 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 1 of 11
Approved:	Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner	Effective: 6/15/2023
Supersedes:	Family Services Policy 250	Dated: 2/24/2023

Purpose

To define the roles and responsibilities of staff, supervisors, district directors or managers, CIES, and central office in reporting and responding to threats or violence against Family Services employees.

Table of Contents

Purpose	1
Table of Contents.....	1
Related Policies	1
Additional Resources	2
Introduction	2
Policy	2
Responding to Staff Safety Threats and Incidents	2
Immediate Safety Concerns.....	3
All Other Safety Concerns.....	3
Threats Received by CIES.....	4
Documenting Staff Safety Threats and Incidents.....	4
Emergency Need for Building Accommodations or Assistance	5
Communication of Threats and Incidents.....	5
Threats and Incidents from Mutually Served Clients with DOC.....	6
Personal Protection Plans	6
Safety Documentation	7
Use of Case Note Alert to Document Safety Concerns.....	8
Safety-Related Case Transfer	9
Tasks	9

Related Policies

Family Services [Policy 99](#): Confidential Placements
Family Services [Policy 140](#): Standby and Call-In
Family Services [Policy 150](#): Transportation of Children and Youth in DCF Custody
Family Services [Policy 159](#): Foster and Kinship Parent Safety
Family Services [Policy 251](#): Staff Safety in Homes and the Community
Family Services [Policy 252](#): Staff Safety During Removals
Family Services [Policy 255](#): HOPE (Helping Our Peers Excel) Team

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	
		Page 2 of 11

Additional Resources

[Family Services Staff Safety SharePoint Page](#)

[Response to Staff Safety Incidents](#)

[Protocol for Conducting Child Abuse Investigations when Domestic Violence and Child Abuse/Neglect Co-Occur](#)

[AHS Safety and Security Incident Communication Protocol](#)

[DHR Policy and Procedure 11.11: Workplace Safety and Security](#)

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 towards staff. Such reactions create risks to the personal safety of staff. 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, in the office and in the field, is a vital issue that must remain at the forefront at all times. The importance of staff safety should be given primary attention in the performance of work duties. This policy guides staff in how to:

- Respond to threats, violence, and other safety or security issues; and
- Properly document safety related concerns.

Policy

Responding to Staff Safety Threats and Incidents

If someone is being assaulted or is in imminent danger, any aware staff shall call **911** or local police. All employees may contact law enforcement about a threat or safety concern at any time.

It is recognized that division staff have a right to protect themselves from others in instances of imminent threat of death or serious injury. In these situations, division staff may employ the response reasonably necessary to an assault or imminent threat of physical violence. Physical actions should serve the purpose of gaining space from the person posing danger, which is what one needs to increase safety. If the situation is that someone is being destructive of property, the action should not be to move closer, but rather to gain more space and back up. If there is an inability to gain space (i.e., someone is attacking, striking, or attempting to strangle), physical action can be taken to defend one’s self and get away safely.

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 3 of 11

When a Family Services Division employee receives or perceives a threat from a person or environment (in person, by writing, telephone contact, online or social media, etc.), the employee will attempt to secure their immediate safety by leaving the situation or location as necessary – or by calling **911**. Family Services employees will immediately notify their supervisor and district director or designee if a staff member or their family is threatened with harm or actually harmed. If a supervisor or district director is unavailable, staff may seek consultation directly from the staff safety team or a policy and operations manager.

Immediate Safety Concerns

District directors or designees will implement immediate safety precautions as needed for the employee and/or overall security of the office. If an immediate law enforcement response is needed, the district director or designee shall contact law enforcement immediately. Following the call to law enforcement, the district director or designee shall contact the staff safety team. The district director or designee shall contact the assigned policy and operations manager if the staff safety team is unavailable or out of the office.

A member of the staff safety team shall alert the assigned policy and operations manager of the situation. The staff safety team will follow-up with law enforcement and Office of State Safety & Security or SSS (formerly known as Buildings & General Services or BGS).

After immediate actions are taken to ensure the safety of staff and the district office, the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) and [SSS Incident Report](#) shall be submitted.

All Other Safety Concerns

The [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) and [SSS Incident Report](#) shall be completed and submitted by the supervisor in consultation with the affected staff. The staff safety team shall review all received forms within the business day.

If there is no immediate planning needed, the staff safety team or the assigned policy and operations manager will contact the district director and/or supervisor by email within one business day of [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) completion and make arrangements for a staff safety consultation. At a minimum, the consult should review and document steps already taken and future safety/recovery planning. Impacted staff should be included in the consultation unless they decline involvement.

The staff safety team shall alert the assigned policy and operations manager of the situation. A member of the staff safety team will follow-up with law enforcement and SSS.

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 4 of 11

Responding to Potential Criminal Behavior

Threats can sometimes fall within criminal statutes such as criminal threatening, disturbing the peace by phone, stalking, obstruction of justice, etc. When dealing with potential criminal behavior directed towards staff, 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. In most cases, the staff safety team will be coordinating with law enforcement. There may be instances in which the district director has direct communication with law enforcement, though this is done in close collaboration with the staff safety team. All evidence – including voicemails, text messages, social media posts, etc. – supporting the threat or safety concern should be retained and brought to the attention of the appropriate personnel or authority.

Threats Received by CIES

If an individual calls Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES) and makes a threat during the phone call, the CIES family services worker shall complete the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) and notify the local district office and staff safety team immediately. If immediate planning for the next working day is needed, CIES will call the staff safety manager.

Documenting Staff Safety Threats and Incidents

As indicated above, Family Services employees will immediately report all safety incidents or threats to their supervisor or another available supervisor. Regardless of supervisory availability in the office, workplace or field, no employee should feel they need to wait to report a threat or safety issue. No one shall discourage an employee from reporting a safety or security concern. Therefore, no one shall discourage an employee from completing the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#).

The supervisor shall conduct a supervisory conference with the employee to discuss the safety incident or threat and assess their needs. The [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) will be completed and submitted by the supervisor in consultation with the person harmed, threatened with harm, or feeling unsafe. The [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) is meant to be completed by the supervisor based on this supervisory conference where the affected staff is asked to detail the situation to determine the type of response necessary. The [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) may also be used to raise awareness and document concerning behaviors or activities that could become active threats or lead to safety incidents. If the district director or designee determines onsite security is needed, this should be communicated to the staff safety team and operations.

A member of the staff safety team will review all [Staff Safety Incident Forms \(FS-110\)](#) submitted and respond based on the needs and requests of staff. The supervisor and the

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 5 of 11

district director will follow up with the staff safety team and the employee regarding their desired safety precautions and the response to threats.

In addition to completing the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#), the [SSS Incident Report](#) needs to be completed per DHR Policy 11.11. When an incident or threat occurs that involves a State of Vermont employee, Vermont property, or a visitor to a Vermont facility, the incident shall be documented with SSS within 24 hours of the incident.

Emergency Need for Building Accommodations or Assistance


District directors along with the staff safety team will determine if further assistance is needed from SSS. Examples of assistance from SSS include having a security detail assigned to the building site of the incident or threat, putting alarms on doors or windows, putting locks on doors or windows, temporarily re-assigning staff to a safer work location, modifying the site in some other manner, requesting notice of trespass orders, or other safety measures.

Either the district director or staff safety team may report urgent events to the State Safety & Security (SSS) 24/7 Statewide Phone Number at **(802) 828-0777**. This line is answered by the on-duty security officer who can make the proper security notifications to other personnel, including paging the Chief of SSS.

If the district director or designee determines onsite security is needed, this should be communicated to the staff safety team and operations. Additional security or other building modifications must be approved by the director of operations or their designee. A member of the staff safety team will coordinate with SSS and the district office to arrange for approved items.

Communication of Threats and Incidents

District directors and managers or designees have an obligation to ensure staff are promptly informed of known threats to their safety. District directors shall communicate safety threats and incidents via email using the subject line “Staff Safety Incident” or “Staff Safety Threat”. District directors shall send staff safety notification emails to all staff within the office/team and include the staff safety team on the email. District agreements should be made about how much information is shared widely, for instance whether or not the FS-110 sent to all staff in the district. A member of the staff safety team communicates safety threats or incidents to members of the Family Services Management Team (FSMT) and the Operations Team. The communication of safety threats and incidents by email is intended to reach staff whether physically in the office or in the field, ensure consistency of notifications, and allow for the communication of relevant information. FSMT and Operations are included on safety notification emails to

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 6 of 11

ensure the appropriate communication of safety concerns with Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES), Residential Licensing and Special Investigations (RLSI), the System of Care (SOC) Unit, the Domestic Violence Unit, and central office as appropriate.

Staff safety alerts will be shared with division managers for communication per the [AHS Safety and Security Incident Communication Protocol](#). District directors or designees, in consultation with the staff safety team, shall determine when it is necessary to notify AHS building partners and/or foster or kinship families of safety incidents or threats. Per the [AHS Safety and Security Incident Communication Protocol](#), it is the responsibility of SSS, law enforcement, or AHS central office to notify co-located non-AHS building tenants of safety alerts.

Information conveyed to staff regarding threats and incidents should be factual. Speculative information, rumors, and unconfirmed information should be avoided, unless provided by law enforcement. Messaging should minimize traumatic impact.

Except in extraordinary circumstances, no communication of a threat or incident shall include medical information, information pertaining to the sheltering of victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, or other confidential information. Where circumstances require the sharing of such information, care shall be taken to ensure that it is protected and occurs in consultation with the Domestic Violence Unit as needed.

Threats and Incidents from Mutually Served Clients with DOC

If a threat is made by person who is served by both the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Corrections (DOC), the staff safety team is responsible for communicating with the DOC staff safety manager or designee.

Personal Protection Plans

Based on the circumstances of the threat or safety concern, staff may request a personal protection plan. A personal protection plan is an employee-driven process based on what the staff person reasonably believes will promote their safety. Personal protection plans are formalized by the employee and their supervisor or designee during supervision or a supervisory conference when a particular client (an adult or child/youth), family, or environment has been identified as being potentially dangerous or presenting risk to the personal safety of staff. Supervisors shall use the [Personal Protection Plan Discussion Guidance](#) in conducting this supervisory conference focused on developing the plan.

A personal protection plan can be a simple written outline or paragraph describing

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 7 of 11

specific precautions to be taken upon intervention. Approval by the supervisor may be necessary, depending on the nature of the plan. The staff safety team should be included and review all personal protection plans as a follow-up to the initial staff safety consultation. The employee and supervisor should keep a copy of the personal protection plan. Personal protection plans shall be referred to before initiating contact with the client and/or client’s family. Personal protection plans should be dated and reviewed periodically during supervision.

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

- Where and when it is best to meet with the client and/or client’s family (e.g., in a neutral setting, not at the family’s home);
- Who, if anyone, should be present when the family services worker meets with the client and/or client’s family (e.g., another worker, supervisor, DOC staff, law enforcement, or the client’s network of supports);
- Whether or not the child/youth should be present when the family services worker meets with the parents or caretakers; and
- Specific actions to be taken under certain circumstances (e.g., discussing the need for additional security or a law enforcement escort when going to court, immediately leaving the family’s home if the client appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol or appears to be suffering from a mental health emergency).

It may be necessary to seek legal intervention or request notice against trespass orders to increase an employee’s safety. Such an option may be discussed with the staff safety team . All notice of trespass orders will be requested through the staff safety team utilizing the established SSS process articulated in [DHR Policy and Procedure 11.11: Workplace Safety and Security](#). District directors and the assigned policy and operations manager should be informed if legal intervention or notice of trespass orders are sought. The personal protection plan could specify that relief from the court will be pursued in the event of a new incident or if specific behavior persists. Other orders including Civil Stalking Orders may also be sought. These shall be discussed with the staff safety manager or specialist and consultation with the assigned AAG will be sought.

Safety Documentation

Particularly volatile or potentially dangerous clients and client home/neighborhood situations which could present risk to division staff should be identified and documented in appropriate case record materials as applicable, including but not limited to:

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 8 of 11

- The intake report, if safety concerns are known by the reporter;
- The investigation or assessment summary, if such information is learned during the child safety intervention;
- A case note alert in FSDNet for the family;
- Notation on the front/outside of the family’s case file;
- Description and up-to-date safety information in case notes;
- Description and up-to-date safety information in the family’s case file;
- The case summary for closing or transfer to another district office; or
- Supervision notes or supervisory conference notes.

Use of Case Note Alert to Document Safety Concerns

A case note alert shall be applied in FSDNet to alert other division staff to dangerous or potentially dangerous situations. Staff safety case note alerts are required for all [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) submissions. These alerts should be dated and list the reason for the alert/safety concern.

Other safety-related reasons to apply a case note alert include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A history of assaultive or violent behavior in the family, and the cause(s) of that behavior, if known (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, domestic or intimate partner violence);
- Prior threats against division staff or other state employees and partners;
- Firearms or other weapons in the home or carried by family members;
- Attack dog on premises;
- Residence in high crime, drug, gang, or extremely rural, isolated, or otherwise dangerous area.

The length of time staff safety case note alerts are applied should be determined by district staff along with the staff safety team or assigned policy and operations manager. Each case note alert should be reviewed periodically to determine if it needs to be updated. Prior to removing the case note alert, the initial reason for the alert and reason for removal of the alert should be documented in case notes.

Information conveyed to staff regarding threats and incidents should be factual. Speculative information, rumors, and unconfirmed information should be avoided, unless provided by law enforcement. Messaging should minimize traumatic impact. Except in extraordinary circumstances, no communication of a threat or incident shall include medical information, information pertaining to the sheltering of victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, or other confidential information. Where circumstances require the sharing of such information, care shall be taken to ensure that

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 9 of 11

it is protected and occurs in consultation with the domestic violence team as needed.

Safety-Related Case Transfer

Situations may arise where a family services worker is personally the subject of a physically or emotionally dangerous level of client animosity. In those situations, efforts may include a teamed response or transferring responsibility for that client’s case to a different worker.

In cases where the district director or designee determines that a case transfer within the office is necessary to decrease risk to the family services worker, the transfer should occur as soon as possible.

When a case has been transferred to another family services worker for safety reasons, the district director or supervisor shall inform the newly assigned worker of the reason for the transfer and provide any available information relevant to ensuring the newly assigned worker’s safety. A case note alert and personal protection plan should be in place prior to reassigning the case.

There may be circumstances where transferring the case to another family services worker does not resolve the danger or threat. Consultation with the assigned policy and operations manager and the staff safety team is required when the district office requests to transfer the case to a different district office. In these instances, district case transfer may be considered following the guidance set forth in Family Services [Policy 211](#).

Tasks

Tasks of the Person Harmed, Threatened with Harm, or Feeling Unsafe:

- Attempts to secure one’s own immediate safety by leaving the situation or home as necessary, engaging their SafeSignal alert, or by calling 911
- Immediately notifies their supervisor and the director/manager of the incident, threat, or any instance where they do not feel safe
- Meets with their supervisor to discuss the incident/threat while the supervisor completes the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) and [SSS Incident Report](#)
- Seeks consultation from the staff safety team as needed
- Works collaboratively with their supervisor and staff safety team to develop a personal protection plan, if desired
- Contacts law enforcement about threats or safety concerns at any time necessary
- When applicable and in accordance with this policy, notifies involved community partners on a case of any reports of safety concerns and actions taken in response

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 10 of 11

Supervisory Tasks:

- Advises the director/manager of the incident or threat
- Conducts a supervisory conference with the employee to discuss the incident/threat and assess their needs
- Completes the [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#)
- Attaches the completed [Staff Safety Incident Form \(FS-110\)](#) to the [SSS Incident Report](#)
- Works collaboratively with the employee to develop a personal protection plan, if desired by the employee
- Follows up with the employee regarding their desired safety precautions and the response to threats
- Promptly responds to case note alerts, and determines when case note alert are necessary for staff
- Engages in ongoing safety conversations with the employee during supervision
- Ensures staff safety protocols are reviewed in individual and group supervision on a monthly basis
- When applicable and in accordance with this policy, notifies involved community partners on a case of any reports of safety concerns and actions taken in response

Director / Manager Tasks:

- Calls 911 or seeks the assistance of local law enforcement if immediate action or protection is needed
- Reports any urgent events to the SSS 24/7 Statewide Security Phone Number at (802) 828-0777
- Implements immediate safety precautions as needed for the employee or overall safety of the office
- Follows up with the employee regarding their desired safety precautions and the response threats
- Promptly notifies staff of threats to office safety and ensures communication of relevant information, copying the staff safety team
- Communicates information necessary for other district managers in line with AHS Communication Protocol
- Follows up with the employee regarding their desired safety plans and additional response
- Ensures staff safety protocols are reviewed in staff meetings at least quarterly
- Develops communication plans with co-located building partners and reviews/modifies as necessary

Staff Safety Team Tasks:

- Reviews all submitted [Staff Safety Incident Forms \(FS-110\)](#) within 24 hours

 VERMONT DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Family Services Policy Manual		<h1>250</h1>
Chapter:	Staff Safety, Well-Being, and Resiliency	
Subject:	Reporting and Responding to Staff Safety Threats	Page 11 of 11

- Provides safety consultations following submissions of [Staff Safety Incident Forms \(FS-110\)](#)
- Ensures districts and affected staff are supported in addressing safety concerns
- Alerts the assigned policy and operations manager of safety-related incidents
- Collaborates with law enforcement and *State Safety & Security* on safety-related incidents
- Reviews personal protection plans as developed by districts
- Submits requests for on-site security
- Works collaboratively with the Family Services Management Team and the Operations Team as needed to implement safety responses and additional resources
- Ensures the appropriate communication of safety concerns with Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES), Residential Licensing and Special Investigations (RLSI), the System of Care (SOC) Unit, the Domestic Violence Unit, central office, and others as appropriate