Personal Safety in the Community Procedure

1.   Purpose

Inala Community House (ICH) Family Intervention Services (FIS) is committed to ensuring that workers are safe when working with service users in the community and particularly in service users' homes. ICH has systems in place that aim to ensure that risks to workers are minimised while still being able to provide high quality services to services users.

This procedure aims to ensure that all service user contact is conducted with a high level of safety and that workers are equipped with the means to avoid or manage potentially dangerous situations.

This procedure operates in accordance with the ICH Personal Safety in the Community Policy, Work Health and Safety Policy and associated procedures.

2.   Scope

This procedure applies to all employees, contractors, students and volunteers within ICH FIS. For the purpose of this procedure, these persons shall be referred to as workers. This procedure addresses ICH FIS requirements in alignment with the Department's most current Families Investment Specification.

3.   Definitions

Safety refers to physical, emotional and psychological well-being which can be impacted by hazards, the state of the environment, actions or inactions of others, accidents and vicarious trauma.

The Department refers to the Queensland Government Department responsible for Family Services programs and/or Child Safety.

Service User is any partner or care giver named in the referral for whom services will be provided including children.

Initial Case Consult the first formal meeting between the Department and ICH FIS to discuss the case, including the worries, needs and supports required, and risks. Other key stakeholders who know the family may also be invited to participate.

Meet and Greet is the first formal meeting between the ICH FIS Worker, ICH FIS Manager and service user.

4.   Procedure

4.1   Organisational approach to risk management

At an organisational level, ICH is dedicated to having a comprehensive risk management strategy which in addition to other things, helps to ensure the safety of all people on ICH premises. Refer to the ICH Risk Management Policy for further details.

ICH aims to ensure that risk management practices are adopted throughout the organisation as a prudent management practice and seeks to embed a culture of continuous improvement that encourages the continuous assessment, review and mitigation of risks throughout ICH. This procedure focuses on risk management practices associated with worker safety when working in the community.

4.2   Risks to ICH FIS workers

ICH FIS workers provide support to service users who are involved with the Department due to safety concerns for children. These service users may present with a range of complex issues which can include, but not limited to, substance misuse, domestic violence, mental health, unsafe or unstable housing, associations with high-risk persons, unhygienic environments, and other issues. These issues and behaviours can pose a risk to worker safety.

ICH FIS workers undertake a large percentage of their work with service users in their home environment. They also provide transportation to service users and supervision of family contact, often in the community.

The primary concern while conducting home or other offsite visits is the safety of workers and service users. This shall be done through a risk assessment process which involves both the ICH FIS Manager and ICH FIS workers, with input from the Department as required. Risk management shall occur in accordance with the ICH Work Health and Safety Policy.

It is important for all workers to recognise the wide-ranging types of risks which they may be exposed to when working in the community. Refer to Appendix 1 for further detail about the types of risks.

Risk Identification

Risks can be identified at any point in time by any worker however there are key stages where risks are identified and assessed. These stages include:

- The initial Referral Form which requests information relating to risks, which the Department completes based upon their observations and interactions with the family. This form is reviewed by the ICH FIS Manager upon receipt to determine whether the referral can be accepted (with consideration of any identified safety risks). The ICH FIS Manager may follow up with the Department to seek further information if required. Refer to Referral Acceptance Procedure for additional detail.

- The Initial Case Consult which is attended by the ICH FIS worker, ICH FIS Manager and the Department prior to the ICH FIS worker meeting the family. Risks and strategies for mitigating these are discussed at this meeting.

- The initial Meet and Greet with the service users, where two workers must always attend and undertake an assessment of the service user, any other people residing in the house, the home environment, and surrounds (including neighbours).

- All subsequent face-to-face communications with the service user, where workers must maintain a high level of risk awareness and may identify new risks through observations, communications or feedback from a third party.

The ICH FIS Manager can decline to accept a Referral if the risk is deemed to be unacceptable even with mitigation strategies. Refer to ICH FIS Referral Acceptance Procedure.

Assessment

- Prior to a first meeting with the family, the ICH FIS Worker and ICH FIS Manager will discuss identified risks (including any task associated risks) and determine if a Risk Management Plan (using the ICH FIS risk management template) is required.

- In some instances, a formal Risk Management Plan will not be required, however an alert on the service user's file will still be required (e.g., in the instance of an aggressive dog).

- If a Risk Management Plan is required, this will be developed by the ICH FIS Worker in consultation with the ICH FIS Manager.

- The Risk Management Plan must assess the consequences and likelihood of the risk occurring and determine and overall risk rating.

- For risks identified as high or extreme, the ICH FIS Manager will discuss the Risk Management Plan with the Chief Executive Officer. A record of this meeting will be case noted on the service user's file.

- The Risk Management Plan must be stored on the service user's file. An alert must be made against the service user's name with details about the risk, noting if there is a Risk Management Plan and the date for the review of the plan.

- The ICH FIS Manager will note the date of review for the Risk Management Plan on the master spreadsheet.

- The ICH FIS Worker must note on the Family Action Plan if there is a current Risk Management Plan at the time of a new plan and with each review.

- Risks must be assessed at each contact or home visit with a service user as their circumstances may have changed. Upon changes to identified risks, the ICH FIS Worker will notify the ICH FIS Manager as soon as practical after their return.

Risk Mitigation

The Risk Management Plan must identify practical strategies for mitigating risks and a reassessment of the risk must be outlined in the plan. ICH FIS workers are responsible for taking steps to ensure their safety during visits.

Prior to a face-to-face visit, workers are responsible for:

- Familiarising themselves with any identified risks prior to visiting. This includes checking for alerts on SRS and reviewing the risk management plan.

- Recording visit details on their calendar including meeting time, service user's name and address. All ICH FIS team members will have access to each other's calendars for the purposes of knowing where workers are and the expected time for return.

- Planning a safe location for the visit. In situations where safety is a known issue, the first visit with the service user should take place at a neutral venue and/or have two workers. This venue should not be in an isolated place.

- If a worker has any concerns about visiting with a service user or if safety is an identified risk, the worker may be accompanied by another worker

- Ensuring that the emergency duress alarm is located is accessible for the duration of the visit.

During face-to-face visits, workers are responsible for:

- Wearing appropriate clothes (avoiding scarfs/expensive jewellery or wearing enclosed shoes if environmental or biological risks are known or suspected).

- Carrying a valid ID card and Blue Card and avoid carrying/displaying cash, credit cards or other valuables.

- Carrying a charged mobile phone which is kept on during the service user visit.

- Carrying a duress alarm and knowing how to operate the alarm. See Duress Alarm Procedure for details.

- Conducting an environmental assessment prior to leaving the car and entering the home.

- Actively scanning for risks while interacting with the service user for the duration of the visit.

- Monitoring the behaviour of service users to identify escalations and then taking appropriate action to de-escalate a situation or end the contact.

- If upon arrival, the door is answered by an unfamiliar person, check that the service user is present and expecting your visit before entering the premises.

- Choosing a safe place to sit while meeting with a service user whether this be in the service users' home or any other locations. Be aware of access and exits of the premises and ensure that exits are not blocked.

- Not providing service users with personal mobile numbers or home addresses.

- Never using a personal vehicle to transport a service user.

- Not using a personal vehicle for client visits unless prior approval has been obtained from the ICH FIS Manager. When approval is granted, workers must ensure that they have parked their private vehicle away from where they are meeting the service user to avoid identification of their vehicle.

- Undertaking physical tasks within one's physical limits and skill capabilities (eg not climbing ladders, not using power tools to install electrical items).

- Checking any equipment used to ensure that it is safe, appropriate for the task and is used in a correct manner (e.g., installing car seats, using electrical equipment, etc).

> If a worker believes their well-being is at risk of being compromised and they are unable to leave the situation, the worker must use their duress alarm or contact 000. See Emergency Duress Procedure for details.

An ICH FIS Worker must never travel in a service user's vehicle. In exceptional circumstances, the ICH FIS Manager in consultation with the CEO may permit a worker to be a passenger in a non-service user vehicle (not including an ICH vehicle).

If a worker identifies a risk during a visit, they should assess the level of risk to their potential safety and/or the safety of others. The ICH FIS Worker should take appropriate action to ensure their own safety and if safe to do so, the safety of others as well.

If a risk cannot be safely mitigated or a worker feels unsafe at any time with a service user, they must leave the situation. The worker always has a right to cut short a visit or not see a service user if they have safety concerns. In these events, the worker must inform the ICH FIS Manager and write a detailed case note. This will trigger a review of risks associated with working with this service user and the need for an updated or new Risk Management Plan.

After home visits, workers are responsible for notifying the ICH FIS Manager of any changes to the identified risks associated with the service user and documenting this on SRS. The ICH FIS Manager will consult with the worker to determine any risk mitigation strategies and create/review a Risk Management Plan.

If an ICH FIS Worker is working alone after 5pm, they are required to notify the ICH FIS Manager (or nominated contact person) of their need to work late, their location and expected finish time. They are also to text the FIS Manager (or nominated contact person) upon their departure from the office once they are safely in their car. Refer to Working Alone After 5pm Procedure for details.

If a worker needs to access the office either before 7am or after 7pm, they must seek approval from the ICH FIS Manager (or nominated contact person) who will organise for the security alarm to be disabled.

If a worker experiences a breakdown or an accident while in a work vehicle, they must comply with the ICH Vehicle Use and Safe Driving Procedure.

Review of Risks

Risks should be reviewed regularly to determine if any updates are required to the service user information or to any risk management strategies. A Risk Management Plan will have a review date noted at the time of development and at each subsequent update. This must be noted in the SRS alerts and also in the Master Spreadsheet.

Risk management reviews will be undertaken:

- Informally at each point of contact with the service user, where each worker assesses risk based on their observations of the service user or other people present, the environment and any other factors.

- At monthly supervision with the ICH FIS Manager.

- When there are significant changes in the service user's circumstances, which result in increased risk or decreased risk.

- After incidents or where face-to-face contact has not been able to proceed based on safety concerns

- At three-monthly review points for the Family Action Plan.

The review process is as follows:

- ICH FIS Worker and ICH FIS Manager will discuss the current risks considering available information.

- The Risk Management Plan will be reviewed and updated when required.

- If required, a Risk Management Plan will be developed, and an alert placed on SRS.

4.3   Incidents

Any incidents relating to ICH FIS workers, service users or ICH property must be promptly reported. See ICH FIS Incident Reporting Procedure for details.

The ICH FIS Manager will debrief with workers after any incidents occur when needed and where appropriate refer workers to the Employee Assistance Program.

4.4   Communication and Training

The ICH FIS Manager will consult with all workers about risks. This shall be through the case management process, supervision and team meetings.

The ICH FIS Manager shall ensure that workers are trained in risk management strategies and the use of safety equipment.

4.5   Responsibilities

The ICH FIS Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring workers know that they can discuss risks and worries about their safety or the safety of co-workers at any time with the ICH FIS Manager and that measures will be taken to ensure that risks are mitigated.

- Ensuring Risk Management Plans are developed with appropriate mitigation strategies.

- Ensuring Risk Management Plans and alerts are updated following a change in the identified risks.

ICH FIS workers are responsible for:

- Identifying risks and actively scan for risk throughout engagement with the service user.

- Consulting with the ICH FIS Manager and taking appropriate action to safely mitigate risks.

- Complying with risk management strategies.

- Actively review risks as required and ensure information about risks is kept current

5. Review

This procedure shall be reviewed every five years.

6. Related Documents

Policies
ICH Work Health and Safety Policy
ICH Risk Management Policy
ICH Privacy Policy
ICH Vehicle Use Policy
ICH Confidentiality Policy
ICH Client Protection Policy
ICH Code of Conduct
ICH Risk Management Policy
ICH FIS Case Management Policy
ICH FIS Incident Management & Reporting Policy
ICH FIS Philosophy Statement

Procedures
ICH FIS Incident Management and Reporting Procedure
ICH FIS Working Alone Procedure
ICH FIS Emergency Duress Procedure
ICH FIS Worker Induction Procedure
ICH Vehicle Use and Safe Driving Procedure

Other documents
Master Spreadsheet

Forms
ICH FIS Referral
ICH FIS Risk Management Plan

References
Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)
The Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)
Qld Human Services Quality Framework
Investment Specifications

Other
SRS Alerts Tab

Appendix 1: Risk categories

Risks can include but are not limited to:

People	- Service users' history - Service users' current behaviour - Likelihood of changes in service users' behaviour - Alcohol or drugs - Mental health - Violence (including domestic and family violence) - Visitors in the home - Physical and/or verbal abuse - Threats of violence - Intimidation.
Environmental	- Hoarding with difficult access or exit - Slips, trips and falls - Uncontrolled and/or aggressive pets - Uneven surfaces, incomplete or damaged building work - Damaged or broken furniture - Insects and other vermin - Access to weapons - Hazardous substances used in the home.
Biological	- Blood - Vomit - Faeces - Infectious health conditions - Sharps - Unhygienic surfaces.
Task related	- Manual handling (including bending, lifting, pulling, carrying, construction of small household items) - Working at heights (i.e., above 300mm) - Use of manual or power tools
Travel	- Fatigue - Transporting service users - Breakdowns - Traffic incidents.