



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

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Human Services

October 24, 2022

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**ATTENTION: DIRECTORS, CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS, MANAGERS,
SUPERVISORS, AND SOCIAL WORKERS**

SUBJECT: SAFE SLEEP POLICY

REQUIRED ACTION: Immediate Time Sensitive Information Only

PURPOSE: NOTIFICATION OF NEW CHILD WELFARE POLICY REGARDING SAFE SLEEP

Infant mortality due to unsafe sleep practices is increasing across North Carolina. Understanding Safe Sleep practices and educating families is especially important when engaging with families with infants (from birth to 12 months of age). During the provision of any child welfare services an effort to prevent co-sleeping and unsafe sleep fatalities must be made. The North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) is committed to providing local child welfare agencies with policy, guidance, and resources to promote best practice in working with birth, kinship, foster and adoptive parents on safe sleep. Resources pertaining to safe sleep should be incorporated into social work practice with all families parenting an infant who encounters the NC Child Welfare System. Additionally, social workers must include safe sleep practices in Plans of Safe Care (POSC), Safety Assessments and Family Service Agreements.

Policy on Safe Sleep has been added to the Cross Function section of the Child Welfare Manual and is effective 11/1/2022. A practice guide along with a Safe Sleep Tip Sheet has been added to the Child Welfare Resources section of the Child Welfare Manual. The purpose of these documents is to provide local child welfare workers policy and guidance on assessing and ensuring safe sleep practices are being followed in the home, at every stage of involvement until the child reaches one year of age.

Attached are the links for the Safe Sleep Practice Guide and two Tip Sheets.

The policy was published 10/21/22 and can be found on the Division's web page at:
<https://policies.ncdhhs.gov/divisional/social-services/child-welfare/policy-manuals/>

The revised changes in the [Cross Function](#) Section of the Child Welfare Manual include:

CPS INTAKE

When a report includes an infant, intake requires documentation about the infant's sleep space, how they are placed to sleep, and if the infant sleeps alone, if the reporter has the answer to these questions. It is required to document any concerns regarding substance use by caretakers. Additionally, inquiring about substance use (legal or illegal, treatment or recreational) and its impact on the caretaker's ability to ensure safety should also be thoroughly documented.

CPS FAMILY AND INVESTIGATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Child welfare workers who are completing an assessment on a home with an infant are required to document a discussion about infant safe sleep. The policy includes activities that should be conducted with the family to assess and ensure infants are sleeping safely in all environments applicable to the family's situation.

The NC Safety Assessment (DSS-5231) should include activities that address any concerns identified regarding safe sleep during the assessment. The use of safe sleep practices should be assessed at each follow up visit to the home. The DSS-5231 should be updated to include any plans to address any new identified safe sleep concerns as they arise during the assessment. In cases where a Temporary Safety Provider is identified they must provide a physical environment in compliance with and agree to parent consistent with infant safe sleep.

IN-HOME SERVICES

When a case has been found Services Needed and there are infants within the family, the child welfare worker should include a safe sleep plan as part of the In-Home Family Services Agreement.

- There should be continued assessment of infant safe sleep practices throughout the life of the In-Home case.
- All caretakers should be provided with education as needed and new questions arise.

PERMANENCY PLANNING

Birth parents, kinship caretakers, and foster and adoptive parents should be educated on infant safe sleep practices to ensure they are equipped with the most current information. It is critical that child welfare workers providing foster care through adoption services confirm that homes where infants are placed are in adherence to safe sleep practices.

- Foster care and adoption workers must document the infant safe sleep space until the infant is one year of age and any practice concerns on the North Carolina Monthly Permanency Planning Contact Record (DSS-5295) monthly.
- It is vitally important that infants have a safety approved sleep space that meets current standards and requirements prior to the infant being placed in the home.

PREVENTION SERVICES (WHERE PROVIDED)

Information provided to families by prevention service workers is the same as child welfare services. However, due to the voluntary nature of this service there are some differences. Prevention workers develop agreements with the family setting goals to address changes the family desires to make that do not require mandatory supervision to ensure safety for children.

- Infant safe sleep practices should be included in every prevention worker's education for a family with infants.
- This evaluation should include a conversational approach regarding these issues, provide education, and address any safe sleep concerns in the agreement with the family.

Additional topics for discussion and information to share with families is included in the guide along with resources and video links.

If you have any questions, contact your Regional Child Welfare Consultant, and include your local support manager.

Sincerely,

Kathy P Stone

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Section Chief for Safety and Prevention
Division of Social Services, Child Welfare
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Services

Cc: Susan Osborne, Assistant Secretary for County Operations
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Web Links: [Safe Sleep Practice Guide for Child Welfare Workers](#)
[Does your Baby Sleep Safe?](#)
[Help your Baby Sleep Safer](#)

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