
Working with Children Services

A Guide for Parents



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NOTES

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Provided by the
Advisory Committee on Children,
Families & the Courts

February 2008

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To Find Out More About Our Agency or Services:

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

Address: _____

- If You Have A Complaint, tell your caseworker or call your local Children Services office.

Telephone: _____

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. 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 (CS) gets a report that a child is not safe. This booklet includes information on:

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

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

Important Contact Information

Caseworker

Name:

Telephone:

Address:

Lawyer

Name:

Telephone:

Address:

Other Important Names & Numbers:

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

Indicated: After an investigation, 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 safer.

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. This is sometimes called an investigation.

What Does Children Services (CS) 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.

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.

We will 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

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.



What We Look For

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

Words You Might Hear

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).

Complaint: A paper asking the court for a hearing about the 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.



You will be allowed to visit your child unless the court decides it is not safe. You also 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. Work with your caseworker to follow your case plan. Talk to your caseworker or lawyer so you know what the court wants you to do to make your home safe.

This could be:

- Serious injuries, such as those needing a doctor's care
- Punching, beating, hitting, or burning a child
- Breaking bones of, 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 assess 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 us. 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 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.



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

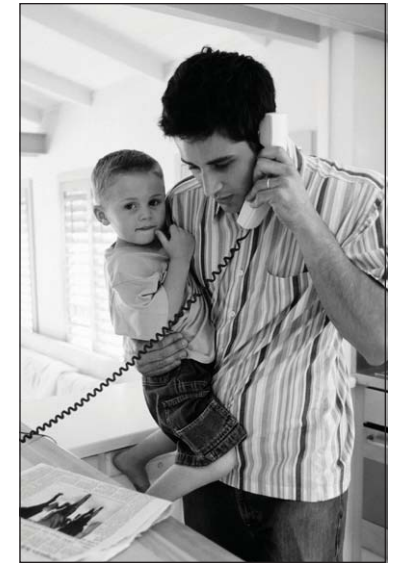
You have the right to:

- 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

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. We may ask the court to remove the child while we work with you on making your home safe.

Your child will probably 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.



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.

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 services to keep your child safe at home.
- You do not agree with your case plan.

You MUST be Told When You Need to Go to Court.

We must tell you when and where to go. You should go to all court hearings.

You also will get a copy of the paperwork we give to the court. It is called a complaint and it says why the court needs to be involved.

Step 2. A Children Services Worker Writes a Report.

This report will be done in 45 days or less. After the report is complete, you will be sent a letter. This letter will tell you if the report was “substantiated,” “unsubstantiated,” or “indicated.” See page 9 to read more about what these words mean.

If we find your child has not been harmed and is safe, CS stops here. CS may still 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 Meeting Family Needs Identified During the Assessment Process.

This plan is called a “case plan.” No one knows your child better than you. It is important for you to tell your caseworker what services you think could help your family.

The case plan will say what will be done to make sure your child is safe. It also will say what you need to do. It will say what services you and your child will receive. It also will say 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.

Step 4.
**The Children Services Worker
Helps You to 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