

Child Protective Services

A Guide To Family Assessment



The purpose of this brochure is to help you understand the Child Protective Services (CPS) reporting and response process. Please contact your CPS worker if you have additional questions that are not answered by the information provided in this brochure.

What Is Child Protective Services?

Child Protective Services, which operates under the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), has the responsibility under the *Code of Virginia* to respond to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Local departments of social services are required by the law to:

- ▶ Act in response to valid reports of suspected child maltreatment.
- ▶ Evaluate child safety.
- ▶ Support and strengthen families, wherever possible.
- ▶ Facilitate services to families to help ensure the safety of their children.
- ▶ Prevent future abuse or neglect.





What Is Child Abuse And Neglect?

Section 63.2-100 of the *Code of Virginia* defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care:

- 1) Causes or threatens to cause a non accidental physical or mental injury.
- 2) Causes or threatens to cause a non accidental physical or mental injury during the manufacture or sale of certain drugs.
- 3) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care.
- 4) Abandons the child.
- 5) Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development.
- 6) Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.
- 7) Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender.

In addition, the law requires health care providers to report to Child Protective Services any newborn infant who tests positive for drugs.

Why Has A Child Protective Services (CPS) Worker Contacted Me?

You have been contacted because the Department of Social Services received a report of possible abuse or neglect of a child or children in your care.

Why Would Someone Make A Report?

The purpose of reporting is to identify abused and neglected children as soon as possible so that the child's safety and well being can be addressed.

Some signs that people notice and may report to CPS include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ A child with questionable injuries.
- ▶ A young child who is left alone.
- ▶ A child who has unattended health care problems or medical needs.
- ▶ A child who is consistently hungry or appears malnourished.
- ▶ A child who has a sexually transmitted disease or other signs of sexual abuse.





Who Made The Report?

Anyone can make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect. The person making the report is not required to provide his/her name. Because of confidentiality laws, the name of the reporter will not be released unless there is a court order or during court testimony. Certain professionals who work with children are mandated by law to immediately report suspected child abuse and neglect.

What Happens After A Report Is Made?

Local departments of social services will respond to valid child abuse and neglect reports by conducting a family assessment or an investigation. The goals of both responses are to:

- ▶ Assess child safety.
- ▶ Strengthen and support families, whenever possible.
- ▶ Prevent future child maltreatment.

Family Assessment Response

A family assessment is conducted when:

- ▶ The report is valid, but is not required by law or policy to be investigated.
- ▶ There is no immediate threat to the child's safety or well being.
- ▶ The family may benefit from services.

Reports which are initially determined to be appropriate for a family assessment response may be reconsidered for an investigation, if there is evidence of serious abuse or neglect, or child safety concerns.

What Happens During A Family Assessment?

In most cases, the CPS worker and family members work together to complete a child safety and family needs assessment. Meeting with the CPS worker provides an opportunity for you, as a parent, to share your concerns and perspectives on how to raise your child/children, to identify family needs, to ask questions, and to obtain immediate feedback.

If you elect not to participate in a family assessment, the CPS worker will proceed with conducting a child safety assessment, as required by Virginia law. The CPS worker will provide you with written feedback concerning your child/children's safety and related needs, including recommended services.

During a family assessment, the CPS worker will:

- ▶ Conduct an initial safety assessment and develop a safety plan for the child, if needed.
- ▶ Talk face to face with you, your children and others who may live with you.
- ▶ Look for signs of injury, abuse, or neglect.
- ▶ Observe your home's environment.
- ▶ Check for prior reports of abuse or neglect.





- ▶ Complete a risk assessment with your family and determine what services, if any, are needed to prevent future abuse or neglect.
- ▶ Request your assistance in identifying other individuals who may be able to help your family if services are needed to keep your child/children safe.
- ▶ Arrange for services to support your family.

The law requires a CPS family assessment be completed in 45-60 days from the date of the report.

If your family needs services, the CPS worker will offer to develop a service plan with you, and link you to available community resources such as family counseling, parent support groups, substance abuse services, children's programs, day care, etc.

You may also choose to decline services for your family that are offered as a result of the family assessment. The case will be closed if there is no threat to your child/children's safety. If your child/children's safety is compromised, the CPS worker will consider petitioning the court to require additional services to ensure the safety of your child/children.

What Right Does CPS Have To Talk To My Child?

In order to provide an objective child safety assessment, Section 63.2-1518 of the *Code of Virginia* allows a CPS worker to speak with a child and his/her siblings without parental consent and outside the presence of the parent/caretaker.

If the CPS worker talks with your child or children without your prior knowledge, you will be notified about the interview as soon as possible.

What About Examining My Child?

The CPS worker will observe the child/children for injuries or signs of abuse or neglect. Under Section 63.2-1520 of the *Code of Virginia*, the CPS worker is permitted to take photographs and make the necessary arrangements to X-ray the child/children as part of a medical evaluation. This can be conducted without parental/caretaker consent.

Photographs of the living conditions in which the child/children reside may also be taken with the consent of the parent/caretaker, or under the direction of the local Commonwealth Attorney's Office.



Date: _____

To: _____

A report of suspected child abuse or neglect has been received about:

(Child or Children)

The concerns are:

Please call:

(CPS Worker)

at : _____

(Agency Name & Telephone)

to discuss the report, answer your questions, and discuss your family's need for services.

Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-552-7096

(Language Line available)



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