

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Who are the intended users of this Handbook?

The primary users of this Handbook are Division of Child Support (DCS) Support Enforcement Officers and Technicians, Claims Officers, and their managers, and support staff who work together to provide child support services to the public. Field office staff and headquarters publications staff worked together to design the Handbook to provide division policy and suggested procedure to staff in an easy-to-use reference. The Handbook presents information in simple visual format and provides quick cross references to federal and state law, and to other DCS and external sources. Staff designed the format of the paper version of the Handbook to look much like the intranet presentation.

We do not intend the Handbook to provide an approach to case work that is directive and exclusive. Staff must use their discretion on how best to approach a case based upon guidance from this book and from their own professional experience and good judgment. Staff should make case decisions within the boundaries of:

- State and federal law and regulation.
- DCS Mission, Vision, and goals.
- The Division's policies.

How do I best access and navigate the Handbook?

The primary medium for this Handbook is electronic, on the DCS intranet. If you have access to the DSHS intranet, you can view this Handbook at www.dcs.dshs.wa.gov. The secondary presentation of this material is in print form. DCS will supply a copy of the printed version of the Handbook to staff on request. (If non-DCS personnel ask for printed copies of the Handbook, refer them to the Public Disclosure Coordinator in DCS Headquarters.)

Both versions of the Handbook contain DCS policy and suggested procedure. The printed version lists the legal citations staff need to consider when making decisions. However, the electronic version of the manual provides immediate cross-references (called hypertext links) from these cites to laws and to other documents over the Internet. Additionally, the electronic version allows DCS to develop on-line tools to help staff with case work decisions.

We divided the Handbook into chapters based on general stages and problems encountered in case work. (See the Table of Contents). We divided each chapter into short sections. Every section begins with a descriptive title. Each section supplies information useful in understanding the process described in the section. Each section begins with a table like the one below.

Laws	This list includes USC, CFR, RCW, WAC, and other cites helpful in deciding a course of action for the particular section. Most contain a short description to help staff decide if this particular law is useful in their particular case problem. The intranet version provides hypertext links to these cites. The law websites are maintained by other sources, such as Congress for the USC, or the Code Reviser for WAC and RCW.
Policy	DCS intends policy statements to reflect and supplement the law and the Division's Mission, Vision, and Goals.

Procedure	In the paper presentation of the manual, the procedure is found on the page following this table. Our goal is to keep the procedure to less than a page and restricted to a single topic. Usually, the procedure is presented in question and answer format. Occasionally, the procedure is presented as a chart or table. We do not write procedure as a mandatory method to accomplish the policy and law. Rather, we offer the procedure as a solution. Staff are free to develop alternative solutions to case work problems. We encourage you to contact the Publications Unit (see below) with your innovations and suggestions for future additions to this desk reference.
Visual Aids	We incorporate flow charts, tables, examples, and other visual aids as tools to help staff accomplish case work. Some of these are only available on the intranet and are not in the paper copy.
Automated Actions	Case work and SEMS are so tightly integrated that we feel it is essential that staff understand the relationship between what actions they take on a case and the actions the computer may take or recommend.
SEMS Screens	Just about every case action relates to a SEMS screen. Please check your Help screens in SEMS for further guidance. Here, we cross reference to the SEMS manual, so staff can see the specific SEMS screens discussed. The intranet version of the Handbook has hypertext links to those screen prints.
Forms Used	Many of the actions taken on a case involve referring to or generating a form. We list those forms in this part of the table. The intranet version has hypertext links to a printable view of the forms and instructions.
Hearing and Conference Board Rights	Many of the actions we take as an agency allow parties to request an adjudicative proceeding or a conference board. We list the specific rights here. Of course, parties may also exercise judicial remedies for many actions.
Personal Notes [Add a note]	You have not added any notes to this handbook section.
See Also	Here we reference other sections of the Handbook and other resources that staff may find useful in dealing with the material in this section. The intranet version shows these references as hypertext links.
Frequently Asked Questions	Staff often ask questions that involve tricky policy problems. We list some of those questions and answers on the intranet presentation of this volume. We also supply a printed version of these questions in canary notices.

What are some standard formats to look for in the Handbook?

In the hard copy presentation of this handbook, Internet hypertext links will appear with double underline. **Example:** <http://www.dcs.dshs.wa.gov/dcs/search/>.

Titles of forms, in both the electronic and paper presentations, are bold text, followed by the form number. **Example:** **Information Update**, [DSHS 18-011A](#).

For a list of acronyms and other terms, please see the Glossary.



How should we expect to see Handbook updates

The DCS Publications Unit will revise this Handbook on a four-year cycle. It is our goal to publish updates to sections annually rather than rewrite the entire book every four years. Of course, changes to legislation and policy will drive changes to some sections more often.

DCS uses Canary Notices (CNs) to inform staff about new policies and procedures or when policies and procedures change. When DCS places a review draft of a proposed CN on Today's News under Documents for Review, you have the opportunity to make suggestions or voice your concerns. The CN takes effect when we assign it a number following the initial review. However, some CNs advise staff of changes in law or rule. In that case, you may have to change procedure to comply with the new law, even before the CN is published. After review, DCS publishes the CN in final form on the intranet and provides staff with yellow (canary) paper copies. As long as the text is in CN form, a CN is a work in progress. As you become familiar with a CN's procedures, we encourage you to recommend improvements to help headquarters staff evaluate the policies and procedures presented. Please e-mail comments and recommendations on CNs to the Policy or Publications Unit (see below). The CN is eventually incorporated into the DCS Handbook.

Sometimes staff request clarification of a policy. A Policy Clarification Memo (PCM) is a written response from the director to such a request. See DCS [Administrative Policy 1.13](#) for information about requesting policy clarification. As with Canary Notices, the DCS Publications Unit reviews PCMs to integrate them into the Handbook as part of the Handbook revision process. Once we publish the revision, the PCM is obsolete.

When the intranet version of the Handbook changes, you have access to the old and new text. To view past policy,

click on the button that looks like this: . Another button that looks like this:  links to a list of all changes since the last publication of the Handbook. The list includes links to the changed pages and includes strike-out language showing old and new text. The intranet Handbook also links to any CNs that affect a given section.

These links show up as yellow buttons that look like this: 

How do I suggest changes or ideas I have concerning the Handbook?

You may contact the DCS Policy Unit to recommend changes or clarification to policy. The unit's e-mail address is DCSPolicy@dshs.wa.gov.

You may contact the Publications Unit to recommend changes to the printed or intranet presentation of this Handbook, changes in procedure, or to DCS's forms. The DCS intranet also has a comment button on most pages that looks like this: . As an alternative to using e-mail, you may send comments by pressing the comment button and completing the

form that appears on your browser. We strongly encourage you to contact us about improvements to this Handbook.

