

## Strengthening Ties Empowering Parents (STEPS)

### Policies and Procedures

#### Purpose and Approach

STEPS is a prevention program that empowers families to strengthen their family and prevent child abuse and neglect that often comes from stressors, including childhood trauma, poverty, and a lack of positive social connections. STEPS uses a strength-based, trauma-informed lens to engage families, build resiliency and prevent any future abuse or neglect.

The Strengthening Families' Protective Factors Framework is the approach used as a foundation to the program. Strengthening Families is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. This framework is based on engaging families, programs and communities through building five (5) key protective factors<sup>1</sup>

Many of the items needed to support families that come to the attention of the child welfare system include concrete supports, social connections and enhancing parental capacity to manage stress, which are components of the *Strengthening Families' Protective Factors Framework*.

STEPS Prevention Workers (PW) are bachelor level staff trained in wrap around case management, evidenced based parenting, and program assessment tools.

#### Program Criteria

The STEPS program serves families that are at-risk of abuse or neglect. Eligible families must have one (1) or more minor children living in the home. Families must have a DCF designation of SAFE with high or very high risk.

The following groups are **ineligible** for the STEPS program: parents with no child (ren) in the home; independent, under-aged parents, and families with open Dependency cases with DCF.

#### Referral Procedures

1. FSSNF Family Preservation Intake Specialist receives fax or email from the referral source with a Family Preservation Program Referral Form and a **completed** FFA indicating a **SAFE** finding and a risk assessment with a High/Very High result. Referrals can be faxed to (904) 265-6905 or emailed to [Duval.preservationintake@fssnf.org](mailto:Duval.preservationintake@fssnf.org) / [Nassau.preservationintake@fssnf.org](mailto:Nassau.preservationintake@fssnf.org).
2. After review or completion of the referral form, Family Preservation Intake assigns the case to one (1) of two (2) agencies providing STEPS services: Jewish Families Community Services (JFCS) or Daniel Kids.

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<sup>1</sup> The Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Strengthening Families: A protective factors framework*. <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/About-Strengthening-Families.pdf>

3. STEPS referrals are distributed according to time received. Any referrals received after 3 pm will be dated for the following business day.

## Assessments

1. Once referral is received, the STEPS Worker will review the Family Functioning Assessment (FFA) from the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN). The FFA-I shall be printed and placed in the Section One of the cases file.

2. If the initial referral indicates the client was referred to the Child Protection Team (CPT), the preliminary or full CPT report should be reviewed in the Medical tab of FSFN after being uploaded by the DCF CPI. The Supervisors will discuss at the initial supervisory case review, which must take place within the first thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the case.

### 3. Assessment Tools Completed on STEPS Cases

- ▶ Protective Factors Survey (PFS)
  - ▶ PFS to be explained to parent/caregiver on initial home visit. The parent is to fill out the survey alone unless assistance is required/requested. Prevention staff shall collect the survey from the parent within 30 days of case assignment.
  - ▶ The PFS results shall be documented as a note in FSFN and the survey will be attached to FSFN note.
  - ▶ The PFS Scores are to be entered in the body of the Support Screen.
- ▶ ASQ and ASQSE
  - ▶ These assessments are to be completed with family within 45 days of case assignment.
- ▶ Social Connections Tool
  - ▶ The tool shall be completed with all families. After completing the document, the tool should be uploaded in FSFN Filing Cabinet as a “Other” image category and the Image Type labeled “Family Finding Tool”. Additionally, a copy of the document will be provided to the family.

3. The STEPS Worker must contact the family within 48 hours of case assignment. All attempts to visit/contact the family must be documented in a chronological note into the FSFN database within 48 hours. Hard copies should be placed in the client’s case file.

4. Only after following all procedures below, should a STEPS Worker consider a family “unable to contact”:

#### Initial Contact

- At least three (3) attempted Phone Contacts to the family;
- At least one (1) attempted Home Visit, with an Introductory Letter left at perspective client’s residence, with a response time of (48) hours. Non-response is considered service refusal.
- If the family does not have a phone, Staff must attempt at least one (1) **Additional** Home Visit.

#### Continued Efforts:

- If the family is engaged in services and disengages, a Continued Participation letter is provided at participant's residence, family must be given five (5) calendar days to respond. Non-response is considered service refusal.
- A minimum of two attempts to reengage shall be made.

If a family is not located, fails to engage, or stops participating in services, the STEPS Worker must inform the CPI, CPIS, and the STEPS Oversight Coordinator (OC) via email. The CPI/CPIS is allowed 48 hours to respond to email. If response is received, case will be "Close the Loop" staffed to determine next steps. If no response is received from CPI/CPIS, STEPS Worker will staff case for closure with STEPS Supervisor. All actions will be documented in FSFN.

6. STEPS services will be available to the family upon the first scheduled home visit. These services include Case Management, In-Home Parenting, and Budgeting Instruction. STEPS may also make available an Integrated Practice Team (IPT) meeting to assist families in achieving their Family Plan goals. If an IPT is needed, the STEPS Worker will complete the IPT Referral Form and send it to the IPT Facilitator for scheduling.

- The Family Plan shall be created in partnership with the family within 30 days of initial assignment. The results of the Protective Factors Survey should also guide goals added to the Family Plan.

7. For non-English speaking families when a bi-lingual STEPS Worker is not available at the assigned agency, STEPS Workers should utilize Interpreter Services to assist them with the initial visit and subsequent home visits.

## Visitation and Contact

1. DCF has now adopted the SDM Risk tool to be used while investigating a family for abuse/neglect. STEPS cases being referred from DCF will have the SDM Risk tool included. The SDM risk score will be entered as the initial score in Family Support Module. The Protective Factors Survey scoring will be entered on initial collection and before closure. The difference of the scores will be documented in the Support Module.

### High/Very High SDM Ongoing

- Face to Face visits shall occur bi-weekly, at a minimum.
  - Children are to be seen at least once every 30 days within the home.
    - All children receiving services will be seen within 15 days of referral assignment.
  - Parent are to be visited in-home once every 30 days at a minimum.

**If a child is born into a STEPS family, the home shall be assessed for appropriateness and must be completed within three (3) business days to acknowledge the birth of the child. The following tasks shall take place at a minimum:**

- **Assessment of safe sleep arrangement, appropriate home conditions for a newborn, access to adequate food for all children, and an assessment/documentation of the parent's preparedness for the new child.**

- **The new child will need to be added in FSFN and a new Support Module will need to be created.**

2. If the family disengages services, the following procedures should be followed:

- If the family misses one (1) scheduled visit/appointment without contacting the STEPS Worker, attempt to contact family will be made by phone. If the family does not have a phone, a Continued Participation Letter taken to the family's home, whereby the family is given five (5) days to respond. Non-response is considered service refusal.
- If attempt is made by phone and a voicemail is required, after providing 24 hours for client to contact, a Continued Participation Letter will be dropped off, whereby the family is given five (5) days to respond. Non-response is considered service refusal.
- The Child Protective Investigator (CPI) and Child Protective Investigator Supervisor (CPIS) will be notified via email regarding lack of participation with services upon worker sending letter and a **"Close the Loop"** staffing will be held between the PW, OC, and CPI/CPIS. (High/Very High )

3. If at anytime during the program the family expresses disinterest or unwillingness to participate in the STEPS program, the STEPS Worker informs the CPI/CPIS, their immediate Supervisor and the FSS Oversight Coordinator and a **"Close the Loop"** staffing will be held. The STEPS Worker enters a detailed closure note into FSFN and follows appropriate case closure procedure. If a new maltreatment is identified, a call to the hotline must be made.

## Supervisor Reviews

1. The STEPS Worker meets at least once every thirty (30) days with their supervisor to ensure proper case documentation and that services are meeting family needs. Only Supervisors are allowed to input Supervisor Reviews, which will be documented in FSFN.

3. Supervisors must conduct case reviews of all new cases no later than thirty (30) days after the case opens and every thirty (30) days thereafter, until case closure. FSSNF Quality Management Department and Oversight Coordinators also conduct audits of STEPS cases and provides a summary to each agency. Supervisors will address all children who are ages a 0-3 during their monthly supervision. 0-3 assessment should include Safe Sleep, safety kit (if available), and/or referrals were made to support the 0-3 population and/or pregnant mothers.

## Case Staffings

STEPS Case Staffings:

1. **Special Staffing/ Close the Loop**- a review of a case between CMO, CPI, and FSS Oversight regarding a case that have unresolved high risk factors or the family is not engaging, that may need to be escalated.

2. **110 Day Staffing**: a review of cases that have been open longer than **110 days** will be formally staffed with OC, FSS Management and CMO. **Any case continuing past 120 days will need a formal request and staffing with FSSNF. If an exception is granted the case will close at or before 150 days.**

3. **Integrated Practice Team (IPT) Staffing:** a review of cases to help find resolution by using community partners to assist families be successful. If a family disengages in services refer this case to FSS for an IPT Staffing. (High/Very High)

## Case Closure

1. **Supervisors must review** and approve **all case closures** at or before case closure to ensure that protective factors to strengthen the family have increased and the risk has decreased.
2. A case may be closed when any of the following situations occur:
  - a) The family's needs have been met and/or the level of risk is reduced
  - b) The family refuses services
  - c) The family moves out of Duval or Nassau County
  - d) The family disengages in services
  - e) The child(ren) are no longer residing in the home
3. The STEPS Worker's closure note must provide a summary that includes how the Family Plan reflects the Initial Referral, what services were provided to address client needs, what client needs were met, and if client risk was lowered. For client risk, the STEPS Worker can reference the Protective Factors Survey scores and write a summary assessment.
4. At case closure the STEPS Worker will provide the client with a Letter of Completion either in person or by mail. Client will initial each service completed and sign the letter. However, if the worker is unable to contact the family, a copy of the closure letter will be mailed, notifying of case closure. STEPS Workers will refer, and list additional service providers on this letter for client's future needs. The STEPS Worker will keep a copy for the case file and client will receive a copy for their records.
5. Status ending comments will include reason for case closure including a family's refusal to begin or continue to receive services. Prior to closing as unsuccessful intervention, a **"Close the Loop"** staffing must occur between the PW, OC, and CPI/CPIS for cases where families are refusing to engage.