A thoughtful philosophy and clearly defined mission and purpose for services set the stage for the development of policies and procedures that will provide the program structure. Policies give the agency direction on how to fulfill the mission and purpose on a daily basis. They set the parameters for best practice, provide boundaries for staff and program participants, and are essential to managing liability and risk.

Include community partners and collaborators (the consulting committee) in developing the policies and procedures from the beginning of the process. Open communication and common understanding surrounding policies and procedures enhances program credibility, and community ownership and support of the program.

Topics covered in this guideline include:

1. Wisconsin Safe Exchange & Visitation Assessment Summary on Policies & Procedures (pg. 2)
2. The Role of Policies and Procedures (pp. 2-3)
3. Policies and Procedures Specific to SEV Centers (pg. 3)
4. Basics in Policy Development (pp. 3-4)
5. Basics in Procedure Development (pg. 4)
6. The Case for Local Policy Development (pp. 4-5)
7. The Role of Forms (pp. 5-6)
8. A Sample Outline of a Policies Manual (pp. 6)
9. Resources On Policies and Procedures (pg. 7)

“The foundation of any SEV program is its policies. Borrowing some other agency’s forms can lead to serious problems later on.”

Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation, Florida State University
A statewide assessment was conducted in fall 2003 targeting providers of safe exchange or supervised visitation services. Several questions were designed to gather information on the presence and implementation of policies and procedures. Twelve provider agencies responded to questions regarding SEV policy development. Providers were asked to indicate areas of written policies in place. The most common written policies were documentation (11), child abuse (10), AODA (9), confidentiality (9), intake (8), security (8) and handling “no shows” (8).

Three had written policies for interacting with law enforcement; five had written policies for interacting with court staff; and three had written memorandum of understanding between community agencies. Four providers had written policies on in-house transfer of client information. Two providers had written policies on working with mental health issues. Six of the 12 had written policy for assessing safety and criteria for declining to provide services.

Agencies were not asked if they had separate policies or procedures for sexual abuse or domestic violence. Only three providers responded to questions specific to completing a safety assessment checklist although five programs indicated that they use a safety checklist for determining if a family would be too dangerous to provide services.

Four programs provide the participants a services handbook; nine utilize an intake form in some capacity; eleven provide safety rules for services; seven utilize permission for release of information forms; and four programs include safety planning.

Focus group members wanted consistency with a degree of flexibility relating to policies and procedures. They were very concerned about safety and security policies and procedures, confidentiality and release of information. Undocumented immigrant respondents needed to be assured that they would not be reported to immigration authorities or law enforcement and that it was safe for them to access services. All were concerned about the potential for backlash from the system as well as their perpetrator by using the services. There was also consensus in wanting policies and procedures that gave highest priority to hearing the needs and concerns of the victim/survivor parents and witness/survivor children; AND that a true partnership develop between the service recipient and staff while creating a long-term family plan. The ultimate goal of the families was to be able to be self-sufficient in living their lives without fear AND to be able to manage interaction with their perpetrator when necessary or have that party restricted from contact.

The Role of Policies and Procedures

SEV programs are encouraged to take time to design policies and procedures that support the local philosophy, mission, and purpose. It is recommended that SEV programs develop consulting committees to provide ongoing feedback and support in determining what works, what doesn’t, guidance, and support for policy and procedure development and revision.

Ongoing review and revision of policy and procedures is necessary to address changes in legislation and infuse new research on best practice. As policies and procedures change, they need to continue to reflect the philosophy, mission and purpose. Involve service recipients and participants in the review process to assure that services will indeed assist families in reducing their exposure to violence, integrate safety and security concerns, and do no harm. As a way of extending their policies and procedures, many programs throughout the country have developed parent handbooks to help parents better understand
expectations, roles and responsibilities pertaining to visits and exchanges. Policies and procedures guide:

◇ Program services planning and development
◇ Program implementation
◇ Program participant screening and intake
◇ Participant and agency confidentiality protocols
◇ Participant and agency documentation and record keeping protocols
◇ Responses to critical incidents
◇ Staff coverage, training and competencies
◇ Interagency relationships: communication, referrals, information sharing, collaborations
◇ Program review and evaluation
◇ Annual review of policies that includes feedback from participants

Policies and Procedures Specific to SEV Centers

Common areas of consideration for developing policies and guidelines are listed below. Remember to develop your mission and philosophy first so you can be certain your process and product are well-grounded. It is also important to be very clear in what you are saying in your written documents. Do not assume common understanding of core concepts and verbiage.

Written policies, guidelines, and procedures do not need to be long, and complicated. Clear, concise statements can be very helpful in creating a common ground understanding of the expectations, roles and responsibilities for everyone involved. Including program participants in the development of policies and guidelines will be helpful in keeping the language to the point and meaningful.

Basics in Policy Development

Identify and recruit people to work on policy and procedure development

• Design the membership of the committee with expertise and interest in policy and procedure development.
• Establish sub-committees, as needed to work on specific policies.

Identify policy types and set priorities

• Referrals
• Service recipient screening, intake, and termination
• Documentation
• Interaction with law enforcement, court staff, and other community agencies
• Confidentiality and in-house sharing of information
• Safety and security
• Child abuse
• Mental health and AODA issues
• Staff and volunteers (personnel)
• Administration and operations
• Other areas as needed

Ask: Why is each policy and procedure needed?

• What is the policy’s purpose?
• How will the policy impact staff? Service recipients? Referral sources?
• Does the policy support short and long-term safety?
• Does the policy allow for flexibility in meeting specific service recipient needs?
• Does the policy support desired outcomes?
• Avoid developing policies that attempt to manage personality issues!
Identify legal requirements

- Funder specifications
- State law
- Federal law
- Confidentiality requirements

Develop procedures for implementation

- Who is responsible for ensuring that policies are followed?
- What forms, checklists, etc., are needed to support implementation of the policies?
- How will continuing participants be informed about new policies?

Set timeline for annual program evaluation, reviews and revisions

SEV Policies & Procedures Development Team

- SEV Agency Administrator
- SEV Agency Direct Service Staff
- Advisory Board Member
- Pro Bono Attorney
- Child Welfare Workers
- Judicial Representatives
- Domestic Violence Services Provider
- Sexual Abuse Services Provider
- Law Enforcement
- SEV Service Recipient
- Concerned Corporate Citizen

This is a guide only. Community dynamics and players vary...
Generally, include those who have the most at stake to be part of the discussion and decision-making process.

Basics in Procedure Development

Answer these questions:

- What needs to happen?
- Who needs to be involved?
- What paperwork is required?
- What is an appropriate timeline?
- Who is responsible for action?
- What oversight is needed?
- What are possible challenges and negative impacts?
- How will we know if it is working or not?
- How can you insure sufficient service recipient input? Staff input? Total ownership?

Write it down

- Succinct procedure
- Summary or explanation
- Create/modify forms
- Date it

Pilot, review, revise, implement

The Case for Local Policy Development

Working with a local consulting committee to develop policies and procedures unique to a service organization has many benefits. Consider the following:

- The process builds local relationships, project ownership, and commitment which will provide a base of support through the difficult times.
- The process forces operational thinking on the costs and benefits of each policy about to be implemented.
- The process holds all players equally
accountable for the implementation of the policies and improves commitment to making changes in policies that need modification.

- The process allows for community success and recognition in meeting community needs.
- The process lays a foundation for accessing resources.

There certainly is a case for not re-inventing the wheel when good policies, procedures, and forms already exist. However, existing policies and procedures “borrowed” from other agencies should be viewed as idea generators only. Consulting committees and service providers should take the time to be sure that the policies, procedures, forms and all written materials being used truly support the philosophy and values of their SEV program. If the consulting committee should decide to incorporate a policy or procedure from another program, it is recommended that the “owner” of the policy be contacted and asked:

- Are these materials currently in use? Have they been revised?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the policies?
- Do we have permission to copy or modify the materials?
- What credit, if any should be given to whom?

The Role of Forms

Forms are very helpful in guiding and streamlining practice within an organization. They are helpful in orienting new staff and program participants to how things work. Forms provide the documentation for how procedures are practiced within an organization – but forms can also become intrusive and even harmful to service recipients if they are not developed with care. Some considerations regarding forms include:

- What are the ways that this form could be used to negatively impact any of the service recipients or staff? Have you requested feedback from service recipients for possible unintended negative consequences for them? (They will not come or sustain services if they fear backlash!)
- Does the form support improving long-term safety and security for children and survivors of domestic abuse or sexual assault?
- Does this information really need to be written down? Whose need does this form meet?
- Does the form drive the process or support it?
- Does the form actualize your organizational mission and vision or contradict it?
- Does the form help you to “walk your talk”?
- Does the form create an artificial divide between the institution and the service recipient?

Avoid developing policies or procedures as a reaction to staff error, attitude, or other unique situations.

Develop forms that are grounded in the mission of your organization. They can be tools toward supporting your organization in implementing policies and procedures. Agency accountability and evaluation can also be enhanced through the appropriate use of forms. Again, be sure to thoroughly think through the costs and benefits to each of the following constituencies in developing forms.

- All service recipients
- Community referral sources and recipients
- The organization — large scale (community image, board of directors)
- Agency staff (what is the impact on their time, skill, and training)
Areas where forms are commonly developed include:

- Personnel
- Service recipient intake, service provision and service termination
- Confidentiality
- Documentation and record keeping
- Safety and security
- Interagency referrals
- Organizational administration
- Organizational evaluation
- Others as needed to support policy and procedure

A Sample Outline of a Policies Manual

Mission and Philosophy

See the guidelines document in this series entitled “Philosophical Foundation” for tips on developing your program’s mission statement based on your philosophy.

Guiding principles

For example...the staff, consulting committee, and board of directors of (program name) … will listen to and honor the voices of victims of abuse, including battered women and men, children who have witnessed or experienced domestic or sexual abuse, and the non-offending parents in developing program policies and practices.

Terminology

Include clear definitions of the terms commonly used in the work you do. It is especially important to include terms that have a meaning specific to your organization that may differ from colloquial or common use.

Policies

These are examples of policies followed uniformly within the program.

- Role of consulting committee
- Advocacy
- Alcohol & drugs
- Battering behaviors
- Sexual perpetrator behavior, including grooming tactics
- Child sexual abuse
- Client files
- Confidentiality
- Child conversations
- Court involvement
- Pre-briefing & debriefing with participants
- Emergency closings
- Fees
- Firearms & weapons
- Guests at visitation
- Hours of operation
- Intake & assessment
- Interventions during supervised visits & exchanges
- Medications & diet
- Parental responsibilities
- SEV provider responsibilities & services
- Records of visits & exchanges
- Referrals
- Refusing to visit
- Security & safety
- Staff qualifications, support & training
- Statistics
- Supervised exchange process
- Supervised visitation process

Guidelines

These are more flexible and are individualized to meet family needs.

- Conversations about the incident that brought the family to the center
- Food and beverages
- Gifts
- Parenting strategies during visitation and separation
Resources on Policies and Procedures

DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD? SOME CAUTIONS ON VISITATION CENTERS
   McMahon, Martha, and Peace, Cynthia; Ending the Cycle of Violence: Community Responses to Children of Battered Women. Sage Publications, 1994

DEVELOPING YOUR PROGRAM’S OPERATIONAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FORMS
   Florida Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation -- http://familyvio.ssw.fsu.edu/index.html

ADVOCATES FOR FAMILY PEACE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES
   Wellstone Family Safety Program, 1611 NW 4th Street, Grand Rapids, MN 55744
      www.stopdomesticabuse.org

Any non-profit training institute or leadership development organization can provide assistance:

SOCIETY FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS
   The Society For Nonprofit Organizations & Learning Institute; 5820 Canton Center RD, Suite 165; Canton, MI 48187, Phone: 734-451-3582; www.snpo.org

NONPROFIT RESOURCE CENTER
   1700 Rockville Pike, Suite 400, Rockville MD 20852, Phone: 301-987-0287; www.nonprofitresource.com

The Wisconsin Safe Exchange and Supervised Visitation Project was initiated by Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance and funded through the Federal Violence Against Women Act Safe Havens initiative. An interdisciplinary statewide consulting committee has guided the process from its beginning in May, 2003. Initial project facilitation and product development was completed by Kieffer Consulting and Facilitation, LLC, Strum Wisconsin. Additional partners in SEV project development include Wisconsin Children’s Trust Fund, Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Wisconsin Department of Justice – Office of Crime Victim Services, and Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.

Wisconsin Safe Exchange and Supervised Visitation Project purpose:

- To assess status of SEV services available to families experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual abuse.
- To develop guidelines for developing and sustaining new SEV services Statewide.
- To develop a sustainable network that provides technical assistance and support to SEV services providers.

Access SEV information online through HTTP://WCTF.STATE.WI.US