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Supersedes:	Family Services Policy No. 21	Dated: 1/25/99

Purpose

To outline a consistent approach to developing, updating and implementing Family Services Division policy and practice guidance.

Policy

Policy, procedure, and practice guidance shall be established in the form of the Family Services Policy Manual and Practice Guidance Manual. The Family Services Policy Manual contains information about policy, procedure, social work practice, specific tasks, timelines, and other topics such as supervision, training, and administrative issues. The Family Services Practice Guidance Manual provides detailed guidance and support on specific areas of social work practice. The Family Services Policy Manual begins with a statement of mission, values, and guiding principles, all of which guide the continually evolving process of policy and practice guidance development.

Definitions


Policy: States the statutory, federal guidelines and procedure that must be adhered to by Family Services division staff.

Practice Guidance: Documents intended to give guidance about what considerations to take into account when working with children, youth and families. These documents include research, links to policy, and strategies to engaging and ensuring we are holding to the values as outlined in the Family Services Practice Model.

Position Papers: Documents that overarch many different areas of practice and convey our philosophical beliefs.

Creation or Amendment of Policy and Practice Guidance

Any person may propose the creation or amendment of policy or practice guidance to a member of the Family Services Management Team (hereinafter FSMT). FSMT shall evaluate the need for the new or amended policy or practice guidance. If FSMT concludes there is a need for the policy or practice guidance, a staff person shall be assigned to form a

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work group and develop a draft.

The development of policy and practice guidance shall involve representatives of groups that will be affected by the policy or practice guidance. Suggested representatives include, but are not limited to: Family Services Division staff, family members, youth, contracted service providers, community partners, kinship parents, foster parents, etc. Work groups should include individuals with expertise in the respective field of the policy or practice guidance topic.

When developing a draft, the work group shall conduct research on federal and state requirements, best practice outcomes, and approaches with demonstrated effectiveness related to the policy or practice guidance topic. As appropriate, data indicators associated with the policy or practice guidance shall be written into the draft as a means of measuring implementation. FSMT shall approve final drafts of policy and practice guidance before distribution for review.


Review of Policy and Practice Guidance

Policy and practice guidance shall be distributed electronically for review to the following:

- Family Services Division staff
- Commissioner’s Office
- Vermont Foster and Adoptive Family Association (VFAFA) President & Secretary
- Vermont Coalition of Residential Providers (VCORP) President & Secretary
- Vermont Kin as Parents (VKAP)
- Court Administrator’s Office
- Juvenile Defender’s Office
- Children, Youth, and Families Work Group
- External Stakeholders Work Group
- Vermont Citizen’s Advisory Board (VCAB)
- Vermont Law School

Depending on the topic, draft policy and practice guidance should be distributed to critical constituents with expertise in particular areas.¹

¹ For example, domestic violence policy and practice guidance should be distributed to the Vermont Network

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Draft policy and practice guidance shall be distributed in one of two forms:

- Draft policy and practice guidance shall be distributed with a comment period of at least 30 days, except under unusual circumstances; or
- Interim policy, effective as policy until replaced or withdrawn. Interim policy allows the immediate adoption of a needed policy, at the same time establishing a specific period for comments pending finalization of the policy.

Finalization of Policy and Practice Guidance

A member of FSMT shall present a summary of the feedback received during the review period, develop a proposal for a final version of the policy or practice guidance, and inform the work group responsible for developing and refining the draft. Formal written acknowledgement of individuals’ feedback and contribution during the review period shall be made upon finalization of documents. The Family Services Deputy Commissioner shall approve all final policy and practice guidance.

Availability of Manuals

The Family Services Policy Manual and Practice Guidance Manual shall be available on the Division’s webpage.


Implementation of Policy and Practice Guidance

Implementation of policy and practice guidance shall be an investment in intentional practice dialogue and should foster a learning culture. This can be achieved through statewide meetings, district discussion, supervisory meetings, etc. The division acknowledges there are critical roles in policy implementation. We all, collectively and individually, are responsible for the implementation of policy and practice guidance.

Ongoing Review of Policy and Practice Guidance

At the discretion of FSMT, all policies and practice guidance shall be revisited every 2 years

Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (VNADSV) in addition to the aforementioned list.

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from the listed revision date. Consideration for policy and practice guidance updates include:

- New policies required by Federal Laws & Policies and State Statutes *(i.e. the enactment date of Division policies corresponds with federal and state requirements)*
- Policies and practice guidance recommended to support the Family Services Division Child and Family Services Five Year Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR)
- Existing policies and practice guidance in need of revision or elimination
- Policy and practice guidance recommendations solicited by Family Services Division staff and community partners

The Policy, Planning, and Performance Unit (hereinafter PPP Unit), shall support policy and practice guidance revision, development and implementation for the division. The PPP Unit consists of Division staff with policy, practice, continuous quality improvement (CQI), domestic violence, youth justice, sexual violence and prevention expertise. The PPP Unit shall maintain an overview of the following information:

- New policies and practice guidance developed and implemented during the previous year
- Data indicators and process measures associated with policy or practice guidance implementation
- Issues related to policy and practice guidance during the previous year and corresponding recommendations

Exceptional Circumstances

While the process outlined above is the ideal way to develop and implement policy and practice guidance, there may be times when policy/practice guidance needs to be immediately updated due to legislative or federal mandates. In those instances, updates/development may occur through an abbreviated development and implementation plan.