

SECTION 1

Receiving an Initial Report and Assigning a CPS

INTRODUCTION:

The Centralized Call Center (CCC) must determine the appropriate CFS response based on the type of initial report of abuse or neglect.

ISSUE:

Does the report warrant the assignment of a CPS to further investigate? If so, assign a qualified CPS who can respond in a timely manner.

PARTIES AND THEIR DUTIES:

1. CCC: Upon receiving a report, determine the appropriate level of response using guidelines based on state law, federal law, and the state's CFS policies. Some states use a tier system which categorizes the level of response that should be taken.⁴⁰
2. CFS: When a CFS investigation is warranted, appoint a qualified CPS to respond to the report. CPS qualifications and on the job training differ from state to state but typically include requirements like:⁴¹
 - A college degree in social work or human services related field; and
 - Attendance at a twelve-week training program divided into:
 - Six weeks of classroom training; and
 - Six weeks in the field working with a supervisor.
3. CPS: Be prepared to explain (if the case proceeds to a formal contested court hearing), your background, education, experience, training and on-the-job mentoring received to date.

CONCLUSION:

Evaluating the report is important since CCC receives more calls on average than CFS has personnel to respond at any given time. Thus, CCC must screen the calls

⁴⁰ Montana's CFS Policy Manual (2013).

⁴¹ *Id.*

properly, and CFS and CPS must understand the difference in response times according to their state's system.

If the court formally opens the case, the parties should factor the CPS qualifications and CFS experience into the weight of his/her testimony. If the investigating CPS lacks the minimum qualifications or training, the parties should request that a CPS supervisor assist with the case. Parties should inquire into the different areas during the initial court hearing to ensure that the CPS understands and can identify minimal standards required for parenting. It is also a good way for the court to get to know a little about the CPS who is practicing in front of the court.

OTHER ISSUES:

1. Should other governmental agencies be contacted to assist in the case?
2. Should other community-based organizations be contacted to assist in the case?

TIMELINE:

Check with your state for the respective deadlines in responding to abuse and neglect reports as well as fully investigate the reports.

WHY IMPORTANT:

Performing the above duties ensures that no report of abuse or neglect goes unanswered. It also informs the parties as to whether a qualified and properly trained CPS is assigned to the case.

FEEDBACK:

When courts inquire into the CFS response and investigation time, they can better understand how CFS operates. Asking the qualifications of CPS, especially the new faces in the courtroom, will show everyone that the court cares, which helps establish professionalism in the System. It also reinforces that CFS should assign qualified CPS to investigate a report or use supervisor support. Sending an unprepared CPS into the field is hard on the CPS, unfair to the family, and hurts the System in the long run.

HELP AID:

Checklist: Receiving a Report of Possible Abuse or Neglect

ADDITIONAL READING:

Child Safety, A Guide For Judges and Attorneys, Therese Lund and Jennifer Renne (2009).