

ORC: _____
OAC: 5101:2-5-13
CFSR: _____
Board: _____
Other: _____

Review Date: 6/24
Last Reviewed: 6/21
Review Responsibility: Board and Administrative Policies Committee
Other Handbooks: EeHB 6A

FCCS PROCEDURE

NO.: 3M

**SUBJECT: SAFETY PROTOCOL FOR
EMPLOYEES**

Approved by: Executive Council

Effective Date: June 14, 2004

Date(s) of Revision: Aug 31, 2010; Sep 13, 2012; Feb 23, 2016; Jun 8, 2021

Responsible for Implementation: All Staff

Employee/Worker Safety

Franklin County Children Services has a zero-tolerance policy regarding any incidents of threats, intimidation or physical harm to any staff member. The agency is committed to the personal safety of all staff, the people we serve and the public. The safety of all employees is of the utmost importance and must be protected as they carry out the mission of the agency to protect children while strengthening families. The following recommendation will assist with threat and risk assessment, preventative safety measures and avoidance, self-defense and agency and law enforcement support.

Recommended Safety Protocol

- 1) Professional Safety and Professional Judgment
 - a) It is expected that staff use their best professional judgment to assess situations, which are potentially dangerous, and to remove themselves physically when necessary. The following are some guidelines to use when practicing casework duties:
 - i) Increased risk to an employee's personal safety is most often the result of the interaction of several factors rather than any one factor in a situation. Maintaining awareness of these different factors increases the likelihood of safety. Please refer to v) for examples.

- ii) In conducting visits in the field, employees will perceive the issue of risk differently. Each case is unique. At all stages of casework, preparation, professional judgment and common sense are essential to increasing safety.
- iii) Supervisory consultation is critical to assist the employee in identifying potentially dangerous situations and if risk to the worker's personal safety is identified.
- iv) Staff should utilize any and all sources of information to prepare for visits. Information which may help the worker assess risk to their personal safety is available through reviewing case information, making collateral contacts, checking criminal record sites and discussing the case with the supervisor and administrative staff.
- v) When reviewing case records, the following type of information regarding family members should be noted as indicative of increased risk to personal safety and to take necessary precautions:
 - ❖ Documented incidents or threats of physical harm against persons and/or professional staff involved in the case (look for Safety Alerts or Critical Incident Reports)
 - ❖ Indication of weapons use on the part of the involved parties
 - ❖ Active drug or alcohol use
 - ❖ History or pattern of violence in the family
 - ❖ Acute or chronic psychiatric problems or episodes
 - ❖ Information indicating extreme anger or outrage at Protective Services intervention
 - ❖ Extreme physical and social isolation of the family
 - ❖ Information indicating hazardous health conditions exist in the home
 - ❖ Information indicating individuals with communicable diseases reside in the home
 - ❖ Information indicating physical hazards or unsafe conditions exist in the home environment

- ❖ Information indicating participation in activities that promote violence, racism, homophobia, or with federally recognized gangs/extremist groups

2) Preventive Safety Measures

- a) Each direct service worker will give their supervisor a schedule that includes the address and telephone number of where the worker will be. If the employee's schedule changes, it is the responsibility of the employee to notify their supervisor or designee immediately before going to a different location.
- b) Practice initial interactions with clients BEFORE going to the home, especially if you expect difficulty. Ask your supervisor or coworker to assist you in planning and practicing for these visits. Unit meetings and supervisory conferences provide additional opportunities to practice and discuss.
- c) No employee at any time will be asked to go into a high-risk situation in which they do not feel reasonably safe without an agreed upon plan of action. Whenever there is disagreement with the plan of action established, the staff member has the right to involve the Associate Director, Director, and finally the Division Director in evaluating the plan.

3) Threat Assessment and Avoidance

- a) Assess the level of hostility/threats in a situation.
- b) If you have a safety concern, consult with your supervisor prior to engagement with the client.
- c) Remain in your car and promptly leave the neighborhood at any time you feel personally threatened. Consult immediately with your supervisor.
- d) Anticipate that the unexpected may happen and make a plan in case it does. Take safety precautions from the start. Avoid clothing that restricts your movement. Stay between the client and the door during a home visit and keep your car keys accessible. Make note of all exits. Be alert if circumstances don't seem normal or if a lot of small observations seem out of the ordinary.
- e) State clearly who you are and why you're there. Use the client's name to personalize and humanize your conversation. Avoid jargon, as it tends to confuse and frustrate the client. Encourage the client's participation in

solving problems by asking for their opinions and suggestions. Listen carefully to what a person is really saying. Use silence and restatement to clarify messages. Reflection may also be used to clarify what has been said. Don't be judgmental.

- f) When dealing with potentially hostile clients, avoid body language and gestures (non-verbal communication cues) that may heighten the threat of danger, such as standing too close and encroaching on the client's personal space.
 - g) If client escalates, use threat assessment and avoidance strategies (de-escalation).
 - h) Allow the client to "blow off steam." Ventilation usually saps energy and diffuses intensity. Watch for non-verbal signs indicating imminent violence, e.g., flared nostrils, dilated pupils, crouched torso, clenched fists, gritted teeth, etc.
 - i) If the situation continues to escalate and involves verbal threats or physical assault, leave and call for help immediately. Under no circumstances should you turn your back on a disturbed client, and do not allow them to walk behind you.
 - j) If you are unable to leave and are physically in danger of assault, use the non-aggressive self-defense procedures taught in Children Services safety training.
 - k) Report the incident to your supervisor as soon as you can leave and complete an **Employee Incident Report** form (see directions for completing the form in Policies and Procedures, **3L.1 Employee Incident Reporting**).
- 4) Situations Requiring Immediate Assistance
- a) The Children Services employee should assess danger to a child, self or others, in consultation with the supervisor, when possible, in order to determine if immediate law enforcement assistance is required.
 - b) The following situations require immediate assistance:
 - i) When a child is in imminent danger. For example:
 - ❖ There are reasonable grounds to believe that the child is suffering from serious illness or injury and is not receiving proper care;

- ❖ There is immediate danger of injury from the child's surroundings; or
 - ❖ There is immediate or threatened serious physical or emotional harm.
- ii) When a client is out of control, posing a danger to self, child, staff or others at the site, including but not limited to:
 - ❖ A client who is threatening suicide or homicide;
 - ❖ A person who is having a psychotic episode;
 - ❖ A person who is "high," sick or intoxicated;
 - ❖ A person is being held hostage; or
 - ❖ A person is bringing a weapon on the premises and is refusing to relinquish it.
 - iii) When workers have been threatened with physical harm.
 - iv) When there is the threat of weapons being used on the child or on Children Services staff.
 - v) When workers must remove a child from his/her caregiver, home or school.
 - vi) When the required visit is to an unsafe area, targeted for increased police cruises and foot patrols by law enforcement personnel, which officially designate the area as "high crime".
 - vii) When the required visit is to a house or area with houses officially designated by Narcotics staff as "crack" houses or areas with drug related activities or houses, which have been raided or are under surveillance.

5) Self-Defense

- a) Children Services staff have the same right that all persons have to protect themselves and their property from harm. As a matter of law, the reasonableness of the actions people take to defend themselves and their property will be considered in light of all the facts of any given situation.
- b) The right to defend oneself is based on a person's reasonable belief that they face immediate danger, even if that belief turns out to be mistaken.
- c) Children Services staff may also use reasonable force to intervene in a situation where a child is threatened or attacked after appropriate de-escalation techniques have been attempted.

- d) In all situations, the amount of force legally allowed to defend person and property will be only that which is reasonably necessary under all the circumstances. All persons, including staff, should always attempt to escape from a threatening situation without resorting to force.
- e) Guidelines When Executive Director Is Requested to Send A Letter Due to Threat to Employee
 - i) The letter is not a form letter. Each letter sent will be an original.
 - ii) Prior to the Executive Director sending this letter, the staff person involved in the conflict will provide a written employee incident report which will summarize the events that transpired.
 - iii) The staff person's supervisor and administrator will also sign the employee incident report.
 - iv) If the recipient of the letter calls back to the agency to discuss the conflict, the Executive Director or designee will return the call.
 - v) The original letter will be sent to the client; a copy of the letter and the employee incident report will be kept in the case file and the Executive Director will keep a copy.
- f) The Prosecutor's Office will assist any staff person who is threatened or assaulted in a manner that results in criminal charges or where a civil order of protection is needed if:
 - i) The Employee was conducting himself in accordance with Ohio law and Agency policies and procedures at the time an incident occurs.
 - ii) The incident occurred during the performance of approved work activities.
 - iii) The incident arose directly as a result of work activities, even if the incident occurred during non-work hours.
- g) Procedures for Franklin County Children Services Workers Filing Criminal Actions
 - i) Caseworker believes incident occurred that merits further investigation for possible criminal charges.
 - ii) Caseworker fills out Employee Incident Report in SharePoint specifying incident. Included should be list of witnesses and any law-enforcement intervention.

- iii) Caseworker will complete the Safety Hazard section in SACWIS detailing the safety concerns and/or issues with the client(s).
NOTE: A safety hazard section should be completed for each client, if applicable. Safety alert to be placed on SharePoint to make FCCS employees aware of the safety issues.
- iv) Employee Incident Report goes through chain of command. Director will identify if need for criminal intervention.
- v) Director will either fax (645-4548) or e-mail to the Intake Court Liaison Officer (645-8892) the employee incident report form.
- vi) Report will be assessed by the Columbus City Attorney's Intake office, who will make the determination of:
 - a) Charges – Probable cause is found that a crime was committed. Assistant City Attorney will swear out any charges and Liaison will be escort worker through subsequent court proceedings.
 - b) Warning Letter – Not enough evidence that a crime was committed; however, a warning letter is sent requesting individual cease behavior. Intake will be responsible for sending out letter.
 - c) Either the Assistant City Prosecutor or Liaison will contact individual concerning outcome. There may be some discussion concerning decisions due to finding of probable cause and caseworker concerns that can be addressed.
- vii) Caseworker to schedule a meeting with their direct supervisor and/or Director or Associate Director to determine what action steps need to be taken (e.g., case transfer or all contact with client to be at FCCS offices).
- h) The agency will provide supportive services to staff that have experienced a safety incident. Such services may include, but are not limited to: time off, Peer Support, critical incident stress debriefing or referral to the Employee Assistance Program.

6) Tips for other Dangerous Situations

- a) **Dog Bites.** Remember what you learned in training such as rattling gates and paying attention to items in the yard that would lead you to believe

that animals are there. At the first opportunity, employees should request that dogs and/or animals be secured. Do not enter a yard or house with a dog present and unsecured.

- b) **SWAT Raid.** Do exactly and only what you are directed to do by the law enforcement officers conducting the raid. Do not argue or attempt to show an ID until asked, and do not do anything that could be interpreted as dangerous by an officer. Comply, and they will sort it out and get you on your way as soon as possible. Remember, law enforcement are taught that if you are vertical you are dangerous. You may be asked to get down on the ground and possibly handcuffed, and then the officers will ascertain your identity and not before.
- c) **Meth Labs.** Watch out for chemicals, smells such as finger nail polish, medications, rubbing alcohol, and cat urine when there are no animals present. Look for a lot of cold medications such as Nyquil, etc., sitting around the house and bottles with chemicals stored in them. These chemicals are extremely flammable in most cases. Do not touch any of these chemicals as many can be absorbed through the skin and cause serious damage. Remove yourself from the home immediately.
- d) **Weapons.** Weapons are a serious issue and can pose a serious threat to an employee and a child's safety. However, the absence of weapons should not be taken as a sign of reduced risk. If a weapon is shown to an employee in a threatening manner, the employee should immediately leave and contact their supervisor and law enforcement for further action.
- e) **Gangs.** The risks posed by a given gang at a given time vary and depend on perceived threat, power, and other issues. Generally, it has been found that respect for gang members, their territory and their gang affiliation will keep people out of danger. At no time, should any employee attempt to interfere in gang related activities or engage in behaviors deemed threatening to gang cohesion.

In all the above situations, employees should notify their supervisors, as soon as possible.