

	<b>INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SERVICES</b> <b>CHILD WELFARE POLICY</b>	
	<b>Chapter 5:</b> General Case Management <b>Section 04:</b> Locating and Engaging Noncustodial Parents	
	<b>Effective Date:</b> April 1, 2022	<b>Version:</b> 6

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## POLICY OVERVIEW

Locating and engaging the noncustodial parent may lead to several positive outcomes for the child. It may aid in establishing a relationship or connection between a child, parent, and/or other relatives or kin, which may lead to an expedited permanency outcome. In addition, the noncustodial parent may:

1. Be a potential permanency option and lifelong connection for the child;
2. Provide additional information about the child and/or family members' medical history;
3. Provide information regarding benefits the child may be eligible to receive (e.g., child support and health benefits);
4. Participate in the Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting or Case Plan Conference process and help in the development of a Permanency Plan for the child; and/or
5. Identify extended family members or kin that support the child and family and may be:
  - a. A potential placement option (if the noncustodial parent is not),
  - b. Active participants in the CFT meeting or Case Plan Conference, and/or
  - c. A potential permanency option.

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## PROCEDURE

The Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) will make diligent efforts, beginning in the assessment phase, to locate and engage the noncustodial parent throughout the life of the case. When it is necessary to remove a child from a custodial parent, DCS will give primary consideration to placement with the noncustodial parent prior to selecting an out-of-home placement. See policy 8.01 Selecting a Placement Option for additional information.

Information gained from the noncustodial parent will be considered when developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan or IA/Prevention Plan, planning services, and establishing eligibility for federal funding. Engagement with the noncustodial parent may also assist DCS in identifying relatives or kin that may serve as placement or support for the child. See policies 5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan or 5.09 Informal Adjustment /Prevention Plan (IA), and 15.01 Eligibility Overview for Field and Legal Staff for additional guidance.

Background checks may be conducted when moving a child to the care of the noncustodial parent if the FCM has reason to question the safety of the placement or if risk factors are present.

**Note:** If it is determined that it is in the best interest of the child to complete criminal history checks on a noncustodial parent, the FCM must document in the case management system that background checks were completed and the outcome of the check, as criminal history checks are not required for noncustodial parents. See policy 13.14 Background Checks for Reunification and Practice Guidance for additional information.

To engage the noncustodial parent, the FCM will:

1. Ask the parent, guardian, or custodian; child; and other pertinent individuals the name and location of the noncustodial parent at the time of the initial assessment and, as necessary, throughout the life of the case;
2. Record information gathered in the case management system within 3 business days of the receipt of the information;
3. Complete a diligent search to locate the noncustodial parent if the parent's location is unknown. See policies 5.23 Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants and 5.06 Locating Absent Parents for additional guidance.

**Note:** Complete an Investigator referral for assistance in locating the noncustodial parent if the FCM is not otherwise able to make contact. FCMs may make a referral for assistance in situations where all procedural steps have been completed and their efforts have been unsuccessful. See Investigation Services on the DCS Community Services website for further information.

4. Notify the noncustodial parent (once identified and located) of the parent's rights and responsibilities and all pending court hearings;

**Note:** In the case of an involuntary removal, notify the noncustodial parent according to policy 4.28 Involuntary Removals.

5. Provide the Advisement of Legal Rights Upon Taking Custody of/Filing a Petition on Behalf of a Child Alleged to be a Child in Need of Services form to the noncustodial parent. If the noncustodial parent is a minor, provide the Advisement of Legal Rights to the minor parent and the minor parent's parent, guardian, or custodian. Inform the noncustodial parent of the right to:
  - a. Request placement of the child,
  - b. Visit with the child, unless the court orders no visitation, and
  - c. Participate in case planning for the child through the CFT Meeting and/or Case Plan Conference.
6. Develop the Kinship Connection Diagram with the noncustodial parent;
7. Ensure the noncustodial parent is kept informed about the child and is included in all aspects of case planning;
8. Inform the noncustodial parent of the obligation to pay child support if ordered. Request that the court issue an order for child support if not ordered or redirect an order for child support if the child is placed in out-of-home care. See policy 2.20 Establishment of Child Support Orders for additional information;
9. Make copies of all correspondence sent to the noncustodial parent for the case file; and
10. Document in the case management system all efforts made to locate and engage the noncustodial parent. See policy 5.03 Engaging the Family for additional information.

The FCM Supervisor will:

1. Review all efforts made by the FCM to locate and engage the noncustodial parent; and
2. Provide direction and support to the FCM as needed.

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## RELEVANT INFORMATION

### Definitions

#### DCS Investigator

A DCS Investigator is an employee of DCS who is responsible for assisting FCMs in locating absent parents, relative, and/or other identified persons of interest to the case and/or assessment.

#### Noncustodial Parent

A noncustodial parent is a mother, father, or alleged father (biological or adoptive) who does not have legal or primary physical custody of the child. For any questions regarding custody or custodial arrangements, contact the DCS Staff Attorney.

### Forms and Tools

- [Advisement of Legal Rights Upon Taking Custody of/Filing a Petition on Behalf of a Child Alleged to be a Child in Need of Services \(SF 47114\)](#)
- Case Plan/Prevention Plan (SF 2956) – Available in the case management system
- [Incarcerated Parent Letter-Assessment](#)
- [Incarcerated Parent Letter-Permanency](#)
- [Incarcerated Parent Demographic \(SF 56538\)](#)
- [Incarcerated Parent Information \(SF 56539\)](#)
- [Investigation Services](#)
- [Kinship Connection Diagram](#)
- [Plan of Safe Care \(SF 56565\)](#)
- [Program of Informal Adjustment \(IA\)/Prevention Plan](#)

### Related Policies

- [2.20 Establishment of Child Support Orders](#)
- [4.28 Involuntary Removals](#)
- [5.03 Engaging the Family](#)
- [5.06 Locating Absent Parents](#)
- [5.08 Developing the Case Plan/Prevention Plan](#)
- [5.09 Informal Adjustment/Prevention Plan](#)
- [5.15 Concurrent Planning](#)
- [5.23 Diligent Search for Relatives/Kin and Case Participants](#)
- [8.01 Selecting a Placement Option](#)
- [13.14 Background Checks for Reunification](#)
- [15.01 Eligibility Overview for Field and Legal Staff](#)

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## LEGAL REFERENCES

- [IC 31-9-2-22.1: Concurrent Planning](#)
- [IC 31-34-19-7: Placement of child; relative evaluation; background checks](#)

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## PRACTICE GUIDANCE- DCS POLICY 5.04

*Practice Guidance is designed to assist DCS staff with thoughtful and practical direction on how to effectively integrate tools and social work practice into daily case management in an effort to achieve positive family and child outcomes. Practice Guidance is separate from Policy.*

### **Conducting Background Checks on Noncustodial Parents**

Background checks may be conducted on the noncustodial parent if the FCM has reason to question the safety of the placement or if risk factors are present. Safety or risk factors that would necessitate a criminal history check include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Child raises concern regarding the placement;
2. Custodial parent or members of the CFT have concerns regarding the placement;
3. Custodial parent or members of the CFT report past or current criminal history perpetrated by the noncustodial parent; or
4. Noncustodial parent does not have regular visitation with the child.

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