 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>159</h1>
Chapter:	Coordinating with Others	
Subject:	Foster and Kinship Parent Safety	Page 1 of 4
Approved:	Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 6/15/2023
Supersedes:	Family Services Policy 159	Dated: 1/27/2020

Purpose

To define the roles and responsibilities of division staff in response to threats or violence against foster or kinship parents.

Related Policies

Family Services [Policy 82](#): Juvenile Court Proceedings – CHINS
Family Services [Policy 91](#): Kinship Care & Collaboration with Relatives
Family Services [Policy 94](#): Foster Care Placements & Collaboration with Caregivers
Family Services [Policy 99](#): Confidential Placements
Family Services [Policy 121](#): Notification of Changes for Children and Youth in DCF Custody
Family Services [Policy 250](#): Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats
Family Services [Policy 251](#): Staff Safety in Homes and the Community
Family Services [Policy 252](#): Staff Safety During Removals

Introduction


The work of the Family Services Division comes with inherent risks. The division’s work with families may cause stress to clients, and some clients may react to our intervention with feelings of anger or hostility, violence, or threats of violence. Such reactions create risks to the personal safety of staff and division partners. Hostility is most often directed towards the division itself, and the resultant safety concerns are applicable to any employee, community partner, or foster/kinship family acting on its behalf. The safety of Family Services staff and our partners is a vital issue that must remain at the forefront at all times.

Anticipatory case consultations with the staff safety team are encouraged and may be requested at any time by all division employees. The division seeks to address safety matters in a preventative and planned way as much as possible.

Policy

Foster and Kinship Parent Safety

When a foster or kinship parent receives or perceives a threat from a person or environment (in person, by writing, telephone contact, online or social media, etc.), the individual should attempt to secure their immediate safety by leaving the situation or location as necessary – or by calling **911**. Foster and kinship families are encouraged to

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immediately notify their family services worker if they are threatened with harm or actually harmed. The worker will promptly notify their supervisor and district director.

Regardless of staff availability in the office, no foster or kinship parent should feel they need to wait to report a threat or safety issue. No one shall discourage foster or kinship families from reporting safety concerns. The [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) shall be completed and submitted by the supervisor assigned to the case, in consultation with the affected foster or kinship parent, family services worker, and resource coordinator.

The staff safety team will review all incident forms submitted and respond based on the needs of the foster or kinship family and district office. Ongoing communication occurs between the staff safety team and RLSI leadership about threats and safety incidents impacting foster and kinship families.


Depending on the nature of the situation, either the supervisor, family services worker, resource coordinator or staff safety manager will follow up with the foster or kinship family regarding their desired safety precautions and the response to threats. Coordination should occur on a case-by-case basis to determine who will take the lead in supporting the foster or kinship family.

In addition to district support and outreach to the affected foster/kinship family, an RLSI family services worker may follow up with the family in a regulatory role to assess the impact of the significant event on the capacity of the foster/kinship home and consider the safety and protection of everyone in the home. If immediate action needs to be taken for anyone’s safety, RLSI staff will coordinate and safety plan with the staff safety team.

When dealing with potential criminal behavior directed towards foster or kinship parents, district directors in consultation with the staff safety team may notify the appropriate personnel, such as the assigned AAG, law enforcement, or the local State’s Attorney.

Special Considerations Regarding Notifications of Placement Changes

Division staff should always be mindful of the safety concerns associated with putting a foster or kinship family’s home address in writing. Notification regarding changes in placement will occur through a conversation, either in-person or by phone. If family services workers are unable to reach parents by phone, written notice may be a back-up measure to assure that notice has occurred. For additional information, see Family Services [Policy 121](#).

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Confidential Placements

The division typically informs parents of the identity of their child’s caregivers and a general location of their child’s placement. The term ‘confidential placement’ describes time-limited and rare situations where a protective order is sought and obtained, and the identities and location of a resource family is kept confidential from the child’s parents. Confidential placements are only considered if informing the parents of the child’s placement would compromise the safety of the child or caregivers. Confidential placements cannot be broadly requested by foster care applicants or licensed caregivers as a strategy to limit shared parenting, family time, or collaboration with a child’s family of origin. See Family Services [Policy 99](#) for information about confidential placements and the division’s procedure and considerations.

Personal Protection Plans

Based on the circumstances of the threat or safety concern, foster or kinship parents may develop personal protection plans and consult with division staff while developing them. Members of the district office team (family services workers, resource coordinators, supervisors, etc.) may support foster parents in the development of personal protection plans. Consultation with the staff safety team is available and recommended in situations of significant safety concern.

A personal protection plan is an individually driven process based on what the person reasonably believes will promote their safety. A personal protection plan can be a simple written outline or paragraph describing specific precautions to be taken upon intervention. Coordination with or approval from members of the district office team may be necessary depending on the nature of the plan.

Personal protection plans serve to promote the individual’s well-being and lessen risk of threat to personal safety when intervening or initiating contact with the person who made the threat. Details in the plan could include, but are not limited to:

- Where and when it is best to meet with the person (e.g., in a neutral setting and not at the foster home);
- Who, if anyone, should be present when the foster parent meets with the person (family services worker, supervisor, another foster parent, DOC staff, law enforcement, or the client’s network of supports);
- Any limitations on whether the child/youth should be present; and
- Specific actions to be taken under certain circumstances (e.g., discussing the need for safety planning or an escort when going to court, during pick-up and drop-off, or following family time).

Foster and Kinship Parent Safety & Awareness Checklist

Consider the following behaviors by any adult or youth:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substance use disorder | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health illness or problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History of assaultive or violent behavior | <input type="checkbox"/> History of violating court orders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prior criminal history | <input type="checkbox"/> Tactical training (survivalist, military) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prior threats | <input type="checkbox"/> History of stalking (in-person or electronic) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent law enforcement contact | <input type="checkbox"/> Gang membership or activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current access to weapons or history of weapon use | <input type="checkbox"/> Sex trafficking or drug trafficking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal thoughts or actions | <input type="checkbox"/> Significant sexualized behavior |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional instability | <input type="checkbox"/> Tendency to run away |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> History of making false allegations |

Consider any sudden or recent life changes within a family:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce or separation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Legal issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Death or serious illness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in custody status | <input type="checkbox"/> Victimization / traumatic event |

Consider significant events or case decisions and how they may impact your relationship with families (e.g., court hearings, case plan change/concurrent planning, family time change)

How does the above information affect your safety in the community?

General Safety:

- Always be aware of your surroundings. TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS! Help can arrive quickly!
- Call 911 if you are in imminent danger or something is making you feel unsafe
- Remind yourself of the locations of safe places in your community – such as police stations, fire stations, hospital emergency rooms, courthouses, banks, or other places with security
- Make sure your cell phone is charged and accessible at all times
- Be aware of local cell phone reception and areas without coverage
- Vary your schedule of activities at home and work if you can; avoid a predictable schedule
- Avoid confrontation with individuals who have made threats against you or your family members

At Home:

- Leave the front porch light on in the evening for security
- Make sure all doors, windows, and garage doors are locked
- Think about evacuation plans in case of emergencies; talk about evacuation plans with your family members
- Obtain the phone numbers (or other contact information) of your neighbors in case of emergencies, or if you need them to check on your house
- Don't enter your home if someone has followed you or is parked on your street/across from your house – drive to a safe location and call 911

Vehicles & Driving:

- Operate a safe vehicle in working order with enough gasoline to get to and from the destination
- Keep your car doors locked; if necessary, keep windows only partially open above the ear while driving
- Drive around the area of your destination looking for unsafe conditions (poor lighting, unsecured animals, numerous cars/individuals who do not live in the home, people drinking or using substances, etc.)
- Hold your keys while walking to the vehicle

Parking:

- Try to park where you can see your vehicle while you are inside; park in the direction you want to leave
- Choose a parking space that is well lit or offers a safe walking route; try to avoid parking in driveways to lessen the chance of being blocked in
- Ask someone to escort you to your car if needed
- When approaching your car, look under the car and check the back seat before entering