

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 1 of 20 |
| Approved: | Karen Shea, Deputy Commissioner | Effective: 3/21/2018 |
| Supersedes: | Family Services Policy 52 | Dated: 11/1/2017 |

Purpose

To clearly articulate a primary focus on child safety and to describe the requirements for conducting child safety investigations and assessments under Title 33, Chapter 49 and Chapter 51.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Purpose | 1 |
| Table of Contents | 1 |
| Related Policies | 2 |
| Policy | 2 |
| Assessing Child Safety is First Priority | 2 |
| Supervising Child Safety Interventions | 3 |
| Required Communication with Reporters..... | 3 |
| Reporting to and Assistance from Law Enforcement..... | 3 |
| Sharing Information with Law Enforcement during Joint Investigations or Assessments..... | 4 |
| Child Safety Interventions Involving Residential and Child Care Licensing | 4 |
| Phases of Child Safety Interventions | 4 |
| Timeline for Commencing Child Safety Interventions..... | 4 |
| Waiver of 72-hour Commencement Requirement | 5 |
| Planning the Child Safety Intervention | 6 |
| Assessing and Documenting Safety in Child Safety Interventions..... | 6 |
| Access to Children during Child Safety Interventions..... | 8 |
| Other Requirements for Child Safety Interventions..... | 9 |
| Special Considerations for Child Sexual Abuse Investigations With No Identified Child | 11 |
| Re-Assignment to Chapter 49 Investigation Track | 11 |
| Requirements to Inform Parents and Alleged Perpetrators..... | 12 |
| Working with Individuals Who May Require Reasonable Accommodations | 12 |
| Working with Individuals with Limited English Proficiency | 13 |
| Photographs and X-Rays during Child Safety Investigations | 13 |
| Co-Occurring Child Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) | 13 |
| Interviewing the Alleged Perpetrator | 14 |
| SDM Risk Assessment | 16 |
| Requirements for Concluding Child Safety Interventions | 16 |
| Delays in Concluding Child Safety Intervention Due to Law Enforcement | 17 |
| Plan of Safe Care for Substance-Exposed Newborns | 17 |
| Sharing Information with Mandated Reporters Working with Child or Family..... | 18 |
| Informing Child’s Caregivers and Parents of Case Disposition..... | 18 |
| Referral to Children’s Integrated Services..... | 18 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 2 of 20 |

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Entries into the SSMIS Child Abuse and Neglect Report..... | 19 |
| Guidelines for Opening Family Support Cases..... | 19 |
| Family Refusal of Family Support Services..... | 20 |
| Additional Resources..... | 20 |

Related Policies

Family Services [Policy 50](#): Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions

Family Services [Policy 51](#): Screening Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect

Family Services [Policy 60](#): Juvenile Proceedings Act – CHINS (C) and (D) Assessments

Family Services [Policy 65](#): Substance Use Disorder Screening & Drug Testing for Caretakers

Family Services [Policy 68](#): Serious Physical Injury Investigation and Case Planning

Policy

This policy is applicable to child safety interventions (investigations or assessments) under Title 33 Chapter 49 or Chapter 51. Unless otherwise indicated, policy and procedures are the same for all child safety interventions.

Assessing Child Safety is First Priority

The first priority of the social worker is to assess child safety:

- Is the child safe now?
- If not, what needs to be done to promote safety?
- Is out-of-home placement necessary?
- If the child must leave home, is a familiar person available to provide short-term care?
- Is DCF custody a necessary element to promote safety?

Child safety interventions are time-limited interventions focused, first and foremost, on ensuring child safety. These interventions should be concluded in a timely way because:

- They represent significant intrusion into private family matters. Families deserve to know the outcome. If services are needed to support child safety, they should be arranged for and delivered as soon as possible.
- Individuals who may be placed on the Child Protection Registry should have the opportunity for timely independent review of that decision.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 3 of 20 |

- Placement of substantiated perpetrators on the Child Protection Registry protects others in the future by limiting the situations in which the perpetrator has unsupervised access to children and/or vulnerable adults.

Supervising Child Safety Interventions

The child safety intervention supervisor will supervise all child safety interventions, even if the social worker normally reports to another supervisor.

Required Communication with Reporters

Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES) informs mandated reporters that a report has been accepted for a child safety intervention, the track assignment, and the assigned social worker.

The social worker will attempt to contact the reporter to see if the reporter has further information concerning the child's situation that would inform the child safety intervention, unless doing so is unreasonable given the circumstances. The supervisor may waive this requirement if the safety of any individual may be jeopardized by the contact.

Reporting to and Assistance from Law Enforcement

33 V.S.A. § 4915 specifies that the division “report to and receive assistance from appropriate law enforcement” under certain circumstances. Some notifications required under this section will be handled centrally. However, the assigned social worker or supervisor shall immediately report to appropriate law enforcement as follows:

| Nature of Situation | Report to: |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accepted reports (investigations or assessments) of child sexual abuse by an alleged perpetrator 10 years of age or older | Special Investigations Unit |
| Accepted reports (investigations or assessments) of serious physical abuse or neglect likely to result in criminal charges or requiring emergency medical care | Special Investigations Unit |
| Situations potentially dangerous to the child or social worker | Local law enforcement agency (unless also within SIU jurisdiction) |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 4 of 20 |

| Nature of Situation | Report to: |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Accepted or non-accepted reports of serious physical abuse or neglect including those resulting in death <i>*** This includes reports of serious physical abuse that were not accepted because the alleged perpetrator is a non-caretaker. ***</i> | Law enforcement agency that conducts investigations of death (which may be local law enforcement, the Vermont State Police or the Special Investigations Unit) |

Assistance from law enforcement may be requested in other situations per local protocols.

Sharing Information with Law Enforcement during Joint Investigations or Assessments

In investigations or assessments conducted jointly with law enforcement, written information from the case record may be shared. However, since information contained in police records is discoverable if the perpetrator is charged criminally, the worker should determine with law enforcement what information is needed.

Child Safety Interventions Involving Residential and Child Care Licensing

If the social worker learns that the alleged perpetrator resides or receives services in a licensed or approved foster home or facility serving children, the social worker will notify the Residential Licensing and Special Investigations (RLSI) Unit immediately.

Phases of Child Safety Interventions

Child safety interventions consist of two phases:

| Phase 1: Safety Determination | Phase 2: Assessment and Planning |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The period between case assignment and the completion of the <i>SDM Safety Assessment</i> . | The period in which social workers use family engagement strategies including the <i>SDM Risk Assessment</i> to assess risk, prevent the placement of children in out-of-home care, and promote health and well-being. |

Timeline for Commencing Child Safety Interventions

The division shall commence a child safety intervention **within 72 hours** of the date and time the division had sufficient information to determine the report would be accepted. In most instances with an accepted report, this will be the time the intake report was entered. While the maximum timeframe for commencing child safety

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 5 of 20 |

interventions is 72 hours, social workers and their supervisors may determine that a more immediate response is needed.

FSDNet populates a response priority which serves as guidance when commencing child safety interventions. Supervisors have the discretion to determine:

- When assessments or investigations must be commenced immediately or by the end of the day; or
- When assessments or investigations may be commenced within 72 hours (even if the response priority indicates by the end of the day).

| Commence means... | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Investigation | Assessments |
| Staff will interview the child, or if the child is nonverbal, observe the child. An interview solely by law enforcement does not substitute for division investigation commencement. | Staff will contact the person responsible for the child’s welfare as listed in the intake. While staff may commence an assessment by phone, some assessments may warrant an announced or unannounced visit (e.g., caretaker using opiates with young children or hazardous conditions of the home). |

Waiver of 72-hour Commencement Requirement

The district director may waive the requirement to commence a child safety intervention within 72 hours when, in their judgment:

| Investigations | Assessments |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be harmful to the child¹; • There is danger to the social worker; or • The victim cannot be located. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social worker is unable to locate the person responsible for the child’s welfare as listed in the intake; • It would be harmful to the child; or • There is danger to the social worker. |

The waiver must be granted before 72 hours. Documentation requirements are:

| Who | What | Where |
|------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Manager | Rational for waiver and date for commencement. | FSDNet Module |

¹ Example: When commencing the investigation within 72 hours would result in repeated interviews to the child when the child is not at imminent risk and the alleged perpetrator will not have unsupervised access to the child.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 6 of 20 |

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Social Worker | Anticipated commence date and activities necessary to ensure commencement by that date. | Appended to Intake |
| Supervisor | Daily documentation of efforts to commence. | Appended to Intake |

The issues necessitating the waiver will be addressed immediately so the child safety intervention commences as soon as possible.

Planning the Child Safety Intervention

Thoughtful planning of a child safety intervention is critical to minimize the risk to the child, other family members, and the social worker. Issues to be considered in planning include:

- What history does the division have with the family?
- Could the intervention place the child at higher risk? How can we minimize that risk?
- How do issues of domestic violence or substance abuse in the family affect the approach to the intervention?
- Are there risks to the social worker? How can they be minimized?
- Is police involvement indicated?
- What is the appropriate sequence of interviews?
- In an investigation, is it necessary to interview the child without parental permission? If so, what environment will be most comfortable for the child? Who is the appropriate disinterested party to be present?
- How can repeat interviews, especially with the child, be avoided?

Regardless of the specific basis for report acceptance, the social worker should be aware that during the CSI, other forms of maltreatment may become evident. These should be assessed and documented.

Assessing and Documenting Safety in Child Safety Interventions

Assessing safety is the first priority during a child safety intervention.

Assessing safety includes focusing on present or impending danger to the child. It is a casework process that involves the social worker, the family, and others engaged with the family. While assessing safety, the social worker identifies:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Present danger | An immediate, significant and clearly observable family condition that is currently endangering or threatening to endanger a child and therefore requires prompt response. |
| Impending danger | Family behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions and/or situations which pose a danger that may not be currently or always active, but can be |

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 7 of 20 |

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | anticipated to become active and have severe effects on a child at any time. |
| Child vulnerabilities | Characteristics that make the child more likely to be maltreated and less likely to be able to participate in a plan for safety. Children in the home must be assessed for vulnerability separately. |
| Protective capacities | Attributes that can mitigate the presence of or threat of serious harm to a child when activated on the child’s behalf. Not all family strengths are protective capacities. |

The social worker will document the safety determination and safety plan on the *SDM Safety Assessment* within **24 hours** of the first in-person interview with the family.

If there are allegations in two households within a single child safety intervention, there may be two initial *SDM Safety Assessments*. In cases that were accepted based on concerns about the safety of an infant prior to birth, the *SDM Safety Assessment* will be completed again after the birth of the infant.

After the initial *SDM Safety Assessment*, changes in family or household circumstances will prompt a review/update of the *SDM Safety Assessment*. Examples of a change in family or household circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- the birth of a baby;
- a change in household composition/make-up (such as the addition of new household members or a person leaves the household);
- the family moves;
- there is a new criminal charge;
- there is a significant change in health;
- there is a new report during the open child safety intervention; or
- there is a change in the capability of safety interventions to mitigate dangers.

The following factors inform a determination about whether the child is safe.

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Safe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No danger indicators; the child appears to be safe. |
| Safe with Safety Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one danger indicator present, and there may be protective capacities that can mitigate the danger. • A safety plan is in place that addresses the identified dangers, and if successfully carried out, will allow the children to remain with the parent or caretaker. The person alleged to have caused the abuse or neglect should not be responsible for implementing or monitoring the safety plan. Instead, there should be a safety network made up of people who are aware of the danger(s) and agree to take specific |

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 8 of 20 |

| | |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | action as part of the safety plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan may include informal placement with a safe friend, relative or non-resident parent as a temporary measure. |
| Unsafe | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one danger indicator, and protective capacities are not sufficient to mitigate the danger at this time. • A court order or voluntary care agreement with placement outside the home for one or more children is the only way possible to protect the child from immediate or serious harm. |

If any danger items are selected, the social worker will use the family safety planning (FSP) framework to complete a safety plan. This should be done with the family unless it would be unsafe to do so. In any case, the social worker will take necessary steps to plan for the child’s safety.

Alternative Caregivers as Part of a Safety Plan

When the division is involved with a family through a child safety intervention, it may be appropriate to work with the family to put a safety plan in place which includes the support of an alternative caregiver on a temporary basis. A safety plan with an alternative caregiver shall not last longer than one month. See Family Services [Policy 85](#) for additional information on alternative caregivers and court interventions through Family Court vs. Probate Court.

Access to Children during Child Safety Interventions

| Investigation | Assessments |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The social worker must interview or, for a non-verbal child, observe the alleged victim. The interview should be carefully planned to avoid the necessity of subsequent interviews.</p> <p>Other children in the home will also be interviewed when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are concerns about their safety; or • they may have information important to assess the safety of the alleged victim. <p>If necessary to assure a child’s safety, the alleged victim or other children in the home may be interviewed without the permission of the child’s parents, guardian, or custodian. This interview must take place in</p> | <p>The social worker must interview or, for a non-verbal child, observe the child within 5 days of the initial contact unless the social worker can verify that the child is safe through an independent, objective professional source (physician, day care provider, teacher, etc.). If this is the case, the social worker must interview or observe the child as soon as possible but no later than 10 days from the date of the report.</p> <p>Chapter 49 Assessments – If a family refuses access to the child, the division shall commence an investigation. In certain situations, it may not be in the child’s best interest to be interviewed and the</p> |

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 9 of 20 |

| Investigation | Assessments |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>the presence of a disinterested adult, such as a teacher, nurse, member of the clergy, etc. Law enforcement officers are not disinterested adults.</p> <p>When an interview occurs without parental permission, the parent should be informed and interviewed as soon as is reasonable and safe. The confidentiality of the reporter will be protected, unless the reporter has given permission for their identity to be shared. In most situations, subsequent interviews should take place with the parent's awareness and permission. Subsequent interviews of children without parental permission may occur with the approval of a supervisor.</p> <p>There may be times, under extraordinary circumstances, when a social worker cannot interview an alleged victim. The approval of the assigned policy and operations manager is required unless there is no identifiable victim. The policy and operations manager will append the intake to document approval to waive the alleged victim interview.</p> | <p>circumstances do not warrant a track change. (There may be times, under extraordinary circumstances, when a social worker cannot interview the alleged victim. If these circumstances exist, the district director is required to submit a written request to the operations manager for approval. The policy and operations manager will append the intake to document approval to waive the alleged victim interview.</p> <p>CHINS (B) Assessments – If family refuses access to the child, evaluate situation to determine if there are any underlying Chapter 49 issues. If so, discuss with supervisor to determine whether to make a report to CIES or to submit an affidavit. If not, evaluate for service needs and either open ongoing family case or close assessment.</p> |

Other Requirements for Child Safety Interventions

Unless unreasonable, the social worker shall:

| Investigation | Assessments |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Visit the child's residence.</p> <p>Visit the location of the alleged abuse or neglect, to determine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the nature, extent and cause of the abuse or neglect; • the identity of the person responsible for the abuse or neglect; • the names and conditions of any other | <p>Visit the child's residence.</p> <p>Interview other adult's residing in the child's home who serve in a parental role. The interview will focus on ensuring immediate safety of the child and mitigating future risk of harm using an approach that engages the family in a collaborative process.</p> <p>Evaluate the safety of any other children</p> |

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 10 of 20 |

| Investigation | Assessments |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>children living in the same environment;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> any immediate and long-term risk to each child if the child remains in the existing home environment; and the environment and the relationship of any children in the home to the person responsible for the abuse and neglect. <p>Unless the supervisor determines that it is not in the child’s best interest, interview other people who may have information relevant to the current child safety intervention, including persons suggested by the family.</p> <p>Give the Child Safety Intervention (CSI) brochure to the parent(s).</p> <p>For any family with a child under 1 year of age, or in which a woman is pregnant, discuss safe sleep practices and provide a copy of the Vermont Department of Health’s Safe Sleep Brochure (Keep Your Sleeping Baby Safe: Information for Parents and Caregivers of Infants). Document this in case notes.</p> | <p>living in the same home. The evaluation may include an interview or observation of the other child and will occur with the permission of the child’s parent, guardian or custodian.</p> <p>Collaborate with the family to identify the family’s unique strengths, resources and services needs and develop a plan of services that reduces the risk of harm and improves or restores family well-being.</p> <p>Unless the supervisor determines that it is not in the child’s best interest, interview other people who may have information relevant to the current child safety intervention, including persons suggested by the family.</p> <p>Give the Child Safety Intervention (CSI) brochure to the parent(s).</p> <p>For any family with a child under 1 year of age, or in which a woman is pregnant, discuss safe sleep practices and provide a copy of the Vermont Department of Health’s Safe Sleep Brochure (Keep Your Sleeping Baby Safe: Information for Parents and Caregivers of Infants). Document this in case notes.</p> |

If an activity above is not reasonable or relevant under the facts and circumstances presented by the valid allegation of child abuse or neglect, the social worker must document the reason for that judgment in the case determination.

During the course of child safety interventions, continued visits to the home should occur as necessary to assess and address safety, risks, and the family’s needs. If (per the *SDM Safety Assessment*) there are one or more dangers present and the safety decision is “safe with a plan” **OR** (per the *SDM Risk Assessment*) the risk is high or very high, social workers shall visit the home monthly until the CSI is closed or the case is transferred.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 11 of 20 |

Ongoing visits to the home are not required in instances where the social worker determines the allegations described in the accepted report were false or no dangers or safety concerns exist per the *SDM Safety Assessment* **AND** the *SDM Risk Assessment* is low or moderate.

Special Considerations for Child Sexual Abuse Investigations With No Identified Child

In some cases of child sexual abuse, the facts and circumstances make it unreasonable to interview the child, visit the child’s home, or to identify other children that may be abused or at risk of abuse. This includes when an adult is posing as a child or the identity of the child is not known. In these cases, the assigned social worker shall do the following:

- (1) Refer the case to appropriate law enforcement (or contact involved law enforcement if law enforcement was the source of the report).
- (2) Request any information known to law enforcement about the allegation including police reports, charging affidavits, etc.
- (3) Document information provided by law enforcement in the IA Summary and Case Determination.
- (4) Determine with law enforcement when and how the alleged perpetrator will be interviewed about the allegations and document outcome of any interview.
- (5) If the alleged perpetrator declines the opportunity for an interview, document this in the Investigation Activities Summary and Case Determination.
- (6) Consider all collected evidence and make determination if information gathered would lead a reasonable person to believe that the alleged perpetrator engaged in child sexual abuse.

Re-Assignment to Chapter 49 Investigation Track

For cases initially assigned as Chapter 49 assessments, the division may determine that an investigation response is warranted. The social worker or supervisor will request track re-assignment using the [FS-592](#).

Examples of situations warranting track reassignment include but are not limited to:

- (1) New information indicates that criteria for mandatory investigation are met (see [Policy 51](#)). A social worker in the field may exercise professional judgement to change to the investigation track if necessary.
- (2) A parent or caretaker refuses permission for necessary photographs, x-rays or other medical imaging.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 12 of 20 |

- (3) The parent or caretaker will not allow an interview or observation of the child. The social worker should first inform the person of the implications of re-assignment to the investigation track, so he or she can make an informed decision.
- (4) The parent or caretaker is unwilling to engage in a discussion of the concern or a plan to address safety, after reasonable attempts have been made to overcome initial lack of cooperation.

The supervisor will append the track re-assignment, the date and reason for it in the intake. From that date, all requirements for investigation must be met, including commencement.

Requirements to Inform Parents and Alleged Perpetrators

In all child safety interventions, the division must:

- (1) Inform the parent or guardian of the child that a report has been accepted as a valid allegation and that the division is conducting an investigation or assessment; and
- (2) Inform the alleged perpetrator, at the time of the initial contact, about the complaint or allegation made against the individual. In making this notification, the confidentiality of the reporter will be protected, unless the reporter has given permission for their identity to be shared.

In rare instances where the alleged perpetrator is not interviewed, notification will not occur. See this policy’s section on *Interviewing the Alleged Perpetrator* for additional information and requirements for waiving alleged perpetrator interviews.

Working with Individuals Who May Require Reasonable Accommodations

Before interviewing any person, the social worker will inform the person of their right to receive reasonable accommodations in order to participate in the interview. Suggested language for notification is as follows:

“DCF has received a call expressing concern that your child may be abused or neglected. We need to speak to you about that concern. If you have a disability and need, or think you may need, an accommodation in order to participate in the interview, please let us know. We will discuss your needs and provide you with a reasonable accommodation.”

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 13 of 20 |

Individuals with a disability can be successful parents and may need reasonable accommodations, including adaptive equipment and supports. A disability may not be visible or obvious. When planning with a parent with a disability, the social worker should:

- Ask the person if they need any special accommodations;
- Enter into a discussion with them about their limitations and needs;
- Seek input from an expert or someone with relevant expertise; and
- Consult with a supervisor and/or the assigned Assistant Attorney General (AAG) as needed.

Working with Individuals with Limited English Proficiency

When conducting a child safety intervention in which a caretaker or child has limited English proficiency, the social worker will arrange for appropriate interpretive services. Children will not be asked to interpret for their caretakers or family members.

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) maintains contracts for three forms of interpretive services:

- In-person interpretive services
- Written translation services — translation of documents, brochures, application forms and any other needed written materials.
- Telephonic services — interpretive and translation services for telephone communications.

Photographs and X-Rays during Child Safety Investigations

If, during the course of an investigation, trauma to the child is visible, photographs should be taken of the injuries. Or, the social worker or a physician may determine that child should receive a physical or a radiological examination.

Unless it would compromise the child's safety, parental permission should be sought. However, parental permission is not required.

Co-Occurring Child Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Even though the division's primary duty is to ensure child safety, in cases with co-occurring child abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV), ensuring safety for any adult victim is often closely linked to ensuring safety for the child. A complete and accurate child safety intervention is most likely to occur when the adult victims and children are interviewed in supportive and confidential sessions separate from the parent who batters.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 14 of 20 |

In conducting collateral interviews, care should be taken to protect the confidentiality of the child and family, revealing only what is necessary to obtain desired information. Information provided about intimate partner violence should not be shared with the alleged perpetrator of the violence.

Safe intervention when child maltreatment and IPV co-occurs requires addressing risks to both children and adults who fear retaliation or harm by the parent who batters because of the division’s intervention. It is important to develop safety plans in collaboration with the adult victim and children that address their unique immediate and future safety needs.

During the course of the child safety intervention, social workers (in consultation with the Domestic Violence Unit) should consider the following questions to learn how the parent who batters has impacted the child’s and family’s functioning:

- What physical injuries have the children sustained because of the perpetrator’s behaviors?
- What has changed in the children’s functioning, both emotionally and behaviorally, because of the perpetrator’s behaviors?
- What did this look like during or right after an incident of violence?
- What have been the cumulative changes in the children’s relationships inside and outside the household?
- Has the perpetrator’s behavior impacted the children’s basic needs being met?

Interviewing the Alleged Perpetrator

If the alleged perpetrator is in DCF custody, see Family Services [Policy 66](#): Interviewing Children in Custody.

The social worker will interview the alleged perpetrator unless the individual:

- refuses to be interviewed;
- is a minor and their parents refuse to give permission;
- is not the child's parent or caretaker and has been interviewed by the police in the context of a joint investigation;
- is not residing in the home and has been interviewed by the police in the context of a joint investigation;
- cannot be located;
- presents a significant risk to the safety of the child or protective parent (*see guidance below*); or
- will not be informed of the allegation due to the wishes of the youth victim and approval by the child safety manager (*see guidance below*).

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 15 of 20 |

Waiver of Alleged Perpetrator Interview Due to Safety Concerns

In situations where interviewing an alleged perpetrator presents a significant risk to the safety of the child or protective parent, particularly in human trafficking cases or risk of harm cases involving domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV), the social worker and supervisor will consult with the child safety manager. The alleged perpetrator’s interview cannot be waived if substantiation is being considered or will occur. Written approval by the child safety manager is required to waive an interview with an alleged perpetrator. The child safety manager will append the intake to document approval to waive the alleged perpetrator interview.

Options for Sexual Abuse Victims Aged 15 and Older

Division staff shall consult with the child safety manager during child safety interventions involving youth victims aged 15 and older (both chronologically and developmentally) and alleged actors under the age of 19 where the victim does not want the alleged actor to be notified or interviewed.

If the criteria outlined below are met, social workers will not pursue an interview with alleged actors or notify their parents until the child safety manager has consulted on the case. The child safety manager will consider requests to waive an alleged actor interview/notification if:

- There is no information to suggest this is a pattern of behavior by the alleged actor;
- There is no information to suggest significant violence or predatory behavior by the alleged actor;
- The victim is 15 years or older;
- The alleged actor is 19 years or younger;
- The victim states they are currently safe with no continuing threat from the alleged actor; **AND**
- The alleged actor resides out of the victim’s home and is a non-caregiver.

Waiving the alleged actor interview/notification will **not** be considered if:

- The alleged actor is 20 years or older;
- The alleged actor resides in the victim’s home;
- The alleged actor is a caregiver;
- There is information suggesting this is a pattern of behavior by the alleged actor;
- There is information suggesting significant violence or predatory behavior by the alleged actor; **OR**
- The incident occurred in a PREA-compliant residential treatment program.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 16 of 20 |

If the victim requests to not have the alleged actor notified or interviewed and the child safety manager provides written approval, the interview with the alleged perpetrator will not occur. The child safety manager will append the intake to document approval to waive the alleged perpetrator interview.

SDM Risk Assessment

The social worker will complete the *SDM Risk Assessment* to understand the issues that create risk in the family and to inform the decision about opening a family support case. The *SDM Risk Assessment* does not predict occurrence or recurrence of child maltreatment; it assesses whether a family is more or less likely to have future abuse/neglect incident without intervention.

An *SDM Risk Assessment* for each accepted report (only one per accepted report) should be completed as soon as the social worker has enough thorough information to accurately assess the risk in the family. The required time frames are:

| Investigations | Assessments |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| As soon as the social worker has sufficient information to accurately assess risk, but no later than 60 days from acceptance | As soon as the social worker has sufficient information to accurately assess risk, but no later than 45 days from acceptance |

SDM Risk Assessments are completed on households. When a child’s parents do not live together, the child may be a member of two households. The *SDM Risk Assessment* is always completed on the household of a caretaker who is an alleged perpetrator, regardless of whether the household is the child’s primary residence.

If the alleged perpetrator is not a caregiver nor a member of the child’s household, the *SDM Risk Assessment* is not required unless there is a question about the caregiver’s ability to protect.

Requirements for Concluding Child Safety Interventions

| Investigations | Assessments |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be concluded within 60 days (unless additional time is necessary to make a determination). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be completed in 45 days, or 60 days with written justification and the approval of a supervisor. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All interviews have been completed; • All documentation is complete; • The supervisor has made a | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All interviews have been completed; • All documentation is complete; • The supervisor has made a case |

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 17 of 20 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> substantiation determination. The caretakers, alleged perpetrator(s) and the mandated reporters have been informed of the outcome. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> determination about opening a family support case. The caretakers, alleged perpetrator(s) and the mandated reporters have been informed of the outcome. |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

If a child comes into custody during the child safety intervention, the social worker still needs to complete all steps of the investigation or the assessment.

Delays in Concluding Child Safety Intervention Due to Law Enforcement

At times, it is necessary to keep a child safety investigation open longer than 60 days due to other elements of law enforcement activity and/or a criminal investigation. The investigation may remain open with documentation about steps necessary to resolve the outstanding law enforcement issue. The case determination letter should not be sent during the period, to avoid interfering with the law enforcement case. Remaining documentation and data entry must be completed immediately when the law enforcement/criminal case is resolved.

When the *SDM Risk Assessment* is high or very high, a family support case will be opened and assigned even if the child safety intervention has not concluded.

Plan of Safe Care for Substance-Exposed Newborns

The following tasks are required for cases accepted based on concerns of a newborn identified as being affected by legal or illegal substance abuse, withdrawal symptoms, or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder:

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If the child is placed in out-of-home care (including DCF custody or CCO with relatives) | A plan of safe care (POSC) will be created with the parent(s) and foster parents/caregivers, and this will be documented in the case determination. |
| If the child can safely remain at home (including CCOs with parents, family support cases, and instances where no further division involvement is needed) | The social worker should discuss and review the plan of safe care (POSC) with the child's primary care provider prior to closure of the child safety intervention (CSI), and this will be documented in the case determination. |

The plan of safe care will include the following:

- Information about referrals made to Children's Integrated Services (CIS) and other services, if necessary;
- The infant's primary care provider and date of next appointment;

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 18 of 20 |

- Identified treatment needs of parent(s) or caregiver(s) and treatment in place; and
- Identified community and family supports for parent(s) or caregivers(s) and the infant.

Sharing Information with Mandated Reporters Working with Child or Family

Social workers shall notify mandated reporters of the outcome of child safety interventions. Notification may occur verbally or in writing. This includes:

- If an assessment was conducted and whether a need for services was found; and
- If an investigation was conducted and whether it resulted in a substantiation.

Additionally, upon the request of a mandated reporter, the social worker will provide relevant information about the report they made, if the reporter is engaged in an ongoing working relationship with the child or family.

Informing Child’s Caregivers and Parents of Case Disposition

The child’s parents or guardian will be informed of the case disposition. They will be informed verbally, whenever possible, and subsequently documented in the case file, and by the following letters.

| Number | Case Disposition |
|--------|---------------------------------|
| 306-J | Closing with Recommendations |
| 306-K | Closing with No Recommendations |
| 306-L | Ongoing FSD Services |

Notice will be sent at the conclusion of the child safety intervention.

In cases where the alleged perpetrator is also a perpetrator of domestic violence, notification may cause risk to the child and adult victims. The social worker should attempt to contact the adult victim to inform them that the perpetrator is receiving notice.

Referral to Children’s Integrated Services

Referrals to Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) are required for all children under the age of 3 years who reside in a family where there is a substantiation of abuse or neglect. If the child remains in the home, information about services available through the early intervention program will be included in the determination letter.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 19 of 20 |

Additionally, the social worker will discuss with the family a referral to Children’s Integrated Services and/or Head Start and Early Start as a resource to the family when:

- A family support case will be opened on a family with children under the age of three (3); or,
- There is a pregnant woman and/or child under age six (6) and the social worker or the family identifies possible concerns around health, developmental or mental health.

Entries into the SSMIS Child Abuse and Neglect Report

All required information will be entered promptly into the SSMIS Child Abuse Report (590) and the Supervisory Tracking Form the conclusion of the child safety intervention

Police Assist

If the district office notified law enforcement of an accepted report, ‘Police Assist’ will be indicated on the Child Abuse Report, regardless of whether law enforcement actually responded.

Guidelines for Opening Family Support Cases

Low and moderate risk cases should not be opened for family support services unless there is an unresolved danger. When the final risk level is low or moderate AND there are no identified dangers, the social worker should:

- Reinforce the strengths and positives with the family;
- Provide referrals to community services as needed; and
- Verify that the decision to close the case is consistent with the family’s expectations.

In rare instances, the district director may determine that a high or very high risk assessment score will not lead to opening a case. The following information will be provided to the district director to inform their decision:

1. A brief summary, including:
 - a. why the case was accepted;
 - b. date of last contact with the family;
 - c. date of the last in-person / in-home contact, which must have been within the previous 5 days.
2. Copy of the *SDM Risk Assessment* including explanation of any identified risk items that are scored.
3. Description of the services currently in place and status of any referrals made.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
|  VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual | | <h1>52</h1> |
| Chapter: | Child Safety Interventions | |
| Subject: | Child Safety Interventions – Investigations and Assessments | Page 20 of 20 |

4. Description of informal supports for the family and how they assist in mitigating the risk factors.

The higher the risk in the household, the more important it is to engage the family in targeted services related to the risk to prevent future harm. A family support case will be opened when:

- The risk level on the *SDM Risk Assessment* is high or very high;
- The family has a danger issue that could not be resolved during the child safety intervention, **regardless of risk level**; or
- The family requires division involvement beyond 60 days of acceptance of the child safety intervention to ensure engagement with services or other support or monitoring.

The district director may approve opening a family support case for other reasons. The rationale must be documented in the case determination.

The family support case shall be assigned within five business days of the determination of the final risk level. The assigned social worker shall contact the family to schedule an initial visit within five business days of receiving the family support case. During the first visit, the assigned social worker will review the safety plan with the family and begin engaging the family in developing their initial case plan.

Family Refusal of Family Support Services

If a family refuses ongoing services, the social worker should consult with their supervisor for **a discussion of any unresolved danger** and a decision about whether to pursue a court order for services.

If unable to provide ongoing services because the family refuses and there will be no court order, social workers should consider connecting the family to community services. Social workers should document the reason ongoing services were not provided in case notes.

Additional Resources

[Planning Checklist for Home and Field Visits](#)

[Safety Checklist for Home and Field Visits](#)