



Staff Safety and High Risk Situations Policy

STATE of Maine
OFFICE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES POLICY

Section
II

Subsection
B

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EFFECTIVE DATE:
July 12, 2018

LATEST REVISION:
March 19, 2021

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I. SUBJECT

Staff Safety and High Risk Situations Policy

II. STATUTORY AUTHORITY

[DHHS 11-14: Threats, Unusual Incidents and Workplace Violence](#)

III. DEFINITIONS

Acts of Aggression: Attempted or actual physical violence directed at an OCFS employee and behaviors/language that, while not directed at an OCFS employee, threatens the safety of one or more OCFS employees, or another individual involved in the case who is not an OCFS employee - such as a resource parent, Guardian ad litem, Assistant Attorney General, or contracted entities.

High Risk Situations: Cases that require additional activities in order to ensure the safety of OCFS staff. These include both cases where individuals involved pose a heightened risk because of past behavior AND highly charged situations. The following is a list of situations that qualify as High Risk Situations for the purpose of this policy.

- a. Any contact with an individual or an individual's family when that individual has a known history of:
 - i. Threats and/or acts of aggression against OCFS or any OCFS employee; or
 - ii. A known history of violence; or
 - iii. Any case involving domestic violence or allegations of domestic violence (IV.D-4).
- b. Any case when a child is being physically removed from their parent or legal guardian;
- c. Any case when notifying a parent, in person, that OCFS plans to file or has filed a Preliminary Protection Order (PPO); or
- d. Any case when notifying a parent, in person, that OCFS plans to file or has filed a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Petition.

Personal Safety Plan: A plan, created in response to a threat, that is meant to document steps to ensure a threatened OCFS employee can safely complete their job duties. The Personal Safety Plan is created in collaboration between the employee and their supervisor. The Personal Safety Plan must be fully documented on the Personal Safety Plan Worksheet within one business day and sent to the Communication and Compliance Manager, Program Administrator and Regional Associate Director.

Threat:

- a. A threat may originate from any person, to include (but not limited to): clients, contractors, other employees, and/or outside entities.
- b. A threat directed at an employee which is reasonably related to the employee's job is considered a threat, regardless of whether the employee is in the workplace or not when the threat occurs.
- c. Threats include:
 - i. Anything determined by the employee receiving or reporting the threat to be threatening, including a demeanor, tone of voice, gesture, or a sense of violation of the employee's sense of security or space.
 - ii. Any oral or written communication or gesture directed to or against any individual that articulates or conveys an intention to inflict physical, emotional, or financial harm or to damage property.

Threat Report Form: The form completed to report a threat to the Commissioner's office.

IV. POLICY

Staff safety in their day-to-day job responsibilities is a paramount priority. OCFS partners with staff to ensure they are as safe as possible in their work. OCFS recognizes that staff could be in situations where their personal safety is at risk and has developed these procedures to outline the steps to prepare and respond to potentially unsafe situations.

V. PROCEDURES

Threats.

- a. When a threat (whether verbal, physical or behaviors meant to intimidate or threaten) is made against an OCFS employee or an OCFS employee receives a threat against OCFS, that employee

will create a Personal Safety Plan with their supervisor to address any safety concerns raised by the threat.

- b. The employee will use and maintain the Personal Safety Plan as a resource for their own safety.
- c. The supervisor will support the employee in implementing the plan and send it to the Communication and Compliance Manager, Program Administrator/Assistant Program Administrator and Regional Associate Director for review, documentation and tracking purposes.
- d. All threats made against an OCFS employee, or another individual involved in the case who is not an OCFS employee – such as a resource parent, Guardian ad litem, Assistant Attorney General, tribal partners or contracted entities must be reported to the Commissioner’s Office on the Threat Report Form provided by the Commissioner’s Office. Information from the Threat Report Form is entered into the automated information system threat module for tracking purposes.
- e. The supervisor of the employee receiving the threat will complete the Threat Report Form with the assistance of the employee receiving the threat.
 - i. The supervisor will then submit the Threat Report Form to the Program Administrator.
 - ii. The Program Administrator will then review and submit the Threat Report Form to the Communication and Compliance Manager for the Office of Child and Family Services and the Regional Associate Director of Child Welfare Services.
- f. When a threat has been made previously, a Threat Report Form will be completed whenever the individual makes a new threat (whether against an OCFS employee, or another individual involved in the case who is not an OCFS employee – such as a resource parent, Guardian ad litem, Assistant Attorney General, tribal partners or contracted entities).
- g. In cases filed with the court or being prepared for filing with the court the caseworker or their supervisor must notify the Assistant Attorney General handling the case, as well as the Child Protective Division Chief by sending them the Threat Report Form.

Acts of Aggression.

- a. If an employee’s immediate safety is compromised, they will leave the location as soon as they can safely do so and call 911.
- b. After the act of aggression has subsided, the employee will immediately call their supervisor to report the situation.
- c. Whenever an act of aggression occurs, a Personal Safety Plan will be created within 24 hours by the OCFS employee whose safety has been threatened. This plan will be created with their supervisor and used to address any concerns raised by the act of aggression.
- d. All acts of aggression must be reported to the Commissioner’s Office on the Threat Report Form provided by the Commissioner’s Office.
 - i. The supervisor of the employee involved in the act of aggression will complete the Threat Report Form with the assistance of the employee involved in the act of aggression within 24 hours.
 - ii. The supervisor will then immediately submit the form to the Program Administrator.
 - iii. The Program Administrator will then review and submit the form to the Communication and Compliance Manager and the Regional Associate Director of Child Welfare Services within 24 hours.

- iv. Data from the Threat Report Form will be entered into the automated information system threat module.

High Risk Situations.

- a. In High Risk Situations, prior to making contact with the family, OCFS staff will:
 - i. Research past threats, acts of aggression, and known history of violence; and
 - ii. Consult with supervisor to determine if a Personal Safety Plan is needed and if so, use it to address any safety concerns.
- b. In a referral requiring emergency response, OCFS staff may be unable to research and/or complete a Personal Safety Plan before making contact with the family. In such situations, OCFS staff must be accompanied by another staff person or Law Enforcement. If any verbal, physical or threatening behaviors occurred, then a Personal Safety Plan should be completed as soon as possible after contact with the family.
- c. In cases where parents are being notified that OCFS will be filing a PPO or TPR, the OCFS staff making the notification should be accompanied by another OCFS staff person.
- d. During the physical removal of a child from their residence, the OCFS staff completing the removal should be accompanied by another OCFS staff person and a Law Enforcement Officer. The staff must meet the family or individual in a location approved by their supervisor. Any exceptions must be approved by the PA or APA.

VI. POLICY SUPERSEDES

II.B. Staff Safety and Critical Safety Cases, Effective July 12, 2018

VII. LINKS TO RELATED POLICIES

[IV.D. Child Protection Investigation](#)

[IV.D-4 Domestic Violence and Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

VIII. APPENDICES

[Appendix A: Threat Report Form](#)

[Appendix B: Personal Safety Plan Template](#)

Note: The hyperlinks to these documents only work on DHHS issued computers. If you would like to request a copy of these documents, please email your request to:

OCFSPolicyTraining.DHHS@maine.gov