

Chapter 2

STANDARDS FOR INITIAL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

2-1. Purpose. The purpose of standards for “Introduction” with parent(s)/legal guardian(s) is to focus on the importance of building a positive working relationship. A positive working relationship is critical to the case manager’s ability to co-construct meaningful case plan outcomes, strategies for change, and to assess the progress of the family over time. The standards are designed to assist case managers with building rapport with parent(s)/legal guardian(s), learning about the family through interviews and observations, obtaining relevant information, and beginning to develop a trust-based working relationship.

2-2. Definitions.

a. “Family assessment” is an ongoing process that provides the case manager with information that informs the case manager’s actions throughout the case. The family assessment is formally documented on a regular basis in FSFN as the agency’s official position as to the current status of impending danger threats, child well-being, and safety analysis. On-going family assessment includes:

- (1) Understanding the family dynamics and what conditions must change to achieve lasting child safety and permanency.
- (2) Identifying changes in family dynamics that inform the need for changes in safety management.
- (3) Gathering continuous feedback from the family and others as to what is working or not working to support the family change process.
- (4) An understanding of the parent/legal guardian’s internal motivation to change and its progression over time.
- (5) Creating and evaluating case plan outcomes and associated actions to effectively address caregiver protective capacities and child needs.

b. “Working Agreement” is a mutual understanding between the case manager and the parent/legal guardian(s) as to how to effectively work together on the family assessment, case plan, and evaluating progress over time. It includes discussions as to when and where contacts will occur, how to contact the case manager and case manager’s supervisor, how to contact the parent/legal guardian(s), and what to do if a meeting needs to be cancelled. This operating procedure does not require that a working agreement be in writing.

2-3. Family Engagement Standards for Introduction Activities.

a. Initial discussions with the family should help transition the parent/legal guardian(s) from the investigation to ongoing services, including the parent/legal guardian(s)’ sentiment about the circumstances surrounding their involvement with the department. These initial meetings should provide families with opportunities to discuss their concerns, ask questions, and receive answers.

b. Several meetings might be required to achieve the purpose of introduction activities, especially for families with a history of child welfare system involvement or complex dynamics.

c. The following information gathering activities should occur in sequence to the extent possible. When the family initiates discussion that starts somewhere else on the list below, they are likely to be more engaged when the case manager allows that to happen.

(1) The first contact will focus on the safety plan and how it is working from the perspective of the child(ren) and the parent/legal guardian(s). The case manager and supervisor must confirm the sufficiency of the ongoing safety plan within five business days after the case is transferred from investigations or another case manager per the requirements in CFOP 170-1, [Chapter 12](#).

(2) The case manager will be as prepared as possible to deal with the parent/legal guardian(s)' fear, worry or anger. The parent/legal guardian(s) often will ask questions related to the intrusiveness of the safety plan, whether it is a child placed out of the home, a parent/legal guardian who has been asked to temporarily leave the home, or safety management providers coming into the home. In the first family contact, the case manager should:

(a) Explain the difference between a safety plan and a case plan.

(b) Establish the case manager's responsibility to manage the safety plan and how the case manager will achieve it, including the following:

1. Review a copy of the plan with the parent/legal guardian and determine if all the elements described in the plan are happening or not happening.

2. Gather parent/legal guardian(s)' feedback about the current safety plan.

3. If there are Conditions for Return, gather parent/legal guardian(s)' input as to what would need to happen to assist them with achieving the Conditions or, if one parent is separated from the child and home, ensure that the current safety plan covers visitation. Parent/legal guardian feedback on the visitation plan is critical.

4. Explain other activities the case manager will be doing to ensure that the safety plan is working dependably.

(3) If families have had past involvement with the child welfare system, the case manager will acknowledge that this is known and seek family perspectives about that experience.

(4) The case manager will learn general information about the children and any other persons in the household.

(5) The case manager will learn about the family's understanding and perspectives as to conditions and/or circumstances that led to current agency involvement.

(6) The case manager will explain what case management work with families usually involves (i.e., figuring out what needs to change for parents to close their case or regain responsibility for the care and safety of their children) and will develop a working agreement with the parent/legal guardian(s) that includes safe communication strategies when dynamics of domestic violence pose threats for the survivor and children in family.

(7) The case manager will establish a working agreement with the family which includes at least a statement that the parents will keep in contact every 14 calendar days with the case manager or contracted case management agency regarding accurate contact information, status of case plan task completion, barriers to completion, and plans towards Conditions for Return if there is an out-of-home plan.

(8) If one or more of the parent/legal guardian(s) are unwilling to commit to the assessment process, the case manager should try to gain additional information and discuss with the parent(s) the reasons they are unwilling to participate in the process. The case manager should seek to find some areas of mutual agreement such as meeting their child's needs, which can serve as a point of further discussion or allow for some collaborative planning between the parent/legal guardian and the case manager.

2-4. Supervisor Consultation.

a. Within five days following a case transfer, a supervisory consultation will occur to ensure the sufficiency of the safety plan.

b. The case manager should consider seeking a case consultation for any of the following issues based upon case dynamics:

(1) Discussion as to what was learned from the family and what additional information gathering is necessary to reconcile discrepancies or fill gaps.

(2) Discuss the level of family engagement and explore next steps.

(3) On-going safety management issues.

2-5. FSFN Documentation.

a. Within two business days, each contact with a family will be recorded by the case manager in case notes in FSFN and any family team meetings or staffings will be documented using the FSFN meeting module.

b. The following FSFN resources are located on the [Center for Child Welfare](#) website under the FSFN "How Do I Guide" page:

(1) [Notes – How Do I Guide.](#)

(2) [Meetings – How Do I Guide.](#)

