
From: Fitzjarrald, Ellie
Sent: Friday, October 11, 2002 3:30 PM
To: ALL DPA Statewide Staff
Cc: Sturrock, Kathy; DMA POLicy; DPA Policy
Subject: Policy for Completing Home Visits related to ATAP Penalties for Non-Compliance

Broadcast to All DPA Staff & DPA Service Providers

From the Policy and Program Development Team

Policy for Completing Home Visits related to ATAP Penalties for Non-Compliance

Attached are the policy guidance and tools developed to implement the home visit requirement that must be met before a family can have their temporary assistance reduced from 40% to 75% or have their case closed when an adult is penalized for failing to comply with the FSSP, work activity, or child support cooperation requirements.

This policy is effective immediately. More details about this are included in the implementation memo. If you have any questions, please contact the Policy and Program Development Team at DPAPolicy@health.state.ak.us

Policy staff are also available to teleconference with your office or unit to answer questions. If you are interested in this, please email us at [DPAPolicy](mailto:DPAPolicy@health.state.ak.us).

Assistance Regional Managers, please share this information with our service providers.

TO: All DPA Staff & DPA Service Providers

FROM: Ellie Fitzjarrald, Chief
Policy and Program Development

RE: Penalty Home Visiting Policy

DATE: October 11, 2002

This memo presents the new Alaska Temporary Assistance Program policy for conducting a home visit when an individual is under penalty. This policy is key to successful implementation of the new penalty policy, as a home visit must be attempted before a penalty can progress to the 75% or 100% level.

Also attached are documents that outline the elements needed for making a decision to impose a 75% or 100% penalty reduction in assistance. The "Home Visit for Penalty Progression" will be used as a template for documenting a decision to progress a penalty, and Field Services is working on developing this into a standardized case note (CANO) format. "Home Visit for Penalty Progression Field Notes" is an optional form designed as a tool for field staff to gather information while making a home visit to an individual under penalty. Additional procedures and protocols for home visiting are currently being developed by Field Services and will be released shortly.

Because the law creating progressive penalties as well as the requirement for home visiting became effective in July 2002, November is the first month that it is possible for a penalty to progress to the 75% reduction level. Families who have been under penalty since July have been identified and their names forwarded to Regional Managers for distribution to field offices. By our best estimate, approximately 100 families have been continuously under penalty since July. These cases need to be reviewed to determine whether the continuation of a penalty is appropriate and if so, a home visit must be attempted before their penalties can progress from 40% to 75% of their benefits. Field offices may discover additional families under penalty since July, and these families should also be scheduled for a home visit.

Because of the timing of this policy guidance, there may not be sufficient time left in the month of October to visit every family approaching a 75% benefit reduction and provide timely notice of adverse action. If a home visit cannot be attempted or completed in time for the penalty to progress to the 75% level in November, the family will remain at the 40% level and a home visit can be attempted and/or completed in time for a progressive penalty to be imposed in December. Local offices will determine the priority for completing home visits.

As always, we will appreciate feedback from the field as you implement this policy.

If you have questions please contact Carolyn Spalding or Angela Salerno in Policy and Program Development unit. Thank you.

POLICY FOR HOME VISIT TO INCREASE PENALTY TO 75% OR FULL FAMILY SANCTION

Introduction

When an adult is penalized for failing to comply with the FSSP, work activity, or child support cooperation requirements, the amount of the penalty and reduction in the family's payment increase over time, or until the individual complies. The reduction in the family's maximum cash assistance amount progresses as follows:

Months one through four:	40%
Months five through eight:	75%
Month 9 and thereafter:	100% (full family sanction and case closure)

The progression from the 40% to the 75% reduction, or from the 75% to the full family sanction is not automatic. The following actions must be taken before a family's assistance can be reduced by 75% or their case closed:

- ❖ Complete a home visit. If a home visit cannot be completed, document the attempts to make the visit.
- ❖ Consider any information obtained from a home visit, other information about the family, and the availability of services in the community that might fit the family's needs.
- ❖ Document that the health, safety and well-being of the children in the family will not be significantly jeopardized by imposition of the 75% or 100% reduction in assistance.

If a home visit is not or cannot be attempted, the family's assistance cannot be reduced beyond 40%.

Purpose of the home visit

The primary purpose of the requirement for a home visit before imposing a 75% or full reduction in assistance is to ensure that we have done everything possible to re-engage the family in efforts toward self-sufficiency and to determine the effect of the reduction on the children. The required home visit is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- ❖ To observe firsthand the family's situation;
- ❖ To encourage the recipient to comply with the activity for which they were penalized;
- ❖ To determine if the recipient is refusing to comply, unable to comply, or needs additional supports or services; and,
- ❖ To gather information to assess the impact of further reductions in benefits if the recipient is able but chooses not to comply.

To accomplish these objectives, it is essential that every effort is made to establish a mutually respectful relationship between the worker and the family.

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Health, Safety and Well-Being

The determination that the health, safety and well-being of the children will not be significantly jeopardized by reductions in assistance beyond 40% means that further loss of assistance will not result in conditions that threaten the children's health or safety. If there is any indication that the children's health or safety could be threatened, the family's cash assistance will not be reduced beyond 40%.

Conditions that threaten health or safety include those when the family:

- ❖ does not have sufficient income or resources to provide for housing, food, transportation, or other essential needs; or,
- ❖ does not have access to an alternative means of support, such as from a relative, live-in partner, or community resource, to meet those essential needs; or,
- ❖ the children will be unable to stay in the home if benefits are further reduced or ended; or
- ❖ is working with a division within the Department of Health and Social Services, or with another social service agency, for the safe return of a child temporarily removed from the home, or to prevent removal of a child from the home, and that effort would be disrupted if benefits ended, resulting in the child being at risk of placement into emergency shelter or foster care.

Arranging the Home Visit

The home visit is made anytime after the initial penalty is imposed and before a further reduction is made. The home visit may be made by the case manager, other designated staff, partner agencies or an approved vendor. The visit may be made with staff from other agencies if appropriate releases of information have been obtained.

Procedures for conducting home visits are provided in the Administrative Procedures Manual section 105-9 and may be supplemented by regional or office procedures.

The essential steps for arranging a home visit are:

1. Contact the recipient to try to arrange a home visit at a time agreeable to the family. More than one means of contacting the family may be needed and each may need to be tried more than once. Methods include telephone calls to the home, messages left at contact numbers, notices, or in-person meetings.
2. If the recipient cannot be reached, schedule a time and send a notice to the family informing them when the home visit will be made and asking them to respond if they want to schedule a different time.

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3. Explain that the purpose of the home visit is to explore the family's situation, discuss ways to end the reduction to their assistance, and describe what will happen next if they continue to not comply.
4. Document each attempt to arrange the home visit in a case notation (CANO) in the EIS case record. The case note must explain what was done, when and the result.

Following are suggested steps for arranging the home visit:

- a. Make telephone calls to the home or leave messages at contact numbers requesting a time to make the home visit.
- b. If unable to reach by phone, send one or more notices asking the recipient to contact the worker to schedule the home visit.
- c. If the recipient does not respond, send the notice informing them of the time at which the worker will make the home visit and ask them to respond if they want to schedule a different time.
- d. If the recipient does not respond to the notice of the scheduled home visit but is not home at the time of the visit, a note may be left asking them to contact the worker to arrange another time.

A decision may be made in consultation with the supervisor that a home visit cannot be attempted due to lack of staff or travel resources, or because the home's location is inaccessible or remote. This decision must be documented by a CANO in the EIS case record. In these cases, the family's assistance will not be reduced beyond 40%.

Making the Home Visit

Before the visit, review the case management and eligibility records, and contact the eligibility worker to obtain pertinent information about the family's household members, housing situation and income and expenditures. When making the home visit, follow recommended office procedures to protect personal safety, such as leaving an itinerary, checking in with a central contact, or carrying a cell phone.

The home visit provides the opportunity to observe the family's living situation and identify any indicators of problems or challenges that may be contributing to an individual's inability to participate, or that may make the family's situation worse if assistance is further reduced. The following areas should be addressed during the visit in order to re-engage and encourage the recipient to comply with the activity for which they were penalized:

- ✓ Determine if the recipient understands why their cash assistance is reduced and what they have to do to end the reduction. Some individuals may not understand what is required due to low literacy skills or limited English.

POLICY FOR HOME VIST TO INCREASE PENALTY TO 75%
OR FULL FAMILY SANCTION

- ✓ Ensure the family understands that they are using months of assistance that may count towards the 60-month time limit.
- ✓ Explore the reasons the family gives for not complying with the activity for which they are penalized and what additional supports or services they think they need in order to comply.
- ✓ Determine if there are any problems or challenges that need to be addressed so that the recipient can comply if they are willing, or if the recipient is now exempt from completing the required activity. Some possible issues might be marital or family disruptions, children's behavior problems, immediate legal concerns, illness, or lack of child care.
- ✓ Revise the family self-sufficiency plan if appropriate to include an alternate activity and any supports or services to be provided.
- ✓ Explain that the family's assistance may be reduced further if the recipient continues to not comply with the activity for which they were penalized.

To gather information to assess the impact of further benefit reductions, ask the family for their viewpoint on their current situation: how they are managing on their current benefit amount, how they expect to maintain their household, and what they plan to do if benefits are reduced further. Information to be considered includes:

- ✓ Housing situation – is it stable, is the family receiving, or could they receive or retain, a subsidy,
- ✓ Utility costs – what are the costs of essential utilities such as water, heat and electricity, and basic phone service,
- ✓ Other basic living expenses such as food, clothing, or transportation,
- ✓ Child support obligations that must be met for a child outside the home,
- ✓ Income available to the household (other than Temporary Assistance),
- ✓ Other resources or support available from relatives or friends,
- ✓ Alternate services or support available in the community.

A description of the home visit and a summary of the information obtained are documented in a case notation (CANO) in EIS using the *Home Visit for Penalty Progression* template.

If the Family will not allow a Home Visit

In some cases, the family may not agree to or allow the home visit to be made. They may refuse entry to the home, not respond to contacts to arrange a home visit, or not be at home at the pre-arranged time. In these situations, staff ensures that all attempts to arrange and to make the home visit are documented in the case record and then proceed with the determination as to whether assistance should be reduced beyond 40%.

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Determination to further reduce assistance

The final step before reducing a family's assistance by 75%, or imposing a full family sanction (100%) and closing the case, is to decide if the reduction will result in conditions that threaten the health or safety of the children in the family. This may be done in a staffing meeting that includes other staff or agencies that have worked with the family. The decision will consider all available information about the family obtained from the home visit, other contacts with the family, collateral contacts, the eligibility worker, the case management and eligibility records, and contacts with other staff or agencies. The decision must be documented in the case record, and record the elements used in making the decision:

- the family's understanding of the reasons for the penalty,
- whether they will take action to comply with the activity for which the penalty was imposed and if not, any reasons they gave,
- if there are any problems or challenges that need to be addressed so that the recipient can comply if they are willing, or if the recipient is now exempt from completing the required activity,
- if the family self-sufficiency plan is being revised and what additional supports and services are to be provided,
- a description of the family's basic living expenses for housing, utilities, food, clothing or transportation, and any child support obligations that must be met for a child not in the home,
- a description of the extent to which the family's available income, resources and supports will cover these expenses,
- a description of community services that are available to meet the family's basic needs, and
- an assessment of whether further reduction in the assistance amount will result in conditions that threaten the children's health or safety by depriving them of essential needs.

The documentation must include the decision made and the action taken to implement it, and must be entered in a CANO in the EIS case record using the *Home Visit for Penalty Progression* template.

Follow-up

If information is obtained at the home visit that impacts eligibility or indicates possible fraud, it should be given to the eligibility worker and a fraud referral made if appropriate.

If as a result of the home visit or other contacts with the family, the case manager has concerns about abuse, neglect or the safety of the children, they will contact DFYS with their concerns.

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Once a family receives a reduction in assistance of 75%, the case manager should maintain contact with the family to try to re-engage them in working towards their self-sufficiency. Before these families reach eight months under penalty, another home visit will have to be made or attempted, and the decision made whether the full 100% reduction in assistance will result in conditions that threaten the health or safety of the children.

The case manager should also continue to try to re-engage families whose assistance was not reduced further to 75% or 100%. For these families, the case manager may do further home visits and make the decision to increase the reduction in assistance later if the family's situation changes and the well-being of the children is no longer significantly jeopardized.

Once a family's assistance is reduced by 75% or 100%, it cannot be changed back to a 40% reduction. The family still has the option to comply with the required activity in order to lift the penalty.

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION

Elements needed for documenting a decision to impose a 75% or 100% penalty reduction in assistance

ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION
HOME VISIT:	<p>If a home visit was made, list date and time of visit, who made the visit (including staff from other agencies), and observations made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • household members present • housing situation • living conditions inside home • behavior/interactions of household members.
<p>IF HOME VISIT WAS NOT MADE, LIST ATTEMPTS MADE TO ARRANGE HOME VISIT:</p> <p>(This is a summary of individual CANOs entered as each attempt was made.)</p>	<p>Include in description of attempts to contact family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the dates of the attempts; • the methods used, such as phone call to home or message phone, notice or letter, in person contact; • the results of the attempts – was the family contacted, what was the response. <p>List here trips made to the home at which the family did not allow the visit to proceed.</p>
COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENT:	<p>Does the recipient understand why their cash assistance is reduced and what they have to do to end the reduction?</p> <p>What reasons do they give for not complying with the requirement?</p> <p>What does the recipient think they can do or that they need to comply with the required activity?</p> <p>Does there appear to be any indications of problems or challenges that are keeping the recipient from complying? If so, should the recipient now be exempt from completing the required activity?</p>

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION

<p>COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENT (continued):</p> <p>If individual will be complying with requirements and penalty will be lifted, stop here.</p>	<p>Is the recipient willing to comply with the activity for which they were penalized, or with an appropriate alternate activity? Is the FSSP being updated or revised?</p> <p>If complying, what supportive services are being provided to assist the recipient?</p>
<p>BASIC LIVING EXPENSES:</p>	<p>Describe expenses for housing, utilities, food, clothing, transportation, child support obligations that must be met, and any other expenses considered essential for the family's support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include status of housing – is it stable, is the family receiving a subsidy, can they receive or retain a subsidy if assistance is reduced further. • Utilities include essential services such as water, heat and electricity, and basic phone service.
<p>MANAGEMENT OF EXPENSES:</p>	<p>Describe how the client says they are now covering basic living expenses while receiving a reduced assistance amount.</p> <p>How does the recipient say they will manage on a smaller assistance amount if the penalty progresses to the next level?</p>
<p>EXPECTED FAMILY INCOME AND RESOURCES:</p>	<p>Describe the earned and unearned income, TA benefit amount, Food Stamp allotment, and resources that the family will have to cover basic living expenses if the assistance amount is reduced further.</p>
<p>SUPPORTS FROM OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS, FAMILY, OR FRIENDS:</p>	<p>Describe expected contributions for basic living expenses that will be received from other family members or individuals who live in the household.</p>

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION

COMMUNITY SERVICES:	Describe services available in the community that fit the family's basic needs. Describe referrals made for community services.
DECISION ON PROGRESSIVE PENALTY:	Explain if the family's income, resources, supports from other household members, family or friends, and available community services will provide for the family's basic living expenses. If basic living expenses will be covered, explain if there is any reason that an increased penalty amount will result in conditions that threaten the children's health or safety. State the conclusion including the reason that the penalty will or will not progress to the next level.
ACTION TO PROGRESS TO HIGHER PENALTY PERCENTAGE:	Explain date action is taken to progress to a higher percentage penalty and when notice is sent.

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION FIELD NOTES

Elements needed for documenting a decision to impose a 75% or 100% penalty reduction in assistance

ELEMENTS	NOTES
<p>HOME VISIT: If a home visit was made, list date and time of visit, who made the visit (including staff from other agencies), and observations made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • household members present • housing situation • living conditions inside home • behavior/interactions of household members. 	
<p>IF HOME VISIT WAS NOT MADE, LIST ATTEMPTS MADE TO ARRANGE HOME VISIT: (This is a summary of individual CANOs entered as each attempt was made.) Include in description of attempts to contact family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the dates of the attempts; • the methods used, such as phone call to home or message phone, notice or letter, in person contact; • the results of the attempts – was the family contacted, what was the response. <p>List here trips made to the home at which the family did not allow the visit to proceed.</p>	
<p>COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENT:</p> <p>Does the recipient understand why their cash assistance is reduced and what they have to do to end the reduction?</p> <p>What reasons do they give for not complying with the requirement?</p> <p>What does the recipient think they can do or that they need to comply with the required activity?</p> <p>Does there appear to be any indications of problems or challenges that are keeping the recipient from complying? If so, should the recipient now be exempt from completing the required activity?</p>	

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION FIELD NOTES

ELEMENTS	NOTES
<p>COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENT (continued):</p> <p>Is the recipient willing to comply with the activity for which they were penalized, or with an appropriate alternate activity? Is the FSSP being updated or revised?</p> <p>If complying, what supportive services are being provided to assist the recipient?</p> <p>If individual will be complying with requirements and penalty will be lifted, stop here.</p>	
<p>BASIC LIVING EXPENSES:</p> <p>Describe expenses for housing, utilities, food, clothing, transportation, child support obligations that must be met, and any other expenses considered essential for the family's support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include status of housing – is it stable, is the family receiving a subsidy, can they receive or retain a subsidy if assistance is reduced further. • Utilities include essential services such as water, heat and electricity, and basic phone service. 	
<p>MANAGEMENT OF EXPENSES:</p> <p>Describe how the client says they are now covering basic living expenses while receiving a reduced assistance amount.</p> <p>How does the recipient say they will manage on a smaller assistance amount if the penalty progresses to the next level?</p>	
<p>EXPECTED FAMILY INCOME AND RESOURCES:</p> <p>Describe the earned and unearned income, TA benefit amount, Food Stamp allotment, and resources that the family will have to cover basic living expenses if the assistance amount is reduced further.</p>	

HOME VISIT FOR PENALTY PROGRESSION FIELD NOTES

ELEMENTS	NOTES
<p>SUPPORTS FROM OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS, FAMILY, OR FRIENDS:</p> <p>Describe expected contributions for basic living expenses that will be received from other family members or individuals who live in the household.</p>	
<p>COMMUNITY SERVICES:</p> <p>Describe services available in the community that fit the family's basic needs.</p> <p>Describe referrals made for community services.</p>	
<p>DECISION ON PROGRESSIVE PENALTY:</p> <p>Explain if the family's income, resources, supports from other household members, family or friends, and available community services will provide for the family's basic living expenses.</p> <p>If basic living expenses will be covered, explain if there is any reason that an increased penalty amount will result in conditions that threaten the children's health or safety.</p> <p>State the conclusion including the reason that the penalty will or will not progress to the next level.</p>	
<p>ACTION TO PROGRESS TO HIGHER PENALTY PERCENTAGE:</p> <p>Explain date action is taken to progress to a higher percentage penalty and when notice is sent.</p>	