Civil Rights Officer documents exigent circumstances requiring additional time to issue a decision, the EEO/Civil Rights Officer will notify the complainant and advise them of their right to pursue further administrative or legal remedies at that time while the decision is pending. The person filing the complaint may appeal the decision of the EEO/Civil Rights Officer by writing to the director of Human Resources within fifteen (15) calendar days of receiving the EEO/Civil Rights Officer's decision. The director of Human Resources shall issue a written decision in response to the appeal no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing.

The person filing the complaint retains the right to file a grievance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, regardless of the decision made by the West Virginia Department of Human Services.

The availability and use of this procedure does not prevent a person from pursuing other legal or administrative remedies, including filing a complaint of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion or creed in court or with the US Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights. A person can file a complaint of discrimination electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint portal at:  
<https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/smartscreen/main.jsf> or by mail or by phone at:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Office for Civil Rights  
200 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Room 509F HHH Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

800-368-1019 (voice) 800-537-7697 (TDD)

[OCRComplaint@hhs.gov](mailto:OCRComplaint@hhs.gov)

For complaints to the Office for Civil Rights, complaint forms are available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html>. Complaints shall be filed within one hundred and eighty (180) calendar days of the date of the alleged discrimination.

The Bureau for Social Services will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that individuals with disabilities and individuals with Limited English Proficiency are provided auxiliary aids and services or language assistance services, respectively, if needed, to participate in this process. Such arrangements may include, but are not limited to, providing qualified interpreters, providing recorded material for individuals with low vision, or assuring a barrier-free location for the proceedings. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer will be responsible for such arrangements.

### **B: Grievances Regarding the Child Protective Services Worker or Casework Process**

At any time that the Bureau for Social Services is involved with a client, the client (adult or child), or the counsel for the child has a right to express a concern about the manner in which they are treated, including the services they are or are not permitted to receive.

Whenever a parent, child or counsel for the parent or child has a complaint about Child Protective Services or expresses dissatisfaction with Child Protective Services the worker will:

- Explain to the client the reasons for the action taken or the position of the BSS which may have resulted in the dissatisfaction of the client.
- If the situation cannot be resolved, explain to the client their right to a meeting with the supervisor.
- Assist in arranging for a meeting with the supervisor.

The supervisor will:

- Review all reports, records and documentation relevant to the situation.
- Determine whether all actions taken were within the boundaries of the law, policies and guidelines for practice.
- Meet with the client.
- If the problem cannot be resolved, provide the client with the form "Client and Provider Hearing Request", SS-28.
- Assist the client with completing the SS-28, if requested.
- Submit the form immediately to the Chairman, State Board of Review, DoHS, Building 6, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305.

For more information on Grievance Procedures for Social Services please see Common Chapters Manual, Chapter 700, and Subpart B or see W.Va. Code §29A-5-1.

Note: Some issues such as the decisions of the circuit court cannot be addressed through the Grievance Process. Concerns about or dissatisfactions with the decisions of the court including any approved case plan must be addressed through the appropriate legal channels.

## **10.4 Reasonable Modification Policy**

### **A: Purpose**

In accordance with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Bureau for Social Services shall not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its services, programs, or activities. The BSS shall make reasonable modifications in Child Protective Services program policies, practices, or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless BSS can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity.

### **B: Policy**

The department is prohibited from establishing policies and practices that categorically limit or exclude qualified individuals with disabilities from participating in the BSS Child Protective Services program.

The Bureau for Social Services will not exclude any individual with a disability from the full and equal enjoyment of its services, programs, or activities, unless the individual poses a direct threat to the health or safety of themselves or others, that cannot be mitigated by reasonable modifications of policies, practices or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services.

The Bureau for Social Services is prohibited from making Child Protective Services program application and retention decisions based on unfounded stereotypes about what individuals with disabilities can do, or how much assistance they may require. The BSS will conduct individualized assessments of qualified individuals with disabilities before making Child Protective Services application and retention decisions.

The Bureau for Social Services may ask for information necessary to determine whether an applicant or participant who has requested a reasonable modification has a disability-related need for the modification, when the individual's disability and need for the modification are not readily apparent or known. BSS will confidentially maintain the medical records or other health information of Youth Services program applicants and participants.

The Bureau for Social Services upon request, will make reasonable modifications for qualified Child Protective Service, program applicants or participants with disabilities unless BSS can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program, or activity. Individuals do not need to reference Section 504 or Title II or use terms of art such as “reasonable modification” in order to make a request. Further, BSS staff are obligated to offer such reasonable accommodations upon the identification of a qualifying disability or to an individual with Limited English Proficiency.

BSS must consider, on a case-by-case basis, individual requests for reasonable modifications in its Child Protective Services program, including, but not limited to, requests for substitute caregivers, respite caregivers, more frequent support from a case worker, additional classroom and/or online training, mentorship with an experienced resource/adoptive parent, note takers, and other auxiliary aids and services. When auxiliary aids or language interpretation services to ensure effective communication for individuals with hearing, vision, speech impairments, or Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are needed, they shall be provided to the participant at no additional costs. The department evaluates individuals on a case by case basis to provide auxiliary aids and services as necessary to obtain effective communication. This would include but not be limited to:

- Services and devices such as qualified interpreters, assistive listening devices, note takers, and written materials for individuals with hearing impairments.
- Qualified readers, taped texts, and Brailled or large print materials for individuals with vision impairments.
- Access to language and interpretation services.

For more information on obtaining auxiliary aids, contact:

Center for Excellence in Disabilities (CED)

959 Hartman Run Road

Morgantown, WV 26505

Phone: 304-293-4692.

Toll Free: (888) 829-9426

TTY: (800) 518- 1448

For language translation and interpretation services Child Protective Services may Contact 911 Interpreters or the Section 504/ADA Coordinator (see also *Section 10.5 Limited English Proficiency*). To contact 911 Interpreters, utilize the information below:

911 Interpreters Inc.

1-855-670-2500

BSS Code: 16233

When requesting language translation services directly through 911 Interpreters, staff must report the accommodation to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator by completing the *Reasonable Accommodation Reporting Form*.

The Bureau for Social Services will not place a surcharge on a particular qualified individual with a disability or any group of qualified individuals with disabilities to cover the cost of measures, such as the provision of auxiliary aids and services or program accessibility, that are necessary to provide nondiscriminatory treatment required by Title II of the ADA and Section 504.

To address any violations of this Reasonable Modification Policy, consult the Bureau for Social Services Grievance Procedure. To request reasonable modifications, or if you have questions, please contact:

West Virginia Office of Shared Administration  
Office of Human Resource Management  
EEO/Civil Rights Officer  
One Davis Square, Suite 400, Charleston, WV 25301  
(304) 558-3313 (voice)  
(304) 558-6051 (fax)  
[OSACivilRights@WV.Gov](mailto:OSACivilRights@WV.Gov) (email)

Staff who make reasonable accommodations for an individual must be reported to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator utilizing the *Reasonable Accommodation Reporting Form*.

## **10.5 Limited English Proficiency**

The Bureau for Social Services (BSS) will take reasonable steps to ensure that persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access and an equal opportunity to participate in our services, activities, programs and other benefits. The policy of BSS is to ensure meaningful communication with LEP clients and their authorized representatives involving their case. The policy also provides for communication of information contained in vital documents, including but not limited to, information release consents, service plans, etc. All interpreters, translators and other aids needed to comply with this policy shall be provided without cost to the person being served, and clients and their families will be informed of the availability of such assistance free of charge. Language assistance will be provided through use of contracted vendors, technology, or telephonic interpretation services. All staff will be provided notice of this policy and procedure, and staff that may have direct contact with LEP individuals will be trained in the effective use of an interpreter and the effective use of technology including telephonic interpretation services. The Bureau for Social Services will conduct a regular review of the language access needs of our population, as well as update and monitor the implementation of this policy and these procedures, as necessary.

### **PROCEDURES:**

#### **1. IDENTIFYING LEP PERSONS AND THEIR LANGUAGE**

The Bureau for Social Services will promptly identify the language and communication needs of the LEP person. If necessary, staff will use a language identification card (or "I speak cards," available online at [www.lep.gov](http://www.lep.gov)) or posters to determine the language. In addition, when records are kept of past interactions with clients or family members, the language used to communicate with the LEP person will be included as part of the record.

#### **2. OBTAINING A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER**

911 Interpreters Inc. has agreed to provide qualified interpreter services. The agency's telephone number is 1-855-670-2500 (BSS Code: 16233). Interpretation services are available 24 hours a day. Some

LEP persons may prefer or request to use a family member or friend as an interpreter. However, family members or friends of the LEP person will not be used as interpreters unless specifically requested by that individual and **after** the LEP person has understood that an offer of an interpreter at no charge to the person has been made by the facility. Such an offer and the response will be documented in the person's file. If the LEP person chooses to use a family member or friend as an interpreter, issues of competency of interpretation, confidentiality, privacy, and conflict of interest will be considered. If the family member or friend is not competent or appropriate for any of these reasons, BSS will provide qualified interpreter services to the LEP person free of charge. Children and other clients will **not** be used to interpret, in order to ensure confidentiality of information and accurate communication.

### 3. PROVIDING WRITTEN TRANSLATIONS

When translation of vital documents is needed, BSS will submit documents for translation to 911 Translators Inc. or the Section 504/ADA Coordinator. BSS will generally provide language services in accordance with the following guidelines:

- (a) BSS will provide written translations of vital documents for each eligible LEP language group that constitutes five percent or 1,000, whichever is less, of the population of persons eligible to be served or likely to be affected or encountered. Translation of other documents, if needed, can be provided orally; or
- (b) If there are fewer than 50 persons in a language group that reaches the five percent threshold in (a), BSS will not translate vital written materials but will provide written notice in the primary language of the LEP language group of the right to receive competent oral interpretation of those written materials, free of cost.

Additionally, when making a determination as to what language services will be provided, BSS may consider the following factors: (1) the number and or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee; (2) the frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program; (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives; and (4) the resources available to the grantee/recipient and costs.

Documents being submitted for translation will be in final, approved form with updated and accurate information. Staff who utilize 911 Translators must report the utilization using the *Reasonable Modification Reporting Form* to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator.

Documents being submitted for translation will be in final, approved form with updated and accurate information. Staff who utilize 911 Translators must report the utilization using the *Reasonable Modification Reporting Form* to the Section 504/ADA Coordinator.

### 4. PROVIDING NOTICE TO LEP PERSONS

The Bureau for Social Services will inform LEP persons of the availability of language assistance, free of charge, by providing written notice in languages LEP persons will understand. At a minimum, notices and

signs will be posted and provided in the department office lobbies and waiting areas. Notification will also be provided through one or more of the following: outreach documents and program brochures.

5. MONITORING LANGUAGE NEEDS AND IMPLEMENTATION

On an ongoing basis, BSS will assess changes in demographics, types of services or other needs that may require reevaluation of this policy and its procedures. In addition, BSS will regularly assess the efficacy of these procedures, including but not limited to mechanisms for securing interpreter services, equipment used for the delivery of language assistance, complaints filed by LEP persons, feedback from clients and community organizations, etc.

**APPENDIX A - THE DEPARTMENT'S CIVIL RIGHTS DISCRIMINATION  
COMPLAINT FORM**



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
Bureau for Social Services

**Civil Rights Discrimination Complaint Form**

<b>Complainant First Name</b>		<b>Complainant Last Name</b>
<b>Home Phone</b> <i>(include area code)</i>		<b>Work Phone</b> <i>(include area code)</i>
<b>Street Address</b>		<b>City</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>Zip Code</b>	<b>Email</b> <i>(if available)</i>

Is this complaint being completed by someone other than the complainant?  Yes  No

If yes, please provide your information below:

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Telephone Number</b> <i>(include area code)</i>
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The complainant feels they have been discriminated against on the basis of:

- Race/Color/National Origin     
  Religion/Creed     
  Sex  
 Disability     
  Age

Other *(please specify):*

Who or what bureau within the West Virginia Department of Human Services is believed to have been discriminatory?

<b>Name/Bureau/Office</b>		
<b>Street Address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>County</b>
<b>Zip Code</b>	<b>Telephone</b>	

Date(s) discriminatory action is believed to have occurred:

Which program(s) is the complainant alleging the discriminatory action took place in?

- Child Welfare *(includes CPS, Youth Services, Foster Care, Adoption, Homefinding, and Legal Guardianship)*     
  Adult Welfare *(includes APS, Guardianship, Health Care Surrogate, Residential Services Request to Receive and Request to Provide)*     
  Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP)  
 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)     
  School Clothing Voucher     
  Indigent Burial

*Complaints involving the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) must be sent directly to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. See below for more information.*

**Describe briefly what happened. How and why does the complainant believe they have been discriminated against? What is the relief or remedy sought by the complainant?**

*(Attach additional pages as needed.)*

Please sign and date this form. If submitting by email, you may type your name and date. Your email will represent your signature.

Signature	Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
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The West Virginia Department of Human Services shall not retaliate against, intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title VI, Section 504 or the Age Act, or because she or he has made a complaint, testified, assisted, or participated in any manner in an investigation, proceeding, or hearing.

EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall conduct an investigation of the complaint. This investigation may be informal, but it must be thorough, affording all interested persons an opportunity to submit evidence relevant to the complaint. EEO/Civil Rights Officer will maintain the files and records of DoHS relating to such grievances. The EEO/Civil Rights Officer shall issue a written decision on the complaint no later than thirty (30) calendar days after its filing, unless the Coordinator documents exigent circumstances requiring additional time to issue a decision. To submit this complaint or request additional information, please contact:

West Virginia Department of Shared Administration  
Office of Human Resource Management  
EEO/Civil Rights Officer  
(304) 558-3313 (voice)  
(304) 558-6051 (fax)  
[OSACivilRights@WV.Gov](mailto:OSACivilRights@WV.Gov) (email)

The person filing the grievance retains the right to file a grievance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, regardless of the decision made by the West Virginia Department of Human Services. The availability and use of this grievance procedure does not prevent a person from filing a private lawsuit in Federal court or a complaint of discrimination on the basis of being a member of a protected class, with the:

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Room 509F HHS Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20201  
800-368-1019 (voice)  
202-619-3818 (fax)  
800-537-7697 (TDD)  
[OCRComplaint@hhs.gov](mailto:OCRComplaint@hhs.gov) (email)

The complaint form may be found at <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html>

*For SNAP complaints, please contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture.*

*The USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, can be found online at: <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/ad-3027>, or at any USDA office. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form by mail, email, or fax to:*

*U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410  
(202) 690-7442 (fax)  
(866) 632-9992 (telephone)  
[program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov) (email)*

