

DFPS Child-Safety Action Plan

In October 2013, DFPS developed the Safety Plan for Children in Foster Care. The plan outlines improvements to keep children safe in foster care. DFPS is also improving safety in other divisions to protect children before they get to foster care, including investigations, prevention and early intervention, and daycares. Some recommendations from the DFPS Safety Plan for Children in Foster Care are completed while others require rule changes.

Safety Checks & Unannounced Visits

Safety Item 1

Immediately conduct a safety action plan for kinship and foster and adopt homes, starting in Region 7 (Austin/Central Texas). Through this safety action plan, CPS will increase the number of unannounced visits in kinship homes with very young children and conduct a review of regular and frequent visitors, as defined by Residential Child Care Licensing minimum standards, to ensure that CPS staff is aware of these visitors and appropriate background checks were done.

Implementation

CPS completed unannounced child safety visits to kinship homes in Region 7 in November 2013.

Unverified Kinship Homes:

- 524 homes overall where 751 children live
- Unannounced visits to 235 homes and 568 children
- Five removals from unverified placements

Verified Kinship Foster Homes:

- 34 homes
- 34 homes visited
- No removals

Adoptive Kinship Homes:

- Two homes
- Two homes visited
- No removals

Based on the Region 7 review and the fact that most child fatalities are to very young children, CPS is expanding the unannounced visits to all unverified kinship homes where children 3 and younger live. CPS will

conduct these visits over the next four months. After the statewide unannounced home visits in April 2014, CPS will review the findings to determine if policy or protocol changes are needed.

Safety Item 2

Revise policy to increase unannounced foster home visits by the provider each year.

Implementation

Increasing unannounced foster home visits can be incorporated as part of corrective items, contract-specific needs, or through agreement until rules can be changed. Residential Child Care Licensing is reviewing rules and regulations as they apply to unannounced foster home visits by the provider.

Safety Item 3

Immediately perform child safety checks to ensure safety of the children in the provider's homes and look for any systematic issues that could be safety risks.

Implementation

Child safety checks for children in child placing agency/foster placements is part of the ongoing process of corrective actions, if applicable. CPS conducted safety checks on Lutheran Social Services of the South, Austin Branch, in November 2013.

- 15 foster homes
- 34 children visited
- Two reports made to Statewide Intake

CPS conducted safety checks on Arrow Family Ministries, Arlington Branch, in November 2013:

- 14 foster homes
- 41 children visited
- Three reports made to Statewide Intake

Regulatory & Rule Changes

Safety Item 4

Child Care Licensing (CCL) and CPS reviewed policies and regulations regarding children with primary medical needs. Primary medical needs includes specialized care and services for children who are medically fragile and living in foster family and group homes that have been licensed or verified to provide care for these children.

CPS will propose multiple regulatory changes to improve care of this vulnerable population, including increased unannounced visits to foster homes.

Implementation

Residential Child Care Licensing is reviewing rules and regulations regarding children with primary medical needs. Proposed rules must be presented to the DFPS Council in July 2014 and take effect December 2014 if approved. Additionally, interim changes will be explored through contract language.

CPS conducted a stakeholder survey regarding possible rule changes and/or needs of current providers to serve children with primary medical needs. This survey includes questions to assess specific needs, services, and identify target level of number per home/per provider.

Safety Item 5

Amend DFPS rules to limit the number of primary medical needs children who can be placed in one home.

Implementation

Rule changes require stakeholder meetings and input, and this issue was included in the recent stakeholder survey. Proposed rules must be presented to the DFPS Council in July 2014 and rules will take effect December 2014 if approved. Additionally, interim changes will be explored through contract language.

Safety Item 6

Require that caseworkers interview adult children of potential foster parents before verification to better understand the quality of the home environment.

Implementation

CPS will propose a rule change requiring child placing agency providers to interview adult children. There must be a waiver process developed for adult children who cannot be contacted due to extenuating circumstances. This will be part of the rule packet presented at the April 2014 DFPS Council meeting. If approved, the rules take effect in September 2014.

Contract Monitoring

Safety Item 7

Conduct a contract-monitoring audit.

Implementation

Internal Audit is conducting a contracting-monitoring audit to assess the process for evaluating contractor (residential provider) performance, with a focus on child safety and well-being outcomes. Audit findings will be addressed and recommendations implemented as appropriate. The audit report is due in April 2014.

Benchmarks for Providers

Safety Item 8

Develop provider benchmarks so CPS can collect and distribute aggregate data that will allow providers to assess their performance in a statewide context.

Implementation

This is an ongoing part of practice as providers currently must meet benchmarks/targets. Quarterly and annual reports/measures address targets and corrective actions taken to fix deficiencies and maintain child safety.

Communication with Caregivers

Safety Item 9

Communicate safety reminders to kinship care providers, including DFPS safety campaigns.

Implementation

CPS developed a plan that will be distributed in April 2014. The plan includes providing information to the kinship care provider in the provider's preferred method such as through face-to-face conversation, written materials, email, etc. As campaigns are created/publicized, CPS will notify field staff through the quarterly kinship newsletter and other internal communication. Links to online resources will be provided in updates to the Kinship Caregiver Manual.

Safety Item 10

Regularly email foster parents with information about safety campaigns and updates on safety. Currently, DFPS gives information to child placing agencies/contractors and they are required to provide this specific information to all foster parents. DFPS also delivers this information to the Texas Foster Family Association.

Implementation

There are no requirements for foster families to have email/computer access, but DFPS will continue to evaluate the possible development and use of a notification/signup email system.

Safety Item 11

Increase communication with substitute caregivers by updating them, at least quarterly, on new best practices for caregiving and timely safety initiatives.

Implementation

DFPS developed a communication plan to better connect substitute caregivers with best practices, resources, and with child placing agencies/providers and the Texas Foster Family Association. DFPS created a new website http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/pcs/Residential_Contracts/Residential_Child_Care_Contract_News.asp for residential childcare contractors to share memos regarding best practices, events, notices, and new requirements.

Safety Item 12

Create a new webpage dedicated to child safety.

Implementation

DFPS has developed this new page, http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Child_safety/default.asp, which includes provider data as well as information on how to enhance the safety of children in their care.

Kinship

Safety Item 13

Update the home study for kinship placements to ensure that caseworkers discuss safety and recognizing risks during the family's home study. This will include the importance of proper supervision, keeping guns safe and away from children, and situational safety, such as how to be safe around water.

Implementation

DFPS is revising the kinship home assessment template, specifically sections on supervision, risk and safety, and gun and pool safety. Changes will include adding a section where the DFPS staff member who reviews and approves the assessment must acknowledge awareness of identified concerns and plans to address them. Providers will be required to use the new template when it is ready in April 2014.

Safety Item 14

Update the kinship manual provided to all kinship caregivers to include more information on ensuring child safety.

Implementation

CPS is revising the kinship manual. Upon completion and publication in April 2014, CPS will provide a copy of the manual to all current kinship caregivers (or at a minimum, a list of all changes depending on printing costs and timelines). Staff will review all changes in the manual with kinship families during their monthly visits. In addition, prevention calendars have been ordered and kinship staff will distribute them to families.

Safety Item 15

Review kinship policies, procedures, and rules to ensure that they are up-to-date and that safety is emphasized.

Implementation

Review of kinship policies and procedures was completed in November 2013 and policy revisions are in the final stages of approval. Areas of changes/clarification include:

- Visitation (announced and unannounced).
- Clarifying the role of the kinship development worker and the expectations the KIN stage of service.
- Reviewing the kinship home assessment.
- Reviewing ongoing child safety.
- Meeting/staffing with the conservatorship worker and supervisor.

Safety Item 16

Determine a percentage of kinship families statewide who are caring for children younger than 5 and conduct monthly face-to-face visits. These will be in addition to the caseworker's monthly visit and will place another individual in the home who can check on the safety and well-being of the children.

Implementation

Based on the Region 7 review and the fact that most child fatalities are to very young children, CPS is conducting additional, unannounced visits in all unverified kinship homes where children 3 and younger live. After CPS completes the visits in April 2014, there could be additional policy and/or protocol changes based on the findings.

Respite Care

Safety Item 17

Review the availability and use of emergency respite care, which provides child-care services for a brief specified time to foster families caring for children with special needs.

Implementation

Alternate and respite care are being offered but not required by child placing agencies. CPS conducted a survey of providers for primary medical needs children and of the Texas Family Foster Association. This survey included questions to assess specific needs, services, and identify target level of number per home/per provider. CPS will use survey results and feedback from the child safety forums to review any specific rules and requirements. Additionally, changes will be explored through contract language.

Safety Forums

Safety Item 18

In October-December 2013, DFPS Commissioner John Specia brought together provider CEOs and key staff for a series of forums to gather ideas and best practices regarding child safety and providing safe, nurturing care to children who have suffered abuse or neglect. Forums were held in Dallas/Ft. Worth, Austin, El Paso, San Antonio, Houston and Lubbock.

Implementation

Recommendations from the child safety forums have been collected and a report is posted on the DFPS website,

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Child_Safety/documents/Safety_Forum_Summary.pdf The recommendations are under review and will be incorporated into policy, procedures, training, contracts, and best practices. Residential Child Care Licensing will have regional/local meetings with child placing agency case managers (for those CPAs who take primary medical needs children) to discuss child safety in depth. DFPS staff also will conduct smaller, more-targeted safety meetings with small groups of providers.

Safety Recognition Cards

Safety Item 19

Provide safety recognition cards on appropriate care for children with primary medical needs to child placing agency staff, DFPS staff, and caregivers to assist them when investigating, visiting a home, or caring for children with primary medical needs live.

Implementation

DFPS emailed safety recognition cards to child placing agencies on Oct. 1, 2013, and will deliver printed versions during monitoring inspections. The cards provide sample questions and assessment tools for child placing agency staff to inquire about the child, the home, nurses, and other areas. DFPS is also printing small safety cards for workers to carry with them. Sample safety recognition questions are posted on the DFPS website with the Oct. 1, 2013, memo sent to residential contractors regarding quality of care for children with primary medical needs

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/PCS/Residential_Contracts/documents/Roles_and_Responsibilities_for_Caregivers_of_Children_with_Primary_Medical_Needs_10_1_2013.pdf.

CPS also has developed safety recognition cards for DFPS staff in conjunction with Residential Child Care Licensing's card for child placing agencies. The safety reminders will be incorporated into current training and practice.

For caregivers, the safety recognition cards incorporate safety recognition and discussion points regarding primary medical needs children. The printed cards were mailed to staff on Feb. 4, 2014, and CPS leadership held a conference call to further instruct staff and answer questions about the cards.

Background Checks

Safety Item 20

Increase residential child care providers' compliance with laws requiring background checks.

Implementation

On Feb. 14, 2014, DFPS sent a letter from Commissioner Specia to residential child care providers informing them that Child Care Licensing will levy administrative penalties, allowed by state law, beginning April 2014 for untimely background checks.

https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Child_Safety/documents/RCCL_Providers_Letter_TimelyBackgroundChecks_Specia_Morris_02_14_14.pdf

Investigation Policies

Safety Item 21

Review CPS investigation policies regarding families who move and cannot be located.

Implementation

CPS completed the policy review in January 2014 and revisions are in the final stages of approval. Areas of changes/clarification include:

- Requiring that if a family involved in a new or active investigation has moved and cannot be located, the case must be referred to a Special Investigator for assistance in locating the family.
- Designating deadlines for tasks needed to locate the family.

Primary Medical Needs

Safety Item 22

Send a letter from DFPS Commissioner John Specia emphasizing safety, particularly for children with special needs, to all child placing agencies explaining the agency's expectations of foster parents.

Implementation

Letter was sent on Sept. 3, 2013, and posted on the DFPS website at http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/about/pdf/News/Commissioner_letter_residential_child_care_contractor.pdf.

Safety Item 23

Send all residential contractors a memo reminding them of the protocols to ensure quality of care for children with primary medical needs, identifying the expectations for those who accept children with these needs into their care.

Implementation

Memo was sent on Oct. 1, 2013 and posted on the DFPS website at http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/PCS/Residential_Contracts/documents/Roles_and_Responsibilities_for_Caregivers_of_Children_with_Primary_Medical_Needs_10_1_2013.pdf.

Training & Reporting

Safety Item 24

Restructure training on child safety to ensure that the caseworkers can spot and address safety concerns when they walk into a home. This should improve our staff's ability to identify and diagnose safety issues. Training will also focus on better communication between child placing agencies and CPS staff who are regularly in foster homes.

Implementation

On Nov. 7, 2013, all CPS foster/adopt (FAD) management staff completed training on enhanced child safety. Training and review of materials for all regional FAD staff has been completed as of Jan. 31, 2014.

Safety Item 25

Increase training for human services technicians, who often transport children to services, to enhance their abilities to recognize, assess, and address child safety. Because human service technicians are an additional set of eyes on children, they serve as another opportunity to observe and ensure that child's safety.

Implementation

Training under development/delivery based on this action item includes:

1. *Enhanced Child Safety Training* is required for all direct delivery staff, including all staff/management in investigation, Family Based Safety Services, conservatorship, foster/adopt, kinship and placement staff,

subject matter experts, child safety specialists and human service technicians (HSTs). This training must be completed by March 31, 2014.

2. DFPS is designing training for direct delivery staff in all stages of service regarding meeting the needs of children with primary medical needs. This training is tentatively scheduled for release in April 2014.

DFPS is developing multiple trainings are currently being developed to provide ongoing support to staff in all stages of service in assessing, identifying, and addressing child safety. This training is being developed and is scheduled for release in September 2014.

Safety Item 26

On Nov. 7, 2013, conducted a statewide training refresher course on safety for all CPS foster/adopt staff.

Implementation

Completed on Nov. 7, 2013.