

# **CA/N INTAKE**

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## **I. PURPOSE**

CA/N intake is designed to receive information from the community about children who are allegedly abused/neglected. During the intake process, child welfare staff shall:

- Assist individuals contacting DHR to provide behaviorally specific, detailed information about their concerns;
- Determine if the concerns meet CA/N definitions and whether the children may be at risk of serious harm;
- Identify which CA/N reports must be referred to law enforcement;
- Determine the response time for CA/N assessments conducted by DHR; and
- Provide information to reporters about other DHR programs (e.g., CPS prevention) and/or community resources that may be of assistance when the intake information indicates the children are not at risk of serious harm.

## **II. GENERAL GUIDELINES**

Child welfare staff who receive information regarding alleged abuse/neglect to children shall follow these policies and procedures when collecting, analyzing, and making decisions about intake information. For intake information to be considered a CA/N report, the children identified in the report must (a) be allegedly at risk of serious harm or allegedly have experienced serious harm in the past or (b) the person allegedly responsible for the abuse/neglect must have the potential for access to other children thereby placing them at risk of serious harm. “Allegedly at risk of serious harm” is intended to address those children who are in such situations that there is a possibility they may experience serious harm unless DHR intervention occurs. Additionally, it is not intended to provide a mechanism for screening out reports when the reporter is unable to provide conclusive information or evidence that an incident occurred or that a child experienced harm as a result of the incident.

All counties shall establish and maintain procedures for handling after-hours emergency calls. These procedures shall be described in the county’s working agreement with law enforcement and provided to community partners who have after-hours contact with children (e.g., hospitals, law enforcement agencies, foster care providers). Child welfare staff shall respond to the caller within thirty (30) minutes of being contacted.

The county’s after-hours procedures shall identify, at a minimum:

- Contact numbers (e.g., telephone, pager) for on-call staff;
- Contact numbers (e.g., telephone, pager) for back-up staff (e.g., worker, supervisor); and
- Contact numbers for local law enforcement agencies.

### III. INFORMATION COLLECTION

Reporters provide information to child welfare staff through:

- in-person contacts,
- telephone contacts, and
- written information (e.g., letters, DHR form for reporting abuse/neglect), delivered by mail, e-mail, facsimile (fax), or hand-delivery.

When written information only is provided and there has been no personal contact with the reporter, child welfare staff shall contact the reporter, whenever possible, before making intake decisions.

#### A. Conduct Interviews

Child welfare staff who interview reporters shall collect information in an objective, neutral, and unbiased way about how the family functions from both a strengths- and needs-based perspective.

During interviews, child welfare staff shall:

- Encourage reporters to provide detailed information about the alleged abuse/neglect;
- Collect essential identifying information on the children, parents, primary caregivers, other household members, persons allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect, and other individuals who may have information about the child/family situation;
- Collect identifying information on the reporter, how the person became aware of the child/family situation (eyewitness or hearsay), and reasons for contacting DHR now.

Prior to completing an interview, child welfare staff shall:

- Inquire into the reporter's opinion about what should occur and the reporter's interest in remaining involved in the child/family situation.
- Provide reporters with information about child welfare's next steps, if any.
- If the intake information constitutes a CA/N report and the reporter is a legal parent of a child allegedly being abused/neglected, advise the parent that notification will be provided about the CA/N assessment's disposition.

- When the information constitutes a CA/N report and a law enforcement agency (LEA) is required to investigate, inform reporters that they need to contact the appropriate LEA to file an incident report, that DHR will send the intake information to the LEA, and that any needed follow-up must be requested from the LEA.
- Advise the reporter that their identity is kept confidential insofar as possible, can only be released according to State law, and may be released if the information is sent to the District Attorney (DA) or a law enforcement agency (LEA), or if the court becomes involved.
- Provide information to reporters about other DHR programs (e.g., CPS prevention) and/or community resources that may be of assistance when the intake information indicates the children are not at risk of serious harm.

#### B. Clear Agency Records

Child welfare staff shall clear all DHR files and review existing records on all children, family members, and persons allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect. Agency files and existing records include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Central files (i.e., paper case records)
- Automated systems (e.g., IEVS, Facets, SCI-II, FACTS, CA/N Central Registry, ALECS)

Print system information to supplement the reporter's information and assist the child welfare staff member responsible for the CA/N assessment. Scan system information into the referral file cabinet in the CAN/ANNE/Prevention folder. Use the naming scheme described in the FACTS File Cabinet Procedures documents.

- CA/N Records

Obtain and review CA/N records on all prior incidents regardless of the disposition. If there is reason to believe CA/N records or other case material may exist in other states, contact the appropriate Central Registry and attempt to obtain that state's information.

Note: The Public Human Services Directory contains telephone contact numbers for other states' CPS programs. Counties that do not have a current directory may use the internet to search for another agency's contact number.

If CA/N records are unavailable because an incident occurred in another state or for any other reason, document information obtained from the other state or the reason the record is unavailable.

#### IV. ANALYSIS AND DECISION-MAKING

Child welfare staff shall analyze intake information to determine whether a risk of serious harm may be present, which agency (law enforcement or DHR) must respond, and if DHR must respond, the appropriate response time.

##### A. CA/N Reports

Intake information constitutes a CA/N report when:

- Children allegedly being abuse/neglected
  - (see the definition of a child)  
The definition of a child is a person (a) under the age of eighteen (18) years or (b) a person under that age of 19 who is in need of protective services and does not qualify for adult protective services under Chapter 9 of Title 38;
- persons allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect are at least age fourteen (14) years or older when the CA/N incident occurred; **and**
- alleged abuse/neglect meets the *CA/N Allegations And Definitions* (refer to Allegations And Definitions section).

The marital status of the child allegedly abused/neglected does not alter the criteria for a CA/N report in any way. Child welfare staff are still responsible for completing intake functions, making the necessary decisions, conducting CA/N assessments, and delivering services as needed.

Note: Sexual abuse definitions are based on Alabama's criminal statutes for sexual offenses. These statutes contain specific factors (i.e., age, relationship, and consent) that determine whether sexual activity constitutes child sexual abuse. Child welfare staff **must** review the *CA/N Allegations And Definitions* and *Sexual Abuse Guidelines* carefully when determining if sexual activity constitutes a CA/N report.

##### B. Case Situations Not Accepted As CA/N Reports

Reports involving the following situations are not accepted as CA/N reports.

- **Reports on unborn children**  
Child welfare staff shall provide reporters with information about other DHR programs and community resources as appropriate.
- **Reports on persons age eighteen (18) and older**  
Reports received on persons age 18 or older involving incidents that occurred when the person was under age 18 are not considered a CA/N report unless the individual is between his/her 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> birthday and currently in need of protective services.

If the person is age 19 or older, child welfare staff shall advise reporters that they may contact the appropriate LEA to file an incident report as these situations may be appropriate for criminal prosecution.

If the incident occurred on or after the 19th birthday and the person is vulnerable, physically disabled, or mentally disabled, DHR's Adult Protective Services (APS) may be appropriate and a referral shall be made.

When persons age 19 or older report they were abused/neglected as a child and there are other children currently living in the home with the person allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect, there must be some other reason to believe that the other children are presently being abused/neglected before the report is accepted as a CA/N. If the abuse/neglect occurred while in a foster or adoptive placement and the person allegedly responsible for the abuse/neglect is still in a caregiver role, child welfare staff must interview/observe the children and the caregiver(s) to determine if any of the children are currently experiencing abuse/neglect. If abuse/neglect is occurring, a CA/N report shall be initiated on those children.

#### C. Agency Mandated To Respond

Child welfare staff shall determine which agency, DHR or law enforcement, must respond to the alleged abuse/neglect report.

##### 1. Department of Human Resources (DHR)

DHR conducts CA/N assessments on all CA/N reports **except** (1) discipline or corporal punishment occurring in school settings and (2) incidents occurring in **state-operated** child residential facilities (see Appendix for listing), which must be investigated by law enforcement. Refer to b. Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) below for additional information.

#### **Special procedures are required when DHR responds to certain CA/N reports involving the following situations:**

- Incidents involving DHR employees and close working associates (refer to *Special CA/N Procedures* for additional information).

“DHR employees” includes current merit or contract staff, active or on leave, and their immediate family members. Immediate family includes spouses, children, parents and in-laws, grandparents, and siblings.

“Close working associates” includes any individuals in the county who have a close working relationship with DHR (e.g., juvenile/law

enforcement officers, District Attorneys, judges, local agency administrators).

County directors (or their designee) are responsible for determining which county or local child welfare staff members are the most appropriate to conduct the CA/N assessment based on the information received at intake and the individuals' involvement with the County Department. Counties that need assistance with determining who will conduct the CA/N assessment shall contact SDHR Division of Children and Family Services, to discuss the information.

- Incidents where a school employee engages in a sex act, sexual contact or soliciting a sex act or sexual contact, with a student (male or female) under the age of nineteen. Refer to *Out-of-Home Protocol, J. Schools And Allegations Not Involving Discipline/Corporal Punishment*, for procedures to follow when conducting investigations.
- Incidents where a foster parent engages in a sex act, having sexual contact, or soliciting a sex act or sexual contact with a foster child as provided by Code of Alabama §13A-6-71.
- Incidents occurring in out-of-home care settings – refer to *Out-Of –Home Protocol* for detailed information.
- Incidents involving Indian children - the county child welfare supervisor must contact the Office of Child Welfare Policy if assistance is needed.
- Incidents occurring on military installations - the County DHR shall follow their working agreement with the military.

## 2. Law Enforcement Agency (LEA)

LEAs investigate CA/N reports involving:

- Discipline or corporal punishment committed in a public or private school or kindergarten, including incidents where the punishment deviates from school board policy and seems excessive (e.g., choking, slapping, pulling hair, etc.) but was used for the expressed purpose of maintaining order and discipline in the school setting, and
- Suspected abuse/neglect committed in a state-operated child residential facility (see Appendix for listing).

When DHR receives a CA/N report that must be investigated by a LEA, child welfare staff shall verbally notify the appropriate LEA as soon as the report is received, and follow up by providing written intake information in a confidential



manner unless otherwise specified in the county's written working agreement. Child welfare staff may, upon the LEA's request, assist with these investigations.

D. DHR Response Times

DHR's response time is the timeframe within which in-person initial contact shall be made with (1) the children who are allegedly at risk of serious harm and (2) all other children in the home.

Designated response times are "immediate" and "within five (5) calendar days" for children allegedly abused or neglected. "**Immediate**" is defined as "as soon as possible after a report is received, but no later than twelve (12) hours from receipt of the intake information." "**Within five (5) calendar days**" means 5 days from the exact date, hours, and minutes from the date and time of day the intake information was received.

Child welfare staff shall make in-person contact with all other children in the home not abused or neglected as soon as the intake and initial child contact information warrants, but no later than fifteen (15) calendar days which is calculated in exact date, hours, and minutes from the date and time of day the report was received.

FACTS will calculate both "immediate" and "within 5 calendar days" response time from the date and time the intake information is received. If the first contact is not made and entered in FACTS prior to the required exact day, and exact time of day, the response time will be considered as "not met."

The response time is determined by analyzing the information collected at intake (including the review of existing agency records). Supervisory consultation and concurrence is required on all response time determinations. Refer to the *Appendix* for the CA/N Response Time Determination form which can assist staff with making response time determinations. The content of this form is included in FACTS as required documentation. The form in the *Appendix* is available as a tool for child welfare workers' and supervisors' use.

1. Children Allegedly Abused Or Neglected

Initial in-person contact with children identified in the CA/N report as allegedly abused or neglected must be made within one of the following response times.

a. Immediate

Child welfare staff shall respond **immediately** when intake information indicates serious harm will likely occur within twenty four (24) hours to the children identified in the report as allegedly abused or neglected.

Vulnerable children are more likely to be at risk of serious harm than those who are able to protect themselves. (Refer to definition of "vulnerability" in the *Glossary* for additional information. Factors that

can make children vulnerable include, but are not limited to:

- Age six (6) years or younger;
- Disability (e.g., physical, mental, developmental);
- Health; and
- Limited, unknown, or no access to individuals who can provide protection.

Factors that suggest children may be at risk of serious harm within twenty four (24) hours and require an immediate response include, but are not limited to:

- Child death report is received with alleged abuse/neglect as the cause, and there are other vulnerable children in the home;
- Child is under age six (6) years and the alleged abuse/neglect is attributed to the parents' or primary caregivers' substance abuse, mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or family violence;
- Child is being hit, beaten, severely deprived **now**;
- Child is unsupervised or alone **now**;
- Child is in life threatening living arrangements **now**;
- Serious allegations have been reported and a child is accessible to the person allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect or accessibility to the person is unknown;
- Serious allegations have been reported and the child/family situation may or will change quickly;
- Allegations involve failure to thrive;
- Allegations involve medical neglect of children with disabilities;
- Parents/primary caregivers are failing to seek medical care for a health problem which, if left untreated, could cause serious harm;
- Parents/primary caregivers have been reported as being under the influence of substances **now**;
- Parents'/primary caregivers' whereabouts are unknown;
- There is a history of CA/N reports which suggest the children may be at risk of serious harm **now**, and

- Parent/any other legal guardian/custodian calls and states they want to relinquish their child. Worker shall go to the location where the caller is located immediately; talk to and assess the caller and situation; and see the child/children immediately.

When a CA/N report involves the allegation “Positive Test For Alcohol And/Or Drugs At Birth” **and the report is received before the infant is discharged from the hospital**, child welfare staff per December 1, 2016 Memo, *Amended Timely Response to Intake Calls*, shall respond immediately to the hospital. In-person contact must be made with the mother, the infant, and hospital medical staff prior to the infant’s discharge. The mother’s and infant’s address and living arrangement must be verified (e.g., relatives, Medicaid records, DHR records, postal service), and a home visit **must** be made within twelve (12) hours after the infant’s discharge from the hospital.

**When the report is received after the infant’s discharge from the hospital**, child welfare staff must make a home visit as soon as possible, but no later than twelve (12) hours after the report is received.

b. Within Five (5) Calendar Days

For situations in which an immediate response is **not** required, child welfare staff shall respond as quickly as the intake information warrants and no later than five (5) calendar days calculated in exact date, hours, and minutes in FACTS from the date the intake information is received.

2. Other Children In The Home

Child welfare staff shall make in-person contact with all other children in the home as soon as the intake and initial child contact information warrants, but no later than fifteen (15) calendar days calculated in exact date, hours, and minutes in FACTS from the date the report was received.

## V. DATA ENTRY / DOCUMENTATION

Child welfare staff in the County Department who receive the intake information shall complete FACTS data entry / documentation according to the following requirements.

A. Initial FACTS Data Entry

- CA/N reports received at intake involving child deaths must be entered in FACTS under the “Death allegation (refer to CA/N Allegations And Definitions)” within two (2) working days of the report’s receipt. The

initial child contact date for a deceased child is the date the CA/N report was received.

**Note:** County Departments must notify SDHR when they become aware of child deaths involving any of the following circumstances:

(a) deaths due to alleged abuse/neglect that are entered into the Central Registry;

**Note:** Child welfare staff must update FACTS by adding the child death allegation when allegations of physical injuries (e.g., shaken baby syndrome, internal injuries, etc.) or negligent treatment (e.g., failure to thrive, medical neglect, etc.) results in child death.

(b) deaths occurring in DHR approved or licensed out-of-home care settings; and

(c) other deaths when the County Department has had any other child welfare involvement with the child or family within twelve (12) months of this child death report, even if this death did not allegedly result from abuse/neglect.

- When LEAs are mandated to investigate, reports shall be entered upon confirmation from the LEA that abuse/neglect occurred;
- All other CA/N reports shall be entered within three (3) working days of the information's receipt.

## B. Documentation

Information gathered during the intake process shall be documented in sufficient detail to justify intake decision-making. This information includes, but is not limited to:

- Behaviorally specific details regarding the alleged abuse/neglect and the risk of serious harm it presents;
- How and when CA/N reports were submitted to law enforcement, when LEAs are responsible for conducting investigations;
- Basis for the response time determination when DHR is responsible for conducting an CA/N assessment;
- Information provided about other DHR programs or community resources when a CA/N assessment is inappropriate; and
- Notifications provided to District Attorneys (DA) and LEAs on CA/N allegations per the county's written working agreement.

C. District Attorney (DA) and Law Enforcement Agency (LEA) Notifications

Child welfare staff in the County Department who receive the CA/N report shall provide written intake information to the appropriate DA and LEA as described in the county's written working agreement.

**VI. REVIEW, APPROVAL, AND ASSIGNMENT FOR CA/N ASSESSMENT**

Supervisory consultation shall be an on-going part of the intake process, and child welfare staff shall submit all intake information (i.e., through FACTS and by provision of applicable CA/N or case records) for supervisory review and approval. The intake process is complete when all pertinent information has been documented; the intake information has been reviewed and approved by the supervisor; and when appropriate, the intake has been assigned for CA/N assessment.

A. Supervisory Review

Supervisors shall review all intake information to determine that:

- the intake information has been accurately and fully documented;
- the documented information is pertinent and sufficient to make the required intake decisions;
- the supervisor concurs with the decisions made; and
- the CA/N record contains all supporting documentation (e.g., prior CA/N records; LEA and medical reports).

**Note:** If any information is lacking, the supervisor shall obtain an explanation or additional documentation from the intake worker.

B. Supervisory Approval

Supervisory approval indicates the supervisor has reviewed the intake information per A. above; agrees with the worker's judgment about whether a risk of serious harm may be present and the selected response time; and has entered the approval into FACTS. When a CA/N assessment will be conducted, the supervisor shall take the appropriate steps to forward the information for assignment.

C. Assignment For CA/N Assessment

All counties shall develop local procedures for transferring the intake information to CA/N assessment staff in order to ensure that initial child contact is made in accordance with the designated response time.