



CDSS

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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REASON FOR THIS TRANSMITTAL

- State Law Change
- Federal Law or Regulation Change
- Court Order
- Clarification Requested by One or More Counties
- Initiated by CDSS

September 9, 2014

ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE NO. I-52-14

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS
 ALL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM MANAGERS
 ALL PROBATION OFFICERS
 ALL TITLE IV-E TRIBES
 ALL ELIGIBILITY WORKERS

SUBJECT: BEST PRACTICES FOR TIMELY INVESTIGATION OF CHILD
 ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT IMMEDIATE/TEN DAY REFERRALS

REFERENCES: MANUEL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES DIVISION 31
 SECTION 31-110, 31-115, 31-120 AND 31-125.2;
 WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE 16504; PROBATE CODE
 1513; ALL COUNTY LETTER 03-61, DATED DECEMBER 2, 2003;
 ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-13-09; DATED
 FEBRUARY 10, 2009; ALL COUNTY INFORMATION
 NOTICE I-86-06; DATED DECEMBER 1, 2006

The purpose of this All County Information Notice (ACIN) is to inform Child Welfare Services (CWS) agencies of best practices for locating families, making in-person contacts, and documenting contacts in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) in order to respond timely to child abuse and/or neglect referrals.

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16501(f) requires county CWS agencies to respond to any report of imminent danger to a child immediately and to all other reports within 10 calendar days. The Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP), Division 31, Section 125.2, in accordance with the WIC Section 16504, requires that “The social worker investigating the referral shall have in-person contact with all of the children alleged to be abused, neglected or exploited, and at least one adult who has information regarding the allegations.”

The state uses the “Timely Investigations” measure (2B) as a state process measure to determine the percentage of child abuse and/or neglect referrals that have resulted in a timely in-person investigation. This process measure has been monitored by means of compliance reviews conducted by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for a number of years prior to the implementation of the current oversight system and its identification as measure 2B.

The current methodology for the Timely Investigations measure (2B) includes attempted visits. The measure defines an attempted visit as an in-person (physical) response where the social worker has reason to believe the child will be found at the location visited but discovers the child is not there, and the social worker documents the attempted visit correctly and timely in the CWS/CMS.

In October of 2011, the California State Auditor released report number 2011-101.1 “Child Welfare Services: California Can and Must Provide Better Protection and Support for Abused and Neglected Children” which recommended that CDSS add a CWS performance measure that indicates the percentage of investigatory visits completed on time, excluding attempted visits from its calculation of successful outcomes. The report noted that “measuring whether in-person investigatory visits are actually completed and not just attempted is critical because state and county agency management needs to know if social workers are effectively conducting timely in-person observations and interviews of children who have allegedly been abused or neglected.”

In response to the California State Auditor’s recommendation, CDSS has developed an additional state process measure that calculates completed in-person contact with the child and excludes attempted visits. This additional measure will be published on the CDSS website in the Child Welfare Services Performance Outcome Measures report, as well as on the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System voluntary federal report. Additionally, these measures will appear on the California Child Welfare Indicators public website maintained by the University of California Berkeley and on the SafeMeasures® website.

Attempted Visits & Efforts to Locate Families

County CWS agencies are encouraged to have methods and policies in place to ensure in-person contacts successfully occur within the required timeframes for investigations of child abuse and/or neglect. The CDSS recognizes the challenges counties face in making contact with the child and family, including lack of identifying information provided by the reporting party, incorrect addresses provided by the reporting party, families that have moved from the reported address, homelessness, families avoiding social worker contact, and physical barriers to contact such as fences, security gates, dogs, etc. To support county efforts to accomplish timely, in-person contacts during

investigations of child abuse and/or neglect, the CDSS encourages CWS agencies to adopt and implement the best practices for attempting visits and locating families shared below.

Attempted Visits

- The first attempt to contact the child/family should occur in-person.
- Continue in-person attempts at various times of the day at different known locations (i.e. school or work place).
- Attempt at least three in-person contacts prior to referral closure.
- When appropriate, leave a business card in a highly-visible and accessible place.
- Plan workload activities to ensure timely response is made according to the appropriate response time.
- If unable to locate the child/family of an immediate response referral, request a welfare check from law enforcement.

Locating Families

If the family has not responded to the social worker's attempts to make in-person contact, the social worker should continue their attempts to locate the child/family using all resources available within the constraints of confidentiality. Listed below are best practices shared by CWS agencies that are used to locate children and families. Social workers should use the method(s) pertinent to their investigation.

- Contact the family via phone, if a number is available, at different times of the day/evening.
- Contact the family via mail to the family's last known address.
- Verify the family's address with the post office.
- Contact the schools in the child's location, if applicable.
- Contact the parent's workplace, if applicable.
- Research CWS history for collateral contacts and other addresses/phone numbers/email addresses.
- Research welfare databases for public assistance records.
- Research local telephone directories, using the internet as a resource.
- Contact law enforcement for possible contact information.
- Research inmate records.
- Contact the reporting party for other collateral contacts.
- Research LexisNexis to find contact information or collateral contacts.

CWS/CMS Documentation

County CWS agencies may refer to the following ACINs and All County Letter (ACL) for detailed information regarding documentation in CWS/CMS.

- **ACIN I-13-09:** Documentation of Referrals in CWS/ CMS
This ACIN informed counties of existing policies and procedures regarding the investigation and documentation of child abuse and neglect reports in the CWS/CMS application.
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acin/2009/I-13-09.pdf>
- **ACIN I-86-06:** Recording “Time to Investigation” Information in the CWS/CMS
This ACIN informed counties of critical CWS program documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurement requirements.
http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acin06/pdf/I-86_06.pdf
- **ACL 03-61:** CWS/CMS Data Entry
This ACL provided guidance regarding critical CWS documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurement requirements.
<http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/getinfo/acl03/pdf/03-61.pdf>

Additionally, CDSS encourages counties to utilize the following best practices to document in the CWS/CMS a social worker’s attempts to make contact with a child and family.

- All attempts to contact the child/family should be documented in CWS/CMS within three business days.
- Record information such as associated visits and delivered services in the Contact Notes Box.
- Different methods of contact should be documented individually.
- Document all Linkages activity in “Consult with services provider” in the drop down menu.

Timely Response Reminder in CWS/CMS

The CWS agencies are encouraged to have methods and policies in place to ensure that all in-person contacts occur within the immediate or 10-day response timeframe. Counties should not rely on the timely response reminder in CWS/CMS, as the reminder in CWS/CMS calculates an investigation contact due date equal to the referral start date plus the amount of response time (immediate or ten days) to identify an overdue contact, which seemingly allows an additional day to respond to child abuse and/or

neglect referrals. Currently CDSS is working to address this issue in the roll-out of the new CWS/CMS replacement.

Closure Due to “Unable to Locate”

The majority of CWS agencies reported that social workers investigating emergency response referrals make two to four attempts to contact the child and family prior to closing the referral on the grounds of “unable to locate”. As with all referrals, social workers must have the supervisor’s approval prior to referral closure and the social worker should have exhausted all efforts to locate the child/family. The supervisor may meet with management for approval to close the referral. The supervisor should also track any trends in the contacts and attempts made by their staff in order to identify issues and resolve concerns regarding the inability to locate children and families.

The supervisor should review the referral to ensure that:

- All attempts are properly documented in the Contact Notebook in CWS/CMS.
- All applicable resources have been exhausted to locate the child/family.
- The allegation conclusion is “Inconclusive” and the Client Disposition selected is “Contact Attempted, Can’t Locate” in CWS/CMS.

Recording Probate Cases

The CDSS recognizes that some CWS agencies have questions regarding appropriately recording probate court requests for nonrelative home study assessments required by Probate Code 1513(a) and probate court referrals for investigation as described in Probate Code 1513(b). In order to address those questions CDSS will be providing guidance regarding CWS/CMS data entry in a future ACIN.

Conclusion

Timely investigations are essential to protect children in unsafe homes. The CDSS encourages CWS agencies to implement these shared promising practices to ensure initial in-person contact is successfully made when investigating child abuse and/or neglect referrals. The CWS agencies should also implement best practices regarding attempted visits, exhaustive efforts, and referral closure when unable to locate a child/family of a child abuse and/or neglect referral.

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact the Child Welfare Policy and Program Development Bureau at (916) 651-6160.

Sincerely,

Original Document Signed By:

KEVIN GAINES, Chief
Child Protection and Family Support Branch

c: CWDA