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Subject:	Promoting Child Safety in High Risk Families	Page 1 of 3
Approved:	Cynthia K. Walcott, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 2/22/07
Supersedes:	Promoting Child Safety in High Risk Families (Interim)	Dated: 8/11/06

## Purpose

To describe the process to ensure that safety and risk issues are affirmatively addressed with and for all families who are classified high risk following a child abuse investigation that is unsubstantiated.

## Policy

Keeping children safe is our primary concern and we address it in every intervention, every plan and every contact. Child safety is a collaborative effort; we engage families and community members to find safe solutions for children. This is best accomplished through the use of a balanced investigation/assessment during which safety, risk, strengths and protective factors are considered.

During the course of every child abuse/neglect investigation or assessment, the social worker will complete a risk assessment. The risk assessment can be completed at any point during the investigation when the worker has sufficient information and will be completed as soon as possible. If the alleged child abuse or neglect is unsubstantiated, but the risk assessment classifies the family as high or very high risk for future child protection involvement, the social worker will:

- Engage the family in a discussion about issues of risk identified during the investigation as well as strengths and resources identified during the assessment.
- Summarize specific safety concerns and service recommendations in a letter to the family (FS-306)
- Assist the family in accessing services to address safety and risk.
- Communicate concerns to new and/or existing services providers, and enlist their assistance in ongoing monitoring of safety and risk. Communicate about strengths and protective factors identified during the investigation/assessment that may assist the service provider in working with the family. The following options may be employed and should be solution-focused, attempting to build on existing strengths, safety and protective factors:

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- For families who have a small number of involved service providers, ask the family for written permission to communicate with service providers individually.
- If needed to assure coordinated services, ask the caretaker(s) for permission to convene an appropriate community team (e.g. Child Protection Team, ACT 264 team, Screening Team, MAPS, SOS Consultation).
- If the caretaker(s) is unwilling to sign releases or participate in the recommended team meeting, the social worker will discuss with his or her supervisor a referral to the appropriate Child Protection Team. A referral to the appropriate Child Protection Team will be made by the social worker unless waived by the supervisor and documented in the case record. The social worker should strongly consider informing the caretaker of this referral and invite their participation in the meeting. If the caretaker is not informed about or invited to the meeting, a plan will be developed to communicate with the family about next steps.

In situations when a report is accepted under Risk of Harm due to domestic violence or when domestic violence is a significant factor in the case, consultation with the Domestic Violence Unit is strongly recommended prior to implementing additional contact with the family. The Family Services *Protocol for Conducting Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation When Domestic Violence and Child Abuse/Neglect Co-occur\** states that:

The substantiation decision and communication about the decision, presents safety and accountability issues for victims of domestic violence. When deciding upon and processing a substantiation decision that involves domestic violence, consultation with a Domestic Violence Specialist is strongly recommended.

If referrals are going to be made for any type of “team meeting”, social workers in consultation with the DV unit should reference the following (available through the DV unit):

Family Group Decision Making Practice Guidance for Planning, Implementing, Training, and Evaluating – Appendix A: Situations Involving Domestic Violence;



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**Multi-disciplinary Teams including Child Protection Teams Framework for Co-Occurring Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment**

If needed services are not available, contact the AHS Field Director for assistance.

If a case is unsubstantiated, no case on the family will be opened for ongoing services by the division, except to provide post-adoption services to children formerly in the department's custody.

If the social worker and the supervisor feel that the current family situation is not safe and cannot be made safe for the child or children an affidavit shall be drafted and submitted to the state's attorney for review.