

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services  
(CCDCFS)  
Policy Statement**

**Policy Chapter:** Investigations  
**Policy Number:** 2.03.00  
**Policy Name:** Investigations and Assessments

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**Approved By:** Jacqueline M. Fletcher

**PURPOSE:** To outline the response system and intervention utilized by CCDCFS when assessing and responding to the unique safety concerns, risk and protective capacities of each family that is the subject of a screened in report.

**SCOPE:** This policy applies to all screened in reports that meet the statutory threshold for Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention and has been designated to either of the Differential Response pathway assignments of Traditional Response or Alternative Response.

## **POLICY**

Child safety is our primary concern. A thorough accurate assessment and investigation of all intake reports, with an emphasis on child-centered, family-focused best practice increases child safety.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **I. INITIATING ASSESSMENT AND INVESTIGATION REPORTS**

A. Hotline staff assigns all screened-in reports either as an emergency or as a non-emergency response. This response is based upon the need to ensure child safety and safety cannot be determined unless face-to-face contact is achieved. All reports on active cases, whether screened in, or screened out or an information and/or referral report, require immediate action on the part of assigned staff to assess child safety. Child Protection Specialists (CPS) and their supervisors read each new report and take all necessary steps to ensure child safety.

1. Emergency reports: A face-to-face contact with the child subject of the report (CSR) or alleged child victim (ACV) is initiated within one hour or less from the time the report is screened.

2. Fast Response Reports: A face-to-face contact with the child subject of the report (CSR) or alleged child victim (ACV) is initiated within three hours or less from the time the report is screened.
  3. Non-Emergency Reports: A face-to-face contact with the CSR or ACV is initiated within twenty-four hours or less from the time the report is screened.
    - a. Based upon the allegations reported, there may be some situations in which face-to-face or telephone contact with a principal of the report or collateral source, who has specific knowledge of the child's current condition and can provide information about the child's safety can be the initial contact.
    - b. In these situations, there is a face-to-face contact with the ACV within no more than seventy-two hours from the time the report is screened.
  4. The Child Protection Specialist (CPS) makes at least two attempted face-to-face contacts with the CSR or ACV to initiate the assessment or investigation within the first four working days from the date the referral was screened in.
    - a. If the first or second attempt is not successful, the CPS shares the information with his or her supervisor to determine what further diligent attempts to locate and/or contact the family (e.g., contact family members, collateral contacts, etc.) are needed. If face-to-face attempts continue to remain unsuccessful, the CPS and supervisor shares this information with the senior manager to determine next steps.
    - b. In non-emergency situations, the CPS contacts the referral source (when known) prior to initiating a face-to-face contact to review the report information and receive any clarification or additional information.
- B. The CPS conducts a background review of all parents, caregiver(s), custodian(s) and adults in the home. An activity log is completed documenting any information found, including any additional addresses for case members. The background review includes:
1. Historical case records
  2. Child welfare history from another county or state
  3. Public records check for every adult in the home, including the county and city court dockets where the family currently resides (and previous city's docket if the family, or any adult, has recently moved).
  4. National sex offender registry ([www.nsopw.gov](http://www.nsopw.gov))
  5. A public record check may be necessary on a non-custodial parent depending on the extent of contact that parent has with their child.

Any information found that is pertinent to the investigation or child(ren)'s safety is discussed with the family.

- C. When CPS has successful face-to-face contact with the ACV or CSR to determine safety, and in most situations, it is preferable to make an unannounced home visit. If the CPS makes a telephone call to schedule the initial contact, the CPS ensures that assessment visit appointment is within required time frames. The CPS:
1. Respects the family choices when scheduling contacts.
  2. Incorporates family's preferences for day, time, and location for the visit (unless safety concerns are present).
  3. Asks family about contact preferences, such as phone, e-mail, or text.
- D. The CPS documents in a case record activity log the date, time, and with whom the assessment is initiated. There is only one initiation report per new screened in intake.
- E. When the selected pathway is Alternative Response (AR), at the initial contact, the CPS explains the difference between AR and Traditional Response (TR) to the family.
- F. If contact attempts by the CPS remain unsuccessful, follow up attempts will be made at least every five working days until the child(ren) is seen or until a case decision and / or disposition is required.
- G. Assistance from law enforcement may be requested if one of the following situations exist:
1. There is reason to believe the child is in immediate danger of serious harm.
  2. There is reason to believe the CPS is, or will be, in danger of harm.
  3. There is reason to believe a crime is being committed or has been committed against a child.
- The reason for contacting law enforcement is documented in the Activity Log.
- H. If the CPS is refused access to a child, he or she immediately contacts the supervisor. The supervisor makes a determination of next steps (including law enforcement, seeking guidance from the Prosecutor's Office, etc.) based upon the information about the child's safety.
1. Immediate assistance from the Prosecutor's Office is requested if the CPS is refused access to the ACV or any records necessary to conduct the assessment/investigation.
- I. Adding participants (or adding an additional role for a participant) to the SACWIS intake is made within four days of the screen in date and prior to approval of the safety assessment (e.g., adding an ACV, AP, etc.).
- J. If the CPS finds additional concerns of abuse, neglect, or dependency, an immediate report of the information is made to the Hotline.

- K. When the report involves an infant identified as affected by legal or illegal substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms from prenatal or postnatal substance exposure, the CPS develops a plan of safe care, addressing safety needs of infants and health and substance use disorder treatment needs of affect family members or caregivers.
- L. The CPS notifies the non-custodial parent, who holds residual parental rights to the child and maintains an ongoing relationship through visitation with the child and/or payment of child support, of receipt of the report, the report disposition, and the case decision.

## **II. SAFETY ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS**

Safety Assessment: The Safety Assessment is the tool used to drive planning for a child's safety. The completed Safety Assessment tool documents the CPS' evaluation of signs of present danger, past history, child vulnerability, and family's protective capacities to determine the most appropriate safety response. A Comprehensive Assessment Planning Model (CAPM) Safety Assessment is completed for all Child Abuse/Neglect (CA/N) referrals. It is not required for Family In Need of Services (FINS) cases, except Stranger Danger reports, or if a safety threat is identified at the time of face to face contact. The CPS re-evaluates safety of the children in the home at every contact with a child and family throughout the life of a case.

- A. During the course of an investigation/assessment, the CPS utilizes the "CAPM – Safety Assessment" to guide their interviews when completing successful face-to-face contacts with the ACV/CSR and at least one caregiver. This tool is completed in SACWIS within ten working days from the date the report is screened in or a justification/waiver for a time frame extension is completed. This is a point in time documentation of safety.
- B. If a justification/waiver is completed to extend this time frame, the CPS completes the Safety Assessment tool within three working days once the ACV/CSR and at least one caretaker are seen.

If, at any time, it is determined that a child is in immediate danger of serious harm, the CPS immediately develops and implements a safety plan.

## **III. INTERVIEWING**

- A. A professional interpreter service is secured for all interviews when a principal of the report has a language or any other impairment that causes a barrier in communication (e.g., hearing impaired, limited English proficiency). *See Policy 7.06.04 Provisions for Clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).*
- B. Every household member is interviewed, including those known to frequent the family home (boyfriend/girlfriend), beginning with the ACV/CSR.

- C. Unless exigent circumstances exist, parental permission to interview children is required. A child is only interviewed without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent if one or more of the following exigent circumstances exist:
1. There is credible information indicating the child is in immediate danger of serious harm.
  2. There is credible information indicating that the child will be in immediate danger of serious harm upon return home from school or other locations away from their home.
  3. There is credible information indicating that the child may be intimidated from discussing the alleged abuse or neglect or concern in the home.
  4. The child requests to be interviewed at school or another location due to one of the circumstances listed above.
- D. Siblings are not interviewed at school or at other locations away from their home, without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent or the existence of exigent circumstances listed above. However, if the child provides information during an interview that indicates a sibling might be in immediate danger of serious harm or that sibling could provide information regarding immediate danger of serious harm to the child, the interview of the sibling may occur.
- E. When the child or sibling of a child is interviewed without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent, the same day, the CPS attempts a face-to-face contact with the child's parent, caregiver, or custodian to inform them that an interview of the child occurred. The rationale for interviewing a child without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent is documented in the activity log, along with specific details regarding parental notification of the interview.
- F. Children who do not have sufficient verbal skills are not interviewed. Additional interviews that would be detrimental to the child do not occur. This information is documented in the Activity Log and a Justification / Waiver is completed. In these situations, the CPS observes interactions between child and caregiver and documents those observations in the Activity Log. If the observation is not possible, this information is included in the waiver.
- G. When interviewing children, the CPS evaluates the child's condition and obtains the child's explanation of the allegations (their interpretation of what has happened). Children, especially the ACV's and CSR's, are interviewed before other household members. They are interviewed individually whenever possible.
- H. All adults living in the home of the child are interviewed face-to-face. The CPS assesses their knowledge of the allegation or concern, observes the interaction between the child and caretaker, and obtains relevant information regarding child safety and risk.

- I. The CPS advises the alleged perpetrator and parent or custodian of the specific complaints, allegations or concerns made against him or her (while maintaining reporter confidentiality) at the time of the initial contact with the person, whether this is by phone or in person.
- J. When the alleged perpetrator is unknown, the CPS inquires about others who may have had access to the ACV/CSR during the time when the abuse/neglect may have occurred. Each of these identified individuals are interviewed, assessing their knowledge of the allegation(s).
- K. The CPS conducts and documents face-to-face or telephone interviews with the reporter, non-custodial parent, other service providers, and/or any other person identified as a possible source of information during the investigation to obtain relevant information regarding child safety, or risk to the child. Discretion is used in the selection of collateral sources to protect the family's right to privacy.
- L. Depending on case circumstances the CPS may need to take other actions necessary to address safety and risk concerns. These actions may include, but are not limited to:
  - 1. Securing a medical examination or psychological evaluation of the children (with parental, caregiver, or custodian consent)
- M. The CPS documents in a case activity log when records are received. The activity log reflects the thorough review of the records and the weight given to the information contained in terms of making case work decisions and disposition, even if the case is already closed. When records contain previously unreported information of child abuse/neglect, the CPS immediately makes a new report to the Hotline.

#### **IV. FAMILY ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENTATION**

- A. Family Assessment: The "Family Assessment" is the tool used to assist the CPS assess risk, identify the strengths and needs present in the family system, determine service needs to prevent future child maltreatment. The "Family Assessment" includes a safety review, a description of child harm, a strengths and needs assessment, a description of the family's perception, a risk assessment, and service planning.
  - a. The Family Assessment is completed by CPS and approved by supervisor no later than the 45<sup>th</sup> day from screening date.
  - b. A fifteen-day extension can be requested if sufficient information is not available to make an informed case resolution and/or disposition. The justification is completed and approved by the supervisor prior to the 45<sup>th</sup> day.

A Family Assessment does not need to be completed for a FINS case unless it is being transferred for Ongoing Services, with the exception of the following report types:

- Deserted child
- Emancipated youth
- Permanent surrender
- Interstate compact of placement of children

If the case is already in an ongoing status, the CPS completes the Ongoing Case Assessment rather than the Family Assessment.

- B. Service Identification: Service identification occurs throughout the assessment process. As soon as the family or CPS identifies a need for a service, the CPS links them to the appropriate services.
- C. All investigation and assessment activities are documented in the Activity Log within 24 hours, but no more than seventy-two (72) hours, from the date of the event.
- D. The CPS ensures all identifying information regarding the family and family members is verified and accurately entered into SACWIS. This includes any safety hazards and/or characteristics which is inputted in the person's overview tab in SACWIS.

## V. PATHWAY SWITCH

- A. Cases following the AR pathway must switch to the TR pathway when one of the following occur:
- The family requests a change from AR to TR
  - Safety threats require the agency to pursue legal intervention
  - Agency receives custody of or files a complaint with Juvenile Court alleging the child is or may become an abused, neglected, or dependent child
  - Agency screens in a report requiring a TR pathway.
- B. Cases cannot switch from the TR pathway to the AR pathway.
- C. All pathway switches are approved by the Supervisor. When a pathway switch occurs, this is documented in SACWIS along with the date of the switch. The family is notified in writing of the pathway change within 72 hours of the switch.

## VI. CASE DISPOSITIONS

- A. Case dispositions are completed only on cases assigned to the TR pathway that contain an allegation of abuse and / or neglect.
- B. The case disposition is due upon completion of the Family Assessment or Ongoing Case Assessment / Investigation within the 45-day time frame unless a Justification / Wavier has been approved.

- C. A notification of disposition letter is sent within two (2) business days of the disposition with the report disposition and final case decision to the following:
1. The parent, caregiver, or custodian
  2. The child (if the child is of the age to understand)
  3. The alleged perpetrator
    - a. The alleged perpetrator is notified in writing of their right to appeal, and the method by which they may appeal.

When required disposition letters are completed and saved in SACWIS, an Activity Log is automatically generated.

- D. The CPS refers any child under the age of three if there is a substantiated report of child abuse or neglect and/or any infant who has been identified as affected by illegal substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms resulting from parental drug exposure to Help Me Grow for early intervention services. The CPS is to have contact with the Help Me Grow worker to discuss concerns for the child and an Activity Log detailing the information is completed.

## **VII. CASE CLOSURE / TRANSFER FOR ONGOING SERVICES**

- A. At the completion of an investigation/assessment, the CPS presents findings and recommendations to their supervisor by submitting the family assessment tool in SACWIS.
1. Recommendations are based upon:
    - a. Analysis of the family's strengths and needs;
    - b. Risk contributors (including family history);
    - c. Identified safety threats;
    - d. Identified protective capacities;
    - e. If applicable, case disposition and family's final risk level (preliminary matrix indicated case decision).

For further information regarding tools for decision-making and assessment, see Comprehensive Assessment Planning Model (CAPM) field guide.

- B. The agency closes the case when there are no active safety threats and the agency and family agree that agency services are no longer needed.
1. Cases should be resolved within 45 days of the screen in date. The CPS will connect the family to available community resources that may continue to address identified service needs.
  2. When contact or services were provided by the agency to the family after completion of the "Family Assessment" and the case will be closed the CPS completes a "Case Review/Closure" and "Case Closure" in SACWIS, or for AR cases, the "AR-Family Service Plan Review" and the "Case Closure".
    - a. When completing a "Case Review/Closure" or "AR-Family Service Plan Review" for the purposes of case closure and the family is being



linked to a community resource, it is held in conjunction with a case closing family team meeting. See Policy 5.01.04 – Family Team Meeting.

3. If a family is in need of continued Agency services at the completion of the investigation, the CPS will change the case type in SACWIS to Ongoing status and will remain with the Short Term Services unless court involved. If the case becomes court involved, it will be transferred in accordance with Policy 2.06.01.
- C. The CPS notifies the family of their recommendation to close the case or provide in-home supportive services (IHSS), reasons for their recommendations, and intent to close the case or move the case to an ongoing case status. The CPS engages the family in participation for service planning or case planning to encourage family investment in the plan.
  - D. When the family's case is not court involved, the IHSS are voluntary. If the family does not agree to IHSS, regardless of agency recommendation for services, the case is evaluated for closure (unless a court motion has been or will soon be filed). When situations present where the agreement or necessity for services is not clear, the decision is discussed through the chain of command with the Senior Manager.
  - E. When a case is closed due to the family's refusal to participate in IHSS, the CPS includes a list of any recommendations and resources to the family in the case closing letter.

Cases where a court motion has been, or will soon be filed, are transferred to an Extended Services unit as determined in accordance with Policy 2.06.01 "Joint Transfer Conference Policy".

## **VIII. Protective Services Alerts**

- A. The CPS completes a Protective Services Alert when:
  1. The PCSA receives an abuse or neglect report, the whereabouts of a child or his or her parent, guardian, or custodian are unknown, and the PCSA has reason to believe the child is in immediate danger of serious harm.
  2. The PCSA determines that protective services are needed, the whereabouts of the child or his or her parent, guardian, or custodian are unknown and the PCSA has reason to believe the child remains at risk of abuse or neglect.

**SEE ALSO:**

**Ohio Administrative Codes:**

Section 5101:2-36 – Screening and Investigation

Section 5101:2-37 – Assessments

Section 5101:2-36-14 – Protective Service Alert

Section 5101:2-1-01– Children’s Service Definitions of Terms

**Ohio’s Child Protective Services Worker Manual and CAPM Field Guides**

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services Policies and Procedures Manual**

Policy 2.03.02 – Extending Time Frames or Waiving Completion of Assessment / Investigation Activities

Policy 2.06.01 – Joint Transfer Conference Policy

Policy 5.01.01 – In-Home Supportive Services

Policy 5.01.02 – Case Plan / Family Service Plan

Policy 5.01.04 – Family Team Meeting

Policy 5.02.01 – TDM / Staffings Policy