



## Iowa Department of Human Services **Field Guide for the Observation of Children and the Delay of Observation Timeframes**

As Iowa's child welfare agency, the Department places child safety at the forefront. Child Protective Assessments (CPA) are prioritized by assigning observation timeframes based on the type of abuse alleged and assessment path identified as well as the level of risk to the child, including consideration of the child's vulnerability and the alleged responsible person's access to the child. Following evaluation of these factors, a timeframe of 1, 24, 72, or 96 hours is assigned in which face-to-face contact between the Child Protection Worker (CPW) and alleged child victim(s) must occur.

Seeing children in the timeframe assigned and assuring safety is priority. Supervisory consultation at the point of attempted contact with the family, is essential to guide the CPWs efforts to see children timely and keep them safe, as well as ensure consistent policy application. This field guide provides direction regarding timeliness of assessments and establishing the safety of children. It also reinforces the necessity of collaboration between the supervisor and CPW when facing barriers to seeing a child timely.

### **Reasonable Efforts Defined**

Common sense and critical thinking by the worker and supervisor will help to determine what constitutes "reasonable efforts". Use two criteria to assist in determining reasonable efforts:

- ◆ What did you actually do to observe the child?
- ◆ Was this reasonable given the allegation?

NOTE: The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requires "active efforts" to prevent the removal or promote reunification of the Indian child. Active efforts go beyond reasonable efforts and is defined as "affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended primarily to maintain or reunite an Indian child with his or her family" [see Policy Manual 18-C(5)].

### **Reasonable Efforts to Observe the Child Timely**

The Department's priority is to see children timely and assure safety by taking the following actions:

- ◆ Intake Supervisor assigns to the local service area dashboard as expeditiously as possible
- ◆ Field Supervisor assigns the case promptly out of the local service area dashboard
- ◆ CPW confirms receipt of the case assignment
- ◆ Supervisor evaluates the need to immediately contact the assigned CPW to:
  - Discuss CPW's plan to observe the child victim(s)
  - Explore reasonable efforts
  - Identify potential barriers to meeting the timeframe
  - Problem-solve to meet timeframes as needed
- ◆ CPW initiates case and consults with supervisor to:
  - Discuss reasonable efforts made to observe the child victim(s)

- Disclose barriers to see the child victim(s), prior to expiration of the timeframe
- Explore additional strategies to meet the observation timeframe (e.g. a supervisor may delegate observation of the child to other casework staff of the Department)
- Identify how safety was assured (even when unable to observe the child, e.g. collateral contacts to confirm perpetrator won't have access or consultation with the Social Work Case Manager that any access will be appropriately supervised or discussion with non-offending caretaker identifying how the child will be safe until contact can be made)
- Obtain supervisory approval to delay contact, when appropriate
- Establish a revised timeframe (if supervisor approves a delay) that is no later than an additional 24 hours beyond the previous timeframe and make reasonable efforts to observe the child as soon as possible

Table 1:

Original Timeframe Assigned	Revised Timeframe Assigned
1 hour	24 hours
24 hours	48 hours
72 hours	96 hours
96 hours	120 hours

NOTE: Supervisory discretion may be used to determine if the revised timeframe needs to be more or less than 24 hours based on the circumstances of the case (e.g. the CPW confirms the child is out of town with the non-offending parent, will not be returning for 3 days, request for a courtesy observation is denied, and the person alleged responsible will not have access to the child during this time)

- ◆ If you are denied access to a child, cannot confirm safety of the child, if you have concerns for the child's well-being or safety, or the facts otherwise warrant:
  - Seek immediate assistance of law enforcement authorities
  - Request a court order authorizing access to the place where the child is located for the purpose of observing the child and evaluating the child's safety
  - If any of this occurs during a family assessment, reassign as a child abuse assessment.

### **Delaying the Observation Timeframe**

Reasons for the delay must be beyond the control of the Department. It is not acceptable to delay timeframes for reasons such as, due to the assigned CPW not being in work status, nor due to the workday ending/weekend approaching, nor due to car troubles, nor due to workload issues, etc. The appropriate reasons to delay timeframes include:

- ◆ Safety was addressed within timeframe
- ◆ Delayed due to worker safety issues
- ◆ Unable to locate child/family – reasonable efforts to locate documented
- ◆ Family fled – reasonable efforts to locate documented
- ◆ Parents uncooperative - court-ordered access denied
- ◆ Child on the run – police pick-up on record

- ◆ Delayed at request of law enforcement
- ◆ Family/child in another State
- ◆ Child deceased
- ◆ Identified as additional victim

### **Waiving the Observation Timeframe**

The timeframe for observing of a child cannot be waived except in extremely limited and rare circumstances (e.g. child fatality, noting any surviving siblings would have to be observed and safety must be assured within the assigned timeframe).

### **Documenting Work in the CPA Summary of Contacts Section**

Capturing efforts and any barrier to observe the child timely as well as the approval and rationale for the delay in the Summary of Contacts section of the CPA are crucial. Such documentation not only serves as a reference to assure policies and procedures to protect children were followed, but it also serves as credit to the incredible and thorough work being done in the field.

- ◆ Document the assigned timeframe, rationale for not observing the child within the assigned timeframe (e.g. delayed at the request of law enforcement and child’s safety would be further jeopardized by meeting that timeframe or delayed due to worker safety issues and law enforcement assistance is advised and not immediately available).
- ◆ Document the efforts made to observe the child within the assigned timeframe as well as any barriers encountered or circumstances that made it impossible to observe the child within the assigned timeframe.
- ◆ Document how the safety of the child was addressed even when observation of the child is not possible within the assigned timeframe.
- ◆ Document the revised timeframe, which must not be later than an additional 24 hours beyond the previous timeframe (see Table 1 and the corresponding NOTE), and reasonable efforts to observe the child as soon as possible.
- ◆ Document your efforts to contact Meskwaki Family Services, if applicable.

### **Documenting Additional Entries in the JARVIS - STAR Assessment Module**

Under the “Additional Process Info” tab

- ◆ Document supervisory approval of any delay of contact and all reasonable efforts made.

NOTE: If contact was timely, document “Child seen timely” or “Not Applicable”

#### **Supervisory Approval of Contact Delay**

If the CPW has difficulty making contact with a family and the time frame is close to expiring, consultation with the supervisor should occur to discuss the attempts made (noted above) to request a delay in contact. The date and time of the supervisory consultation and corresponding approval for the delay should be documented.

Under the “Timeframes” section of the “Household Composition” tab:

- ◆ Select the appropriate option from the drop down lists for the “Child Seen” and “Justification Reasons” sections, and
- ◆ Enter the earliest date and time in which the child was seen.

**Timeframes**

Current Assessment

Intake Date/Time	Incident #	Timeframe to Assure Child Safety	Child Seen	Earliest Date/Time Seen	Justification Reason
01/18/2021 2:34 PM		24 Hr(s)	Child seen timely Select Child Seen <b>Child seen timely</b> Child seen, timeframe delayed Child not seen	<input type="text" value="01/19/2021"/> <input type="text" value="1:15 PM"/>	

**Timeframes**

Current Assessment

Intake Date/Time	Incident #	Timeframe to Assure Child Safety	Child Seen	Earliest Date/Time Seen	Justification Reason
01/18/2021 2:34 PM		24 Hr(s)	Child seen, timeframe delayed	<input type="text" value="01/19/2021"/>	<input type="text" value="Select Child Seen Justification"/>

**Select Child Seen Justification**

- Safety was addressed within timeframe
- Delayed due to worker safety issues
- Unable to locate child/family-- reasonable efforts to locate documented
- Family fled – reasonable efforts to locate documented
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- Delayed at request of law enforcement
- Family/Child in another state
- Child deceased
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**Add/Edit Characteristic**