

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES  
STANDARDS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

**STANDARDS FOR STAFF SAFETY**

**9.1 STAFF SAFETY**

**Council on Accreditation Standards**

The Council on Accreditation Standards G5.4 (Compliance with Health and Safety Codes and Regulations); G5.5 (Functional Safety); G5.6 (Facility Safety and Security); G5.8 (Contagious and Infectious Diseases); G5.9 (Special Health Precautions) and G11 (Administration and Risk Management) link to and support Standard 9.1 *Staff Safety*.

**Administrative Code**

There Ohio Administrative Code Rule 5101:2-34-32 (PCSA Requirements for Assessments and Investigations) addresses Standard 9.1 *Staff Safety*.

**I. Philosophy**

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) employees, both on-site and in the field, are vulnerable and at-risk of having their personal safety compromised. As the legally mandated public agency responsible to protect children alleged to be at-risk of abuse and neglect, CFSA staff are generally perceived as intrusive and threatening. This, coupled with the environments that direct service staff must enter, leaves staff highly visible and vulnerable. CFSA's have an obligation to be responsive to the personal safety concerns of all employees.

CFSA's are concerned with the personal safety of all staff both on-site and in the field. While all staff must use sound judgement to assess situations and client families that pose potential danger to the children in the home and/or to themselves, the CFSA also has an obligation to provide appropriate support to reduce the level of potential risk. Appropriate support in the form of safety training, written policies, procedures and checklists and equipment, such as cellular phones and preventative safety supplies, provide staff with a heightened level of security and assurance that their personal safety is being addressed and attended to by the CFSA.

**II. Outcome**

CFSA employees have knowledge and awareness of personal safety issues and take CFSA sanctioned precautions on-site and in the field.

**III. Evaluation**

FACIS events, CPOE and the Federal Health and Human Services outcomes may be considered when evaluating this standard. In addition, the CFSA may consider the following:

- the extent to which the recommendations herein are addressed;
- the extent to which worker safety incidents occur as a result of not following the Standards herein;
- the extent to which worker safety incidents occurred and the standards were followed.

#### **IV. Standards for Implementation**

##### **A. Preventive Measures**

The CFSA has an obligation to staff to provide policy, guidance and clear instructions on how to avoid and reduce potentially dangerous situations both on-site and in the field.

- 1) The CFSA should have in place, and routinely review and update, policies, guidelines, and procedures related to staff safety.
- 2) The CFSA should develop policies and procedures that address the transportation of children who have behavioral, medical, or other special needs that pose a potential threat to the safety of staff.
- 3) The CFSA should provide initial safety training for all newly hired staff before sending them into the field unaccompanied by a colleague.
- 4) The CFSA should provide annual training for staff to enhance assessment of personal safety risks and crisis intervention skills including de-escalation techniques.
- 5) The CFSA should interface with law enforcement to develop and maintain effective working relationships to promote staff safety and the protection of children at risk of abuse or neglect.

##### **B. Threatening Situations**

The CFSA should assist staff in preparing for potentially dangerous clients and situations through the use of assessment, action planning, preparation and close contact with the supervisor.

- 1) Staff, when assigned to a case, should assess the level of personal risk, geographic location of the family, and the situation based on available information before going out on the visit.
- 2) Whenever a client or high risk situation poses a potential threat to staff, the supervisor should be notified immediately. The supervisor should discuss the danger with the staff who may be at risk and jointly establish a plan of action (e.g., staff safety plan, escape routes, etc.). Both the discussion and the plan should be flagged for future reference in the case record.
- 3) When entering a potentially dangerous situation, staff should provide their supervisors with a schedule of field activities including: client and/or activity, destination, and phone number (when available).
- 4) When there is an indication that staff may be physically threatened or attacked by a client, staff should schedule visits and conferences in the office when other staff can be present or when police are most available to respond.
- 5) The CFSA supervisor should remain closely involved with all aspects of case assessment and case management in situations of potential or actual physical threat to staff.
- 6) The CFSA should not require staff to enter high risk situations in which they do not feel reasonably safe without a plan of action.

- 7) The CFSA should consider the use of a "buddy system" for home visits where a potentially dangerous situation exists. When using this system, the CFSA should stress the need for role clarity of each "buddy" and use of action plans prior to the visit.
- 8) Based on the nature of the complaint, law enforcement should be requested to accompany staff who are responsible for handling night crises.
- 9) In every case where a substantial threat, accident or physical harm occurs, a critical incident report should be completed.
- 10) The CFSA should make supportive services available to staff who have been threatened or attacked or who may feel threatened. The CFSA should consider providing:
  - a. professional help and counseling through Employee Assistance Programs;
  - b. added training related to the specific problem area;
  - b. approved time off or temporary relief from specific duties.

#### **C. Self Protection**

The CFSA recognizes that situations may arise where staff may find it necessary to protect themselves using a wide variety of techniques from de-escalation to physical self-defense as allowable by law. The CFSA recognizes that the right to defend oneself is based on a person's reasonable belief that s/he faces immediate danger, even if that belief turns out to be mistaken.

- 1) The CFSA should have a written policy on self protection and provide training on staff self protection and the range of techniques to be employed from fleeing and calling key staff (as the first response), to de-escalation, to physical self-defense.
- 2) The CFSA should assure staff members receive training on a variety of self-protection techniques (see Standard 9.10 *Staff Safety Training*).

#### **D. The CFSA and Law Enforcement Partnership**

The CFSA, with local law enforcement, should work closely to provide staff with the assistance and protection needed in potentially dangerous situations. A partnership between the CFSA and law enforcement is critical to carrying out the agency's mission to protect children at risk of abuse and neglect.

- 1) The CFSA should strive to develop, with local law enforcement, a specific protocol that clearly defines those situations in which danger is imminent and when police assistance should be requested and made available. This protocol should be jointly reviewed on a periodic basis. The joint protocol may include the following:
  - a. assessment of danger to the child, staff or others by the assigned staff;
  - b. situations which may require immediate law enforcement assistance, for example, when:
    - i. the child's mental, physical health, or safety is in imminent danger;

- ii. there are reasonable grounds to believe the child is suffering from illness or injury and is not receiving proper care;
  - iii. there is immediate danger from the child's surroundings;
  - iv. there is immediate or threatened physical or emotional harm from a non-family member;
  - v. a client is out of control, posing a danger to self, child, staff or others at site;
  - vi. staff have been threatened with physical harm or are refused entry to assess a child's safety;
  - vii. the CFSA requests assistance for removal of a child from his/her caregiver, home or school;
  - viii. the visit is to an unsafe area, targeted for increased police cruiser and foot patrols by law enforcement personnel, who officially designate the area as "high crime";
  - ix. visiting a house or location officially designated by law enforcement as a "crack house" or area with drug related activities under surveillance;
  - x. visiting a home with a history of domestic violence; and/or
- c. assisting staff in filing assault charges with law enforcement.

#### **D. Bloodborne Pathogens Management**

Staff who provide direct services that require intimate contact such as feeding, bathing, toileting, diapering and medical procedures are particularly vulnerable to the transmission of bloodborne pathogens (microorganisms that are present in human blood that can cause disease) and diseases caused by them. The CFSA should provide these staff with training necessary to limit/avoid exposure to these.

- 1) The CFSA should include in their safety guidelines a section which addresses bloodborne pathogens management. This may include:
  - a. work practice control (e.g., hand washing, disinfecting toys and equipment);
  - b. immunizations;
  - c. use of personal protective supplies (e.g., plastic seat covers, gloves); and
  - d. training on infection control.

#### **E. In-House Safety**

- 1) The CFSA should include in their safety guidelines a section which addresses the following in-house safety issues:
  - a. bomb threats;
  - b. building security;
  - c. fire prevention and safety;
  - d. general safety (e.g., electrical equipment, etc.);
  - e. hazardous materials (e.g., storage, handling, disposal);
  - f. natural disasters (e.g., tornadoes, floods) and emergencies;
  - g. emergency evacuation procedures; and
  - h. other.
- 2) The CFSA should attend to, and follow, the regulations on Safety as provided by the federal OSHA standards.

#### **V. Financial Implications**

There will be costs associated with providing training, equipment and supplies toward Staff Safety as a result of the strategies the agency puts in place.