

Effective Date: 10/4/2021 Revision Date: 10/27/2025	Responsible Administrator(s): Kim Warren, Program and Resource Administrator
Authorized Signature: Trenee Parker, DFS Director 	

Policy 109 – Case Documentation Standards

A. POLICY

The Division shall maintain complete, accurate, and up-to-date client records as a core component of essential case management. Timely and thorough documentation ensures that critical information is available for decision-making, planning, oversight, and review by authorized individuals at all times. Documentation must reflect a cumulative summary of the family's progression through the system, supporting both agency and caseworker accountability in service delivery.

To support informed decisions across shifts, critical decision-making information and location details must be documented by the end of the day.

In alignment with Department Policy #121, Division staff shall record all case-related activities as soon as possible, not to exceed 10 business days from the date of the activity except as described below for critical events.

B. PROCEDURES

1. All documentation must be factually correct, timely, and updated regularly. Timeliness includes both the completion of activities (contacts, assessments, plans) and the prompt entry of related information into the electronic system.
2. All case-related activities conducted with or on behalf of children and families must be documented. This includes, but is not limited to contacts, monthly foster care visits, safety and planning activities, supervisory consultation, collaterals, other meetings and all communications (text, writing, phone, email, in person) used for assessment and decision making. All communications and correspondence with Department legal counsel and protected information such as substance use or medical information, shall be clearly labeled as confidential.
3. All communications and emails should be summarized, identify the person/role of the sender, and include the dates and times. Communications and emails should NEVER be copy and pasted into progress notes. Activities associated with system-generated events (assessments, plans, etc.) are built according to event specific policy and must be documented in the system in accordance with such policy.
4. FOCUS system events are considered timely when completed within 5 business days of the corresponding activity. Critical activation of insurance (Medicaid) and eligibility can't begin until placement and custody events are completed.
5. Court order entries are considered timely when completed within 5 business days of receipt. Petitions must be entered within 3 business days of filing.
6. All other case activities not specifically mentioned herein (including, but not limited to, phone calls, attempted contacts, funding requests, collateral information, referrals, and professional correspondence) must be documented within 5 business days of the activity.

7. Documentation must clearly describe all communications, interventions, and activities conducted with the agency, including when and where they occurred and who participated. Full names and roles of all participants must be documented; abbreviations are permitted only if defined. Entries must demonstrate compliance with mandates, laws, regulations, federal requirements, and Division policy.
8. Case records must demonstrate how the family is ensuring safety and well-being of children. Documentation should reflect the Division's assessment of family strengths and needs and detail all interventions, services, and plans with the family.
9. Any relevant supporting documents (such as reports, correspondence, etc.) must be uploaded to the FOCUS case file(s) within 10 business days of receipt.
10. **Critical events** and/or special circumstances that do not have completed FOCUS events require same-day entry of clearly labeled progress notes by the end of the activity workday. These include:
 - a. **Change in Custody:** Any change to legal custody of children (ex parte, rescission, guardianship, TPR, etc.) must be documented in a progress note to support emergency response needs, unless this information is entered into the appropriate FOCUS events.
 - b. **Placement Changes:** It is critical that the Division know the location and responsible party for all children in DFS custody in the event of an emergency. Any change in a child's location or caregiver that is not reflected in placement events must be documented in a progress note, including the caregiver's name, address, and contact number.
 - c. **Safety Agreements:** Initiation or changes to safety agreements must be documented in a progress note, if not yet entered as a formal event. Documentation must include information regarding any changes in location and/or caregivers for all children.
11. All intake and after-hours activities (such as reports, calls, initial responses, etc.) must be documented before the end of the assigned shift. If the duration of an urgent or complex situation prevents full documentation before the end of the assigned shift, upon receipt of prior supervisory approval, a summary and list of next steps must be entered in FOCUS before the shift ends.

C. FOCUS

All documentation shall be entered into the appropriate FOCUS events and designated Safety Organized Practice (SOP) and Structured Decision Making® (SDM®) tools, events or records.

In the event that a FOCUS issue prevents the completion of an event, workers must submit a FOCUS request to resolve the issue and document the request in a progress note.

The FOCUS mobile app supports timely documentation by allowing workers to use mobile devices for data entry from the field.

D. FORMS

Mobile App Login Instructions