DATE: April 8, 2011
TO: Regional Directors
THROUGH: Pete Conte, Assistant Secretary for Operations
FROM: Jamie Self, Ed.D., Director of Family Safety
SUBJECT: NEW RESOURCE OFFERED: Learning Opportunities from Child Fatality Reviews
ACTION REQUESTED: Disseminate to Child Welfare Staff as Appropriate
DUE DATE: None

PURPOSE: This memorandum provides information regarding dissemination of “Lessons Learned” from reviews of investigations involving allegations of child death due to maltreatment.

BACKGROUND: Effective February 1, 2011, the process for reviewing child fatality cases changed to ensure comprehensive reviews were completed on those cases where the alleged victim or family had relevant prior involvement with the Department. The critical components of these reviews are now being completed within 30 days of receipt of an allegation. The expedited review process provides information that can be shared with all child welfare staff so that potential system issues can be addressed timely.

RESOURCE LOCATION: Attached is the first in what will be a series of “Learning Opportunities” to be shared with field staff. This document, and future Learning Opportunities will be posted to the Child Fatality Review page on the Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare web site at: http://centerforchildwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu/kb/childfatl/Forms/AllItems.aspx
In addition, notifications will be made through broadcast emails from the Florida Center for the Advancement of Child Welfare and the Messaging and Links section in the Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN).

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions or for additional information please contact Eleese Davis at (850) 717-4650 or email eleese_davis@dcf.state.fl.us or Keith Perlman at (850) 717-4675 or keith_perlman@dcf.state.fl.us.

Attachment
1) In cases involving domestic violence, CPI's and CM’s should understand that relapse is a strong possibility (similar to substance abuse in that respect) and work with the family to understand this.

2) CPI's and CM’s need to understand and educate caregivers about the cycle of domestic violence: Honeymoon, Tension, Argument/Crisis, and Abuse.

3) Often times the victim of domestic violence will act out against their perpetrator when they feel safe (e.g. when Police or CPI are on scene), giving the appearance that they are the perpetrator. CPI needs to be aware of this dynamic.

4) CPI should look for a history or pattern that indicates growing potential for domestic violence, and not just physical signs. Full law enforcement criminal checks should be completed in domestic violence cases to determine if there are patterns that have not been revealed by adults in the home.

5) In investigations involving domestic violence, CPI’s should contact investigating officer in previous law enforcement reports to fully understand history.

6) Contact child care providers to inquire about concerns for child safety. There have been incidents where, after the fact, child care providers have stated that they saw bruises or other signs of abuse, but did not take any action.

7) Casework documentation needs to be thorough. In many cases there is good case work by the CPI or CM that is not documented or not documented with sufficient detail (e.g., requesting drug tests of alleged perpetrators’, making referrals for child care or other services, details on disclosures by children, etc.).

8) Safety Plans must include appropriate and specific steps to reduce risk and ensure child safety. They need to go beyond a simple written pledge by caretakers/parents to protect the child from maltreatment or to not do certain things.

9) Reviewing history in FSFN is difficult. Also, many CBC’s have gone to a process where all documents are scanned, so finding information is challenging from that perspective.

10) Collateral contacts with neighbors and family friends are critical components of the investigative process and should always be completed when appropriate.

11) Law Enforcement “call outs” or “service calls” should be obtained and the results considered when reviewing family history.

12) In cases where a family is not staffed for ongoing services with a CBC, CPI’s must make sure services are engaged before an investigation is closed. This includes verification with the provider(s).