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# Working with Children Services

*A Guide for Parents*





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Provided by  
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Advisory Committee on Children,  
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**Important Note to Parents\*:**

We understand a visit from a Children Services worker can be upsetting. It is very common for parents to feel worried, angry or confused.

You have the right to have someone explain everything that is happening.

You should ask questions and make sure you understand the answers.

You may want to write down what is said to you so you can read it again later.

This guide will help you understand what happens when Children Services gets a report that a child is not safe. This booklet includes information on:

- What a Children Services worker does
- Your rights and responsibilities as a parent
- What steps a Children Services worker follows
- How Children Services can help your family
- When the court gets involved
- Words you might hear.

\* Although this guide uses the words "parent" or "parents," this information also may be helpful to others who have responsibility for caring for a child.



## What Does Children Services Do?

Children Services' job is to make sure children are safe.

We believe the best place for a child is with his or her family as long as the child is safe. If a child is not safe, we work with the family to change that.

We know parents want to do the best they can for their child. We help families become strong by providing services and working with parents.

The police have a different job. They investigate possible crimes against children, gather evidence, make arrests, and work with the court to deal with criminals.

## You Should Know

We must get someone to help you if you cannot understand what is said to you because:

- You have a hearing problem
- English is not your first language
- You do not read well.

The use of the word "we" within this Guide refers to Children Services' workers.



We do our best to keep your personal information private. Sometimes we must talk to other people who know you or your child. When we do this, we do our best to respect your privacy and reputation.

Unless a court gives us permission, or there is an emergency involving your child, we cannot enter your home without your permission.

You have the right to talk to a lawyer at any time during the assessment or after it is done.

If you must go to court and you cannot afford a lawyer, then the judge may appoint one for you.

## **When a Report is Made to Children Services**



Children Services visits begin when someone makes a **report**. A report to Children Services can be made by anyone who thinks a child is not safe.

### **There is an Assessment**

A Children Services caseworker must look into what happened to find out if the report is true. We also need to find out if the child is safe. This process is called an **assessment**.



## What We Look For

We look to see if the child has been harmed or is in danger or whether the child is hurt, physically, sexually or emotionally.

This could be:

- Serious injuries, such as those needing a doctor's care
- Punching, beating, hitting, or burning a child
- Breaking bones, cutting or bruising a child
- Making a child feel afraid
- Sexual contact with a child (or letting others have sexual contact with a child)
- Violence between household members in the presence of a child.

We also look at whether the child is not being cared for. This could be because of:

- No adult supervision or protection, such as the child being left home alone
- Alcohol or drug use in the home
- Unsafe housing
- No medical care, school, or food
- A temporary emergency keeping you from caring for your child.

## Steps Children Services Will Follow

### Step 1. **A Children Services Worker Looks into the Report.**

The caseworker will tell you what was reported to Children Services.

The caseworker cannot tell you who made the report.

The caseworker will ask what happened. We may ask to talk to:

- You
- Your child and all children in the home
- Other adults who live in the home
- Other people who know your child, like a relative or teacher.

The caseworker may visit your child at school.

We also have a right to get records to help us decide if a child is in danger. These could be school or medical records. We may ask for your child to have a medical examination. Sometimes we may need to take pictures of your child or home.

We also may work with you to write a plan saying what needs to be done to keep your child safe. This is called a **Safety Plan**.

## **Step 2.      A Children Services Worker Writes a Summary.**

This summary will be done in 45 days or less. After the summary is complete, you will be sent a letter. This letter will tell you if the report made to Children Services was “**substantiated**,” “**unsubstantiated**,” or “**indicated**.” (See pages 9-10 to read more about what these words mean.)

If we find your child has not been harmed and is safe, Children Services stops here. Children Services still may offer you help.

If we find that your child has been harmed or is not safe, then we go to step #3.

## **Step 3.      The Children Services Worker will Work with You to Write a Plan.**

The assessment helps Children Services understand ways to help you keep your child safe. Children Services will work with you to plan this out in writing; this is called your “**case plan**.”

The case plan will say:

- What will be done to make your child safe
- What you need to do
- What services you and your child will receive
- How we will help your family do these things.

You have the right to help write the case plan. You also have the right to know why the services were chosen and how they will help you and your family.

**No one knows your child better than you.** It is important for you to tell your caseworkers what services you think would help your family.

**Step 4.      The Children Services  
Worker Helps You Follow  
the Plan.**

Your caseworker will work with you to figure out how to make your home safe for your child. Our goal is to keep your child at home while you follow the case plan.



## **How Children Services Can Help Your Family**

We know parenting is hard work. Every family has strengths and challenges. Our goal is to help build on your family's strengths and provide services to help you meet the challenges.

Tell your caseworker about any service or program you think will help you or your family. Here are some helpful services we may suggest:

- Parenting classes
- Counseling for parents and/or children
- Child care
- Help for a drug or alcohol problem
- Help with housing and food
- Medical care
- Transportation
- Job skills and training
- Help for domestic violence.

## Words You Might Hear

**Assessment:** How Children Services follows up on a report that a child has been harmed or may not be safe. Children Services must look into what happened and make sure the child is safe. The assessment sometimes is called an “investigation.”

**Substantiated:** After an assessment, Children Services **found a child was harmed or is not safe**. Children Services will work with parents to strengthen the family and keep children safe.

**Unsubstantiated:** After an assessment, Children Services **found a child was not harmed and is safe**. Children Services still may offer parents helpful services. Parents can decide if they wish to work with Children Services or not.

**Indicated:** After an assessment, Children Services **found some facts showing a child may have been harmed or may not be safe**. Children Services may work with parents to keep children more safe.

**Case Plan:** The written agreement between you and your caseworker that is used to measure progress. It outlines Children Services’ concerns, what you must do, what services you and your child will receive and how Children Services will help you.

**Caseworker:** A Children Services worker.

**Children Services:** The agency in your county that works to keep children safe. In some places, Children Services also is called Job and Family Services (JFS) or Child Protection Services (CPS).

**Report:** The information given to Children Services from someone who was worried about a child. This sometimes is called an “allegation.”

**Safety Plan:** An agreement between you and your caseworker that lists what must happen now to keep your child safe. It must be in writing and signed by both of you.



## **Will I Need to Go to Court?**

Most of the time, parents do not go to court. This is because the family and caseworker can work together to keep the child safe at home or with a relative.

You will need to go to court if:

- Your child is in danger and needs to be moved to a safer place
- You need court-ordered supervision or services to keep your child safe at home.

## **What Are My Rights if I Need to Go to Court?**

You must be told if you need to go to court.

Children Services must tell you where and when to go.

You should go to all court hearings.

You have the right to:

- See all papers given to the court
- Tell your side of the story to the judge
- Know why your child was removed
- Have your questions answered
- Know what you need to do to make your home safe for your child
- Have a lawyer at any time
- Have an interpreter if you cannot understand.



## **If My Child Cannot Stay at Home, Where Will My Child Go?**

In most cases, children are not removed from home. But sometimes we cannot be sure a child will be safe at home. Children Services may ask the court to remove the child while they work with you on making your home safe.

Your child probably will stay with family or with foster parents. If possible, we believe it is best for your child to stay with family. It is important to tell your caseworker about any family or close family friends who might be able to care for your child.

You will be allowed to visit your child unless the court decides it is not safe. You will need to follow some rules when you visit your child, even if your child is placed with family.

## **How Do I Get My Child Back?**

In most cases, Children Services and parents can work together to bring children home. Your child cannot return home until the court says it is safe. You should work with your caseworker to follow your case plan. Talk to your caseworker or lawyer



## More Words You Might Hear

**Complaint:** A paper asking the court for a hearing about a child. You will be given or sent a copy of the complaint.

**Court:** When a Children Services case goes to court, it is usually Juvenile Court. Juvenile Court is not the same as a criminal court.

**Foster Parents:** People specially trained to care for children who must live away from home while their parents work with Children Services.

**Hearing:** A scheduled time when the judge or magistrate listens to evidence or testimony.

## **To Find Out More About Our Agency or Services:**

- Ask your caseworker for a brochure or ask for the Web site address to visit the Children Services Web site.

Web Address: \_\_\_\_\_

- If you have a complaint, tell your caseworker or call your local Children Services office.

Agency Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Important Contact Information**

Caseworker: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Lawyer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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