

1. Overview

Intervention with abused and neglected children and their families is planned, purposeful, and focused on achieving child safety, permanency, and well-being. One of the essential elements of planned and purposeful intervention is a complete assessment and understanding of the factors contributing to the abuse. This thorough assessment results in an understanding of parental protective capacity and development of a Child Welfare Case Plan which serves as a roadmap to facilitate the needed changes. Good case planning identifies the goals, activities, and tasks which will lead to successful outcomes. The ongoing safety plan and concurrent permanency plan are incorporated into the case planning process.

The Child Welfare Case Plan is always dynamic; no plan should be static. Flexibility is critical in developing and managing case plans. When child and family needs and protective capacity change, flexibility allows the plan to follow suit.

Although safety considerations are incorporated throughout this manual, this chapter focuses on the caseworker's responsibilities to manage child safety. This includes developing and implementing the Child Welfare Case Plan, managing the ongoing safety plan, planning and considering the concurrent permanency plan, involving the family, and involving others in activities and services designed to increase parental protective capacity and reunify the child with the parents. Although at times the caseworker will be working with a child's legal guardians, this chapter will reference the adults in the family as the child's parents.

A. Developing the Child Welfare Case Plan

The caseworker develops and utilizes a Child Welfare Case Plan to:

- Assess the family's protective capacities and make informed decisions on what must change to establish a safe home for the child;
- Identify strategies with the family that address the effects of abuse and change the behaviors, conditions, or circumstances contributing to the identified safety threats;
- Provide clear and specific outcomes and establish priorities for changing the behaviors, conditions or circumstances that caused the abuse;
- Identify and coordinate the services needed for the child to ensure safety and well-being;
- Identify and coordinate the services needed for the parents to enhance protective capacities and mitigate conditions, or circumstances, or change behaviors contributing to the identified safety threats;
- Establish benchmarks to measure a family's progress toward achieving outcomes; and
- Establish the framework for decision-making in the case.

The Child Welfare Case Plan should be clear to all participants in the case and service delivery systems.

B. Managing Safety

Safety guides all of casework practice. In every case a fundamental goal is to protect children from harm and to ensure that they do not endanger others. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires assessment of the safety of the child in birth families, substitute care placements, and adoptive homes. The caseworker is responsible for:

- Monitoring the ongoing safety plan;
- Identification and examination of parental protective capacities;
- Making appropriate changes in actions or services when parental protective capacity changes or safety threats are eliminated or mitigated; and
- Monitoring a child's safety when in substitute care.

C. Involving the Family

Families are more likely to engage in the case-planning process when they believe their feelings and concerns are heard. A caseworker helps the family maintain a realistic perspective on what can be accomplished and how long it will take to do so. By involving the family, the caseworker:

- Enhances the essential helping relationship because the family's feelings and concerns have been heard, respected, and considered;
- Facilitates the family's investment in and commitment to achieving outcomes, and participating in services and activities identified in the Child Welfare Case Plan;
- Empowers parents to take the necessary action to change the behaviors, conditions or circumstances that contributed to the child being unsafe; and
- Ensures better communication and increases the likelihood the caseworker and the family are working toward the same outcome.

D. Involving Others

Other family members and service providers are almost always involved with the family or will be part of the services and activities outlined in the Child Welfare Case Plan. When working with others, the caseworker needs to assure that issues related to parental consent and confidentiality are sufficiently addressed. For detailed information regarding confidentiality, see Chapter I.

In every case, Child Welfare has the responsibility to decide what the overall focus of intervention needs to be, and to determine whether the child and family are getting the services they need and are making the changes necessary to achieve the outcomes of safety, permanency, and child well-being.