



Division of Safety and Permanence  
March 6, 2026

DSP Numbered Memo Series 2026-07

To: DCF/DMCPS Administrator  
DCF Area Administrators  
Child Placing Agency Directors  
Child Welfare Agency Directors  
County Departments of Community Programs Directors  
County Departments of Human Services Directors  
County Departments of Social Services Directors  
Group Home Providers  
Private Child Placing Agencies  
Residential Care Center Providers  
Shelter Care Providers  
Tribal Chairpersons

From: John Elliott  
Administrator

Re: March 2026 Revisions to Access & Initial Assessment, Safety Intervention,  
and Ongoing Service Standards

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to communicate updates made to child welfare standards in March 2026, which encompasses multiple projects or practice changes.

1. Alignment with Wis. Admin. Code § DCF 56.
2. Alignment with language changes across both sets of standards.
3. Alignment with Family Case Planning practice changes.

### BACKGROUND

The [Ongoing Services Standards](#) have been updated to reflect revisions to Wis. Admin. Code DCF 56 Foster Home Care for Children, alignment with the [Access & Initial Assessment Standards](#) revisions made in June 2024, alignment with the [Child Protective Services Safety Intervention Standards](#) revisions made in February 2025, updates to Independent Living eligibility criteria made in October 2025, clearer guidance on independent living and National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) services and requirements, changes to the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children requirements, and to incorporate child welfare best practice updates. The [Access & Initial Assessment Standards](#) have been updated to reflect alignment with language changes made in the [Ongoing Services Standards](#) in March 2026.

The [Safety Intervention Standards](#) and [Ongoing Services Standards](#) have been updated to reflect practice changes outlined in [DCF Numbered Memo Series 2026-06i: Revisions to the Safety Intervention and Ongoing Standards related to In-Home Case Planning](#).

Previous changes to the Access & Initial Assessment Standards are detailed in [DSP Numbered Memo Series 2024-10](#). Previous changes to the Safety Intervention Standards are detailed in [DSP Information Memo Series 2020-05j](#).

## **POLICY AND PROCEDURE REQUIREMENTS**

Language changes across all Standards include:

- Non-custodial or absent parent is now referred to as non-household parent (only in specific instances referring to legal custody does the non-custodial identifier remain).
- The term case is no longer used to reference people/families; the term “family” is now used to focus on person/family centered language/practice. The use of “case” will only refer to documentation (i.e., case note, case plan, etc.).
- Previous references that identify parents and guardians now include the term Indian custodian.
- All remaining references to State Permanency Consultants have been removed, as this role no longer exists within the Department of Children and Families.
- Language changes have been incorporated that were made in Access & Initial Assessment and Safety Intervention Standards revisions in June 2024 and February 2025, respectively.
- Existing requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act for children in out-of-home care was added.
- Parent/caregiver was changed to parent/guardian. NOTE: Safety Standards will be updated with this language change when that set of standards is next revised.
- The Adoption Criteria and Process sections have been updated with language changes (i.e., “case” is replaced with “family” or removed all together.) This section also revised the referral process and requirements of a case transition staffing to include transitions from a county child welfare professional to a contracted public adoption child welfare professional.

Changes to Ongoing Services Standards policy and procedure include:

- Updated reasonable and prudent parent standard language to align with revisions in Wis. Admin. Code s. DCF 56.
- Incorporated relative and like-kin definition and applicability to policy and procedure in response to the passage of Wisconsin Act 119.
- Revised and clarified face-to-face contact requirements for children in out-of-home care, including contact for higher levels of care.
- Revised specific reference to the transition process for case transfer from county child welfare professional to the contracted public adoption child welfare professional.
- Added case transition requirements from public adoptions child welfare professional to the county for instances when public adoption processes have not been finalized within two years post-termination of parental rights legal proceedings.
- Updated and aligned the Wisconsin’s Interstate Compact for Placement of Children policy and procedures with federal requirements.
- Revised Independent Living requirements to include changes made by state and federal policies, clarified roles and responsibilities of agencies, and removed outdated information.

- Updated relative search requirements and guidance regarding how to best proceed in searching and obtaining specific background checks when utilizing criminal history and incarceration websites.
- Revised or removed appendices to reflect changes in state and federal policies.

In-Home Family Case Plan language and policy updates across all Standards include:

- Updated language throughout Ongoing Services Standards to center family voice and collaboration.
- Renamed Case Plan to Family Case Plan in Ongoing Services and Safety Intervention Standards.
- Defined and required the use of the child and family teaming process as a style of engagement used to develop and monitor the in-home Family Case Plan in collaboration with the family and identified natural supports.
- Removed detailed content within the Safety Intervention Standards related to case planning. In its place, the Safety Intervention Standards now provide direction on where to access in-home case planning requirements.
- Added requirements for in-home Family Case Plans to be used during child welfare in-home cases and are developed in accordance with the CPS in-home standards.

A full summary of the updates made to the Access & Initial Assessment, Safety Intervention, and Ongoing Services Standards is attached.

#### **ACTION SUMMARY**

Child welfare professionals will need to adhere to all requirements within Standards. No additional training is needed or required to implement these changes.

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT: DCF Area Administrator  
 CENTRAL OFFICE CONTACT: Out-of-Home Care Section  
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 Division of Safety and Permanence  
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MEMO WEB SITE: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cwportal/policy>  
 Attachments [Summary of Ongoing Services Standards Changes 2026](#)  
[Ongoing Services Standards 2026](#)  
[Access & Initial Assessment Standards 2026](#)  
[Safety Intervention Standards 2026](#)