



Learning about Services for Your Family in Your Own Home

Lisette's Voice

I am a single mother of four boys. Four years ago, I was living with my boyfriend and there were a lot of fights in my home and the boys were always injuring themselves. Because of the domestic violence and the boys' injuries, I was reported to child abuse at least four times. Most of the times the protective services worker found that I did not hurt the children. But when my 6-year-old set his bed on fire, the protective services worker said that my family needed help. We agreed to accept in-home services. By that time, my boyfriend and I had separated, and I was having a hard time keeping my family together. I put two of my children with my sister and two stayed with me. Once the worker and I began to work together, we found out that all four of my sons needed help with their mental health. They were getting into trouble in the neighborhood, setting fires, and doing poorly in school. We also had no place to live and needed a lot of things. The in-home services worker helped us get Section 8 housing. She helped us get food and clothes so we could all live together again. She also took us to a community mental health program. I found out that my sons had a lot of problems. They had ADD,* ADHD,** learning disabilities, and one had epilepsy. The mental health program prescribed medicine for them, and mental health counselors and taught me how to help them. The in-home services worker also went to the schools with me and attended the IEP*** meetings. A year after the in-home worker referred me to the community mental health program, DCFS closed my case. I now have a family advocate who attends school meetings and court hearings with me. My problems are not all solved yet. My 13-year-old son is involved with the court system. He is mentally challenged. I am still involved with the mental health program, but my family is still all together. They are no longer being injured, and we are working on our problems with a case manager and a family advocate.

*Attention Deficit Disorder, **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, ***Individualized Education Program

What are in-home services? What is their purpose?

The main goal of in-home services is to help you stay together as a family while ensuring the well-being and safety of your children. In-home services are different from traditional office-based services because they *take place in your own home, or in and around your community*. In-home services help you to learn the skills you need to *provide care and protection* for your children and to *prevent out-of-home placement*. If your child is already placed away from your home, in-home services can *help you and your child live together again*.

In-home services are known by different names in different communities:

- family support services
- family preservation services
- intensive home-based services
- family crisis services
- family-centered services
- family reunification services.

With in-home services, you can expect the following:

- Your family will be encouraged to take charge of your own lives.
- Your family will be an active partner in all of the services.
- Services will be in your own language and respectful of your culture.
- Your family's basic needs will be addressed, such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, child care, training for employment.
- Other services to meet your family's individual needs, such as family counseling in your home, will be offered.

In-home services vary in length (number of weeks or months) and intensity (number of hours per week or month) depending upon the individual needs of your family.

Are there different types of in-home services?

Yes. In-home services generally fall into two types: intensive family preservation services and longer-term family support services. Some states offer services similar to what is described below. In other states, these two kinds of in-home services are not as separate as they appear here.

Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS)—These services are meant to help when a child is at immediate risk of being removed from home. Services may be short-term, for example, 8-12 weeks, with staff available to the family 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A combination of child welfare agency and community providers may spend up to 20 hours per week with the family.

Families are contacted immediately after being referred. A service plan, based on the family's strengths and needs, is developed with the family. Support services to take care of the family's immediate crisis are provided. IFPS also help develop practical skills such as parenting techniques, budgeting, managing the household, and shopping. These skills are “modeled” by the worker and practiced by the family. If concrete services such as home repairs, utility payments, food and clothing are needed, they can be provided with “flexible” funds.

Longer-Term Family Support Services—These services are similar to intensive family preservation services and are based on the same principles and goals. They also are designed to strengthen families and help them stay together; however, they are offered when the family is not in a crisis situation and there is no *immediate* risk of out-of-home placement. Services may be offered over a longer period of time (for example, 6 to 12 months) and for less time per week (for example, 1 to 3 hours).

Family support services include, but are not limited to, a variety of services, such as mental health services, substance abuse services, assistance to deal with domestic violence, respite care for parents and caregivers, parenting skills training, and individual and family counseling.

NOTE: The level of intensity of the service depends on what your family needs. Many families do not need intensive family preservation services, and IFPS are not equally available in all states. Most states do, however, provide longer-term family support services and reunification services.

How can I get in-home services?

Most often, families are referred to in-home services after a report of child abuse or neglect. If your family needs help to stay together and keep your children safe, you should be eligible to receive in-home support services. In addition, if your child is returning from out-of-home care, in-home services to help you get back together should be available to your family.

Referrals for these services may be made by the agency worker, the court, physicians, health departments, mental health centers, schools, law enforcement, and other interested professionals. There are three ways you can get in-home services. You can be referred by someone else, you can be ordered by the court to participate in in-home services, or, in many states, parents can ask for the services themselves.

What happens if I refuse in-home services?

If the in-home services are not court-ordered, you can refuse to participate or you can stop participating. But if there is concern for your child's safety, the court can order you to participate.

Practical Tips for Families

- ✓ Request that your family and friends be involved in your support system.
- ✓ Request the appointments take place during times that work for your family, for example, after the regular workday or on weekends.
- ✓ If you think you need help, ask for it.
- ✓ Ask for services in your own language.

Are there any circumstances in which in-home services would NOT be provided?

Yes. If your child would not be safe at home while your family is involved in services, he would be placed out-of-the home before services were provided for your family.

Also, a 1997 federal law, the Adoption and Safe Families Act, describes “aggravated circumstances” when states do not have to make *reasonable efforts* to keep families together or to reunify families. This means that under certain circumstances the agency would not offer in-home services for you and your family. This law gives examples of aggravated circumstances such as the following:

- abandonment, torture, chronic abuse, and sexual abuse
- a parent has murdered or committed voluntary manslaughter (or planned to do so) against another of his/her children
- a parent has committed a felony assault against another of his/her children
- the parent's rights to the child's sister or brother have been terminated involuntarily.

“Aggravated circumstances” can be defined differently by each individual state. States can add more circumstances to the examples listed above.

Do child welfare agencies have funds to pay for in-home services?

Federal laws say how important it is to prevent the placement of children in out-of-home care, but the federal government provides more funding for out-of-home care than for in-home services. States use federal money and a number of other funding sources to offer in-home services. Your state may or may not have enough funds to serve **all** families who need in-home services

Practical Tips for Families

- ✓ Check in your community to find out where and how to get in-home services for your family should you need them.
- ✓ Find out how your state defines “aggravated circumstances.”

