

**Cuyahoga County
Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Children and Family Services
Policy Statement**

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

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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

Principles of Child Protective Services Interventions

1. Child safety is our primary concern. Our practice is child-centered and family-focused.
2. CCDCFS emphasizes family engagement and involvement in all aspects of our practice.
3. CCDCFS supports assessment and intervention processes that focus on family strengths while addressing the underlying conditions and contributing factors that impact child safety.
4. Child safety is best achieved through active, collaborative and respectful engagement of parents, family, community and all other agency stakeholders.
5. Differential Response is designed to identify family needs and find creative solutions, including formal and informal supports and services to ensure child safety.
6. CCDCFS respects family choices in the selection of services.
7. When families cannot ensure child safety, the agency, with solicited assistance from the courts, community, and / or extended families and kin, take appropriate action to provide protection.
8. Non custodial parents are essential to a child's well being. **References to parents assume the inclusion of any non custodial parent.**

Core Elements of Differential Response

1. CCDCFS uses two separate response pathways for child abuse and neglect reports that are screened-in for assessment and investigations.
2. A case is only assigned to the Alternative Response (AR) pathway if the referral meets the agency's criteria for screen-in and the report does not contain any of the following:
 - physical abuse resulting in serious injury or that creates a serious and immediate risk to a child's health and safety;
 - sexual abuse;
 - child fatality;
 - third party / special investigations.

The agency may identify additional cases as NOT appropriate for AR.

3. Initial assignment to the AR pathway can change based on new information acquired by the agency that alters risk level or safety concerns.
4. Families screened-in and identified as eligible for AR have the opportunity to make an informed decision to be served in the AR pathway or the Traditional Response (TR) pathway.
5. Assessments are completed using a child-centered, family-focused, strength-based perspective.
6. After assessment, if there is no safety concerns, families can accept or refuse the services offered.
7. Families serviced in an AR pathway do not have a formal determination of child maltreatment.
8. The AR pathway does not use the labels of alleged perpetrator or alleged child victim.

Tenets of Differential Response

1. Both AR and TR are agency interventions with a primary goal of child safety. Families have strengths and resources; it is the job of the agency to tap into them and help the family apply them to keep their children safe. Services are provided based on need, child safety and risk of maltreatment.
2. Agency practice is based on safety-focused engagement of and partnership with families and communities, rather than an expectation of compliance. Families' values and cultural tradition must be identified, understood and respected. Efforts are expected to fill service gaps in order to be responsive to the needs of families.
3. Transparency in purpose and process is of utmost importance in engaging and partnering with families. Families are the experts; honor the family's wisdom about its circumstances, strengths and needs. Service plans and case plans are developed in partnership with the family and written in language that the family understands.
4. Interventions collaboratively created by the worker of record (WOR) and the family are more likely to succeed. Most families want to address threats to child safety. Services are family-driven and family requests are honored, unless the child's safety is compromised.

5. Interventions in the lives of families are consistent with the family's needs. Most families can be partners in achieving child safety. Child protective services are concluded when they are no longer necessary to address identified safety and risk concerns.
6. Partners – including families, community, service providers and colleagues – share power. Families are more than the presenting concerns that brought them to the attention of the agency.
7. Practice focuses on the solutions, not the problems. Families are helped through connections with their support networks and with community services and resources, when appropriate.

PROCEDURES

I. RESPONDING TO A SCREENED-IN REPORT

- A. Hotline staff assigns all screened-in reports either AR or TR; emergency, fast response, or non-emergency; and include a priority rating.
- B. In the event that any of the below contacts are not successful, the WOR, supervisor and senior manager discuss strategies to assess safety within one calendar day.
- C. If safety is still not assessed after utilizing multiple strategies, WOR, supervisor and senior manager discuss whether an extension of the safety assessment is justified.
 1. All Emergency reports (Priority 1): A face to face contact with the child subject of the report (CSR) or alleged child victim (ACV) is completed within one hour from the time the report is screened in.
 2. All Fast Response reports (Priority 2): A face to face contact with the CSR or ACV is completed within three hours from the time the report is screened in.
 3. All non-emergency reports (priority 2 or 3): Contact with the parent, guardian, or custodian of the CSR or ACV is completed within 24 hours from the time the referral is screened in.
 - a. Traditional Response priority 2: Complete face to face contact with the ACV or CSR within 24 hours from the time the report is screened in.
 - b. Traditional Response priority 3: Complete face to face or telephone contact with a principal of the report or collateral source, who has knowledge of the ACV's current condition and can provide information about the child's safety within 24 hours of receipt of the report AND complete face to face contact with the ACV within 72 hours from receipt of the report. If there is no known principal or collateral source, or if the telephone contact is unsuccessful, a face to face contact with the ACV is made within 24 hours of receipt of the report.

- c. Alternative Response: WOR makes efforts to schedule a meeting time that is convenient for the family but must be within four business days of the time the report is screened in.
- D. The WOR attempts to contact 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.
- E. The WOR conducts a background review of all parent(s), caregiver(s), or custodian(s). The WOR completes an activity log in SACWIS documenting any information found (this includes any additional addresses located). Any information pertinent to the investigation or child(ren's) safety is discussed with the family. 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. A public record check may be necessary on a non custodial parent depending on the extent of contact that parent has with their child.
- F. The WOR calls the family to schedule the first appointment (a phone call is the preferred method of initial contact), unless a significant safety concern requires an unannounced home visit. Drop-in visits are used sparingly and only with a specific purpose that is clearly documented in the case record. If a drop-in visit is necessary because the family does not have a phone, the WOR asks the family about their preference for scheduling the future assessment visits. The WOR:
 - 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. Schedules initial contact within time requirements listed in section A of these procedures;
 - 4. Asks family about contact preferences, such as phone, email or text.
- G. The WOR documents in the case record the date, time, and with whom the assessment is initiated.
- H. When the selected pathway is AR, at the initial contact, the WOR explains the difference between AR and TR. Participation in the AR pathway is voluntary. If the family requests a pathway change from AR to TR, a pathway change occurs.
- I. If contact with the family to schedule an appointment within the required contact time is unsuccessful (unable to make contact, no phone, etc.) the WOR makes an unannounced home visit.

- J. If the WOR remains unsuccessful, a second face to face attempt occurs within four (4) business days. If this attempt is unsuccessful, the WOR continues to attempt face to face contact at least every five (5) working days, at a minimum, until the child is seen or until a case decision and / or disposition is required.
When contact is unsuccessful, in addition to making face to face attempts, the WOR makes other diligent attempts to locate and / or contact the family (e.g., contact family members, collateral contacts, etc.) and may request case mapping.
- K. 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 or serious harm.
 - 2. There is reason to believe the WOR 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.
- L. If the WOR 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. Assistance from the Prosecutor's Office is requested if the WOR is refused access to the ACV or any records necessary to conduct the assessment/investigation.
- M. Adding participants (or adding an additional role for a participant) to the SACWIS intake must be made within 4 days of the screen in date and prior to the approval of the safety assessment (e.g., adding and ACV, AP, etc.).

II. SAFETY ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

- A. Safety Assessment: An assessment of safety is conducted in response to a child abuse and / or neglect report, a dependency report, a family in need of services (FINS) report, or any other instances in which safety needs to be assessed throughout the life of a case.
 - 1. WOR completes the "CAPMIS – Safety Assessment" in SACWIS and submits to the supervisor after completing face-to-face contacts within one day if possible, but no later than the first four working days from the date the report is screened in to assess the safety of the child. It is a point in time documentation of safety. The supervisor reviews the Safety Assessment within 24 hours and any required follow up or needed correction is completed and approved in SACWIS within seven working days from the date the report was screened in.

2. The completed Safety Assessment tool documents the evaluation of signs of present danger, past history, child vulnerability, and family protective capacities to determine the most appropriate safety response.
 3. If a justification/waiver was completed and the WOR has extended the completion of the "Safety Assessment" (pursuant to OAC 5101:2-36-11), The WOR documents the assessment of safety by completing the "Safety Assessment" within 24 business hours from the face to face contact with the CSR or ACV and one parent, guardian, custodian or caretaker.
- B. If it is determined that a child is in immediate danger of serious harm, the WOR immediately develops and implements a safety plan. See Policy 2.03.01 Safety Planning.

III. INTERVIEWING

- A. An arrangement for a professional interpreter service is made 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).
- B. All adults living in the home of the child are interviewed face to face, unless law enforcement will interview the alleged perpetrator. WOR assesses their knowledge of the allegation or concern, observe the interaction between the child and caretaker, and obtains relevant information regarding child safety and risk.
- C. WOR advises the alleged perpetrator and parent or custodian of the specific complaints or 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.
- D. When the alleged perpetrator is unknown, the WOR inquires about others who may have had access to the ACV during the time when the abuse/neglect may have occurred. Each of these identified individuals are interviewed.
- E. All children who reside in the home are seen and interviewed (unless they are non-verbal). When appropriate to the circumstances, children are interviewed away from the parent, caregiver, or custodian and / or alleged perpetrator with consent. The purpose of the interview is to evaluate each child's condition, determine if the child is safe, and obtain each child's explanation regarding the allegations or concerns contained in the report.
- F. WOR receives permission from the child's parent / legal custodian to speak with the child. 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.
- G. The rationale for interviewing a child without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent is documented in the Activity Log.
- H. 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.
- I. When the child or sibling of a child is interviewed without parental, caregiver, or custodian consent, the same day, the WOR attempts a face to face contact with the child's parent, caregiver, or custodian to inform them that an interview of the child occurred.
- J. 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 WOR is still expected to observe interactions between child and caregiver and document those observations in the Activity Log. If the observation is not possible, that information is included in the waiver.
- K. The WOR conducts and documents face to face or telephone interviews with the reporter, other service providers, 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. The WOR exercises discretion in the selection of collateral sources to protect the family's right to privacy.
- L. The WOR may take other actions necessary to assess safety and risk to the child. These actions may include, but are not limited to:
1. Taking photographs of areas of trauma on the child's body;
 2. Taking photographs of the child's environment (with parental, caregiver, or custodian consent);

3. Securing a medical examination or psychological evaluation of the children (with parental, caregiver, or custodian consent); and / or
4. Securing any relevant records, including but not limited to school, mental health, and medical records.

IV. FAMILY ASSESSMENT AND DOCUMENTATION

- A. Family Assessment: The “Family Assessment” is designed to assist workers in assessing risk and identifying the strengths and needs present in the family system to inform case opening decisions and what service needs may be present. 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.
1. The WOR jointly with the family assesses strengths and needs. A family-centered approach to engaging the family may increase their readiness and ability to change. The WOR develops a helping relationship with families and attempts to make the family feel as comfortable as possible while assessing the family needs.
 2. A “Family Assessment is completed for all of the following reports:
 - Intra-familial child abuse / neglect reports, including those which are screened in as a third party investigation.
 - Dependency reports.
 - Family in need of services (FINS) reports.
 3. The “Family Assessment” is completed on all cases transferred for ongoing services prior to the completion of the case plan, except for the following family in need of services reports:
 - Deserted child.
 - Emancipated youth.
 - Permanent surrender
 4. The WOR completes the “Family Assessment” within forty-five (45) days of the screening date.
 - a. A fifteen day extension of this completion time frame can be obtained if sufficient information is not available and a justification to extend the time frame has been completed and approved by the supervisor. The justification is completed prior to the 45th day.
- B. Service Identification: Service identification occurs throughout the assessment process. As soon as the family or WOR identifies a need for a service, the WOR supports the family and links them to the appropriate services.
- C. All investigation and assessment activities are documented in the Activity Log within seventy-two (72) hours from the date of the event.
- D. The WOR ensures all identifying information regarding the family and family members is accurately entered into SACWIS.

V. PATHWAY SWITCH

- A. Cases following the AR pathway are switched to the TR pathway when family circumstances warrant. Cases are changed from AR to 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 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 **are not** switched 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, and the date of the switch is also documented. The family is notified in writing of the pathway change within 72 hours of the switch.
1. The WOR completes this by selecting the “AR Pathway Switch” link and recording the “Pathway Switch Date” and “Pathway Switch Reason”. A case decision is not required to record the pathway switch. In this case, the roles of CSR will revert to ACV and Adult Subject of Report (ASR) will revert to Alleged Perpetrator (AP). The Case Category changes from AR to Assessment / Investigation. The case remains with the WOR until there is a disposition and resolution to maintain continuity and consistency with the family.
 2. When a pathway switch occurs after the “Family Assessment” is completed, the WOR develops a “CAPMIS Case Plan” with the family and records the “Pathway Switch Date” and “Pathway Assigned”.
 - a. The “Case Plan” is due seven (7) days from the date of the pathway switch.
 - b. The family’s participation in the development of the “Case Plan” is the service plan.
 - c. The SAR trigger date will remain the date the “Family Assessment” was completed.The case is transferred to a Traditional ongoing services unit following completion of the “Case Plan”.

VI. SUBSEQUENT ALLEGATIONS

- A. When a subsequent allegation is screened in on an active case, the WOR completes a new assessment following all steps outlined in section II of this policy. Subsequent allegations are treated with the same urgency and response as initial reports.

- B. When assistance of another worker was previously provided or is necessary during the investigation/assessment, the WOR has a responsibility to coordinate with those workers to ensure information is received timely.
- C. When a subsequent allegation is received prior to the completion of the "Family Assessment", the new allegation may be assessed in conjunction with the prior allegation and linked to the same "Family Assessment".
- D. An "Ongoing case A/I" is completed in SACWIS in lieu of the "Family Assessment" if a "Family Assessment" has already been completed during the current case opening.
- E. Alternative Response- When a subsequent allegation is screened in on a case active in AR, the case remains on the AR pathway unless the new report contains information that does not meet the screening criteria for AR. When the report contains information that does not meet the criteria, a pathway switch occurs.

VII. CASE DISPOSITIONS

- A. Case dispositions are completed only on cases that have been assigned to the TR pathway and 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.
- D. WOR 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. If a family is already involved with Help Me Grow a referral is not needed and the WOR notes this in the case activity log.
- E. Once a case disposition is made the WOR:
 - 1. Documents the date and method of the above notifications;
 - 2. Closes the case; or

3. Closes the case and completes referrals for supportive services which is made as appropriate, for any child not to be at risk of imminent harm; or
4. If the family's needs warrant services, the case may be assigned for ongoing services.

VIII. CASE CLOSURE / TRANSFER FOR ONGOING SERVICES

- A. At the completion of an assessment the WOR presents their 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. 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 – I.D. (CAPMIS) 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. AR cases should be resolved within 45 days of the screen in date. WOR 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 WOR 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 case is unable to be resolved within 45 days of the screen in date the case is designated for Ongoing Services.
- C. The WOR notifies the family of their recommendation to close the case or provide IHSS, reasons for their recommendations, and intent to close the case or transfer the case to ongoing services. WOR encourages the family to participate in service planning or case planning so the recommendations can be discussed further.

- D. When the family's case is not court involved the in-home supportive services (IHSS) are voluntary. If the family does not agree to IHSS, regardless of agency recommendation for services, the case is closed (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. If the family is in agreement to have IHSS the supervisor approves the family assessment in SACWIS. Cases recommended for traditional IHSS is transferred to an ongoing case worker in accordance with Policy 2.06.01 "Joint Transfer Conference". It is important to complete the transfer process as soon as possible so services can be delivered.
 - 1. When an AR case is transferred for ongoing services, it is the expectation that these cases be closed within 90 days of the approval of the Family Assessment. The case will remain an AR case with the original WOR unless criteria for a pathway change are met.
 - 2. If a family is in need of extended services longer than 90 days, a recommendation is made by the supervisor during a case review to extend the opening to a maximum of 120 days. This extension is rare.
 - 3. If it is determined that a case will need to remain open past 120 days or reasons persist that requires the case to remain open past the 120 days, the case is transferred to a Traditional IHSS ongoing unit in accordance with Policy 2.06.01. An AR Ongoing Information Sheet is provided to the receiving worker at the time of Joint Transfer Conference. A Joint Home Visit between AR staff and receiving worker is completed at a time convenient for the family and within 7 days of a case transfer. A change in assigned workers may be difficult for the family. It is imperative that this change not impede the progress the family is making.
- F. When a case is closed due to the family's refusal to participate in IHSS, the WOR includes a list of any recommendations and resources to the family in the case closing letter.
- G. Cases where a court motion has been or will soon be filed are transferred to a traditional ongoing unit as soon as possible.

IX. JUSTIFICATION AND WAIVERS

- A. Justification and waiver requirements apply to all cases whether they are screened in as TR or AR. All waivers require prior supervisory approval.
- B. The WOR may extend the time frame for completing all of the following:
 - 1. Completion of the Safety Assessment within 7 working days from when the report was screened in for investigation/assessment. The time frame may be extended until face to face contact with each child and at

least one parent, caregiver, or custodian is conducted or until a report disposition or final case decision is made. The Safety Assessment must be completed within three business days after making face to face contact with the ACV or CSR.

2. Completion of the Family Assessment or Ongoing Case Assessment within 45 calendar days from the date the report was screened in for investigation / assessment. The justification is completed prior to the 45th calendar day of the investigation / assessment. The length of the extension shall not exceed 15 calendar days.
 3. Completion of the report disposition within 45 calendar days from the date the report was screened in for investigation. The length of time shall not exceed 15 calendar days.
- C. The WOR may waive completion of the following assessment / investigation activities with written justification and prior supervisory approval.
1. Face to face interview with each child in the home of the ACV or CSR, including the ACV or CSR.
 2. Face to face interview with each adult residing in the home of the child, including the parent(s), caregiver, or custodian.
 3. Face to face interview with the alleged perpetrator.
 4. Completion of the Family Assessment or Ongoing Case Assessment if the report disposition is one of the following:
 - a. Family moved: unable to complete assessment/investigation.
 - b. Family moved out of county; refer to appropriate PCSA.
 - c. Unable to locate.
- D. The approved justification or waiver is documented in the activity log and approved in advance by the supervisor. Justifications for extension are not approved if the WOR is unable to provide sufficient reason as to why the activity will not be complete without additional time. Extensions are not approved for the completion of paperwork.

SEE ALSO:

- **Ohio Administrative Codes:**
 - Section 5101:2-36 – Screening and Investigation
 - Section 5101:2-37 – Assessments
- **Ohio’s Child Protective Services Worker Manual and CAPMIS 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 5.01.01 – In-Home Supportive Services
 - Policy 5.01.02 – Case Plan / Family Service Plan
 - Policy 5.01.04 – Family Team Meetings
 - Policy 5.02.01 – TDM / Staffings Policy