

Putting Families First Playbook

Law Enforcement

Overview

Law enforcement and child welfare agencies often work hand-in-hand on the most challenging situations to ensure child, youth, and community safety. This partnership is critical to the work of the Putting Families First child welfare transformation, which is focused on keeping children and families together by supporting them in-home with resources and services.

How is Safety Maintained In-Home and in the Community?

- Child welfare professionals use a safety decision-making model to identify danger threats in families and develop plans that are least intrusive.
- Sometimes the circumstances that are viewed as 'unsafe' by the general public do not rise to the level necessary to warrant child protective services (CPS) intervention.
- All child welfare professionals are required by law to take specific training, including training related to making safety decisions.
- Safety decision-making training teaches child welfare professionals how to identify danger and how to develop plans with families when a child is determined to be unsafe. As part of the work of Putting Families First, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) continues to make improvements to these and other trainings.

What Can Law Enforcement Expect Around Putting Families First?

- Law enforcement should continue to refer cases to local child welfare agencies, CPS, and youth justice as they have in the past. When a child is determined to be unsafe, child welfare professionals will determine the least intrusive method possible to keep the child safe, starting with a protective plan or a safety plan.
- Protective plans or safety plans put into place for children may look different from how they have looked historically; this is because of deliberate work to center families in the planning process.
- Law enforcement may notice child welfare professionals spending more time developing protective plans or safety plans with families when they respond to a report of alleged maltreatment.
 - When a dangerous condition is identified and there is a need for a plan to shield the child from those conditions, the child welfare professional is required by policy to put a plan into place before leaving the family's home.
 - Law enforcement agencies may want to discuss with child welfare professionals ahead of time what is needed from them once law enforcement meets their requirements (*i.e. Does the officer need to stay with the child welfare professional the whole time they are developing the plan?*).

"Law enforcement will always put the safety of our children, families and communities first. One way to keep communities safe is by investing in front-end prevention. Putting Families First makes this investment and enables law enforcement to partner with our human service colleagues to provide a safe and supportive environment where families can achieve long-term health and success."

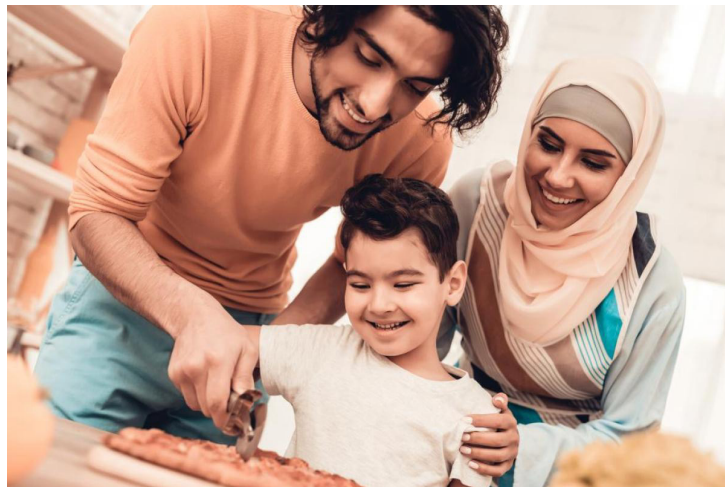
- Marathon County Sheriff Chad Billeb

What Can Law Enforcement Do To Support Putting Families First?

- **Continue or establish partnerships.**
Build or establish joint responses on certain types of child welfare cases or schedule regular meetings together as part of a Multi-Disciplinary Team so that a system is already in place for challenging situations.

- **Establish open dialogue with child welfare professionals.**
Law enforcement and child welfare agencies are encouraged to discuss challenges and help one another understand why decisions are made. Both professions want children to be safe and loved members of their communities, and that may look different based on the requirements of their roles.

- **Be an Advocate!**
Law enforcement officers are trusted local officials and can be incredible advocates for the need for upfront services to keep children in-home. Law enforcement officers can help others understand the importance of children remaining with those who care about them.



Marathon County Partnership with Sheriff's Office

The relationships between agencies and their local partners are critical to the success of Putting Families First. These relationships support and strengthen the work in invaluable ways.

Marathon County works closely with the Marathon County Sheriff's Office to keep children safe and connect families with needed resources and services. The Sheriff's Office is a strong partner in this work and goes about it with a trauma-informed approach. The Sheriff's Office was even an early adopter of programs like the Crisis Response Team, which attends to situations involving mental health struggles, drug misuse and addiction. They understand there is a more empathetic and less punitive way of supporting those who experience these kinds of challenges.

Marathon County child welfare professionals often feel like they are on "one team" with their law enforcement partners when responding to complex drug situations and other affairs. When there is a divergence between the child welfare and law enforcement professionals in thinking about and addressing certain cases, they talk through them as partners. They have these conversations with the shared understanding that children do best when they are with their families and that the justice system is an important piece in getting to that outcome.

The Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement partners in Marathon County have been explicit in their support of Marathon County's child welfare professionals, which means the world to those doing the work of Putting Families First every day.



Resources

Case Flow: Access

Wisconsin's child welfare system is divided into three stages; this infographic details how a case moves through the access stage of the system.

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5573.pdf>

Case Flow: Initial Assessment

Wisconsin's child welfare system is divided into three stages; this infographic details how a case moves through the initial assessment stage of the system.

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/publications/pdf/5574.pdf>

Wisconsin's Plan for Assessment and Case Planning in Youth Justice Statewide

A DCF resource.

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/cwportal/yj/pdf/yasi-plan.pdf>

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