

Child Welfare and the Professional

**Prepared by the
Chester County Department
Of
Children, Youth & Families**

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An Overview

The Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Act (Act 124) was signed into law in 1975. It was enacted to protect children from abuse, allow the opportunity for healthy growth and development and, wherever appropriate, to preserve and stabilize family life. The Child Protective Services Law (CPSL) instituted three major initiatives in keeping children safe. First, it created a toll-free, 24-hour, statewide hotline called **CHILDLINE** (1-800-932-0313) to receive reports of suspected child abuse. Second, the law required every county in Pennsylvania to establish a county children and youth agency to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and to provide services to troubled families. Third, the law required that certain individuals, who come into contact with children in their professions, report suspected abuse. This is how the term "**Mandated Reporter**" came into use. There have been several amendments to the CPSL since 1975, including the necessity of notifying law enforcement of serious types of suspected abuse.

The Chester County Department of Children, Youth & Families was established to conduct abuse/neglect investigations and to provide those services that cannot be provided by family, neighbors, friends and the community. The agency is just one part of the network called the Child Welfare System. Other parts include community services, government offices and individuals who are concerned about the health and safety of children. Intervention by the Department of Children, Youth & Families usually occurs in the "gray area" between the right of parents to raise children as they see fit, and without interference, and the responsibility of the community to protect and nurture its most vulnerable population. This balance often leads to debate over the necessity of CYF involvement and the extent of agency intervention. The agency relies on information from

mandated reporters to help identify those children who may be abused or neglected or at risk of harm.

This booklet is designed to inform mandated reporters of their responsibilities under the Child Protective Services Law. For questions that may not be covered in the "Frequently Asked Questions" segment of this booklet, please call the Department of Children, Youth & Families at (610) 344-5800 to request training or consultation. Speakers are available to assist community organizations in better understanding issues related to child welfare and the Child Protective Services Law.

What is Childline?

ChildLine is the 24-hour toll-free telephone line, **1-800-932-0313**, established by the Child Protective Services Law in 1975 to receive reports of suspected child abuse and to relay information to the appropriate CYF or regional office for investigation. Non-residents may call (717) 783-8744 to report suspected abuse.

ChildLine maintains a **Pending Complaint File**, containing reports under investigation or pending court action; the **Statewide Central Register**, containing indicated reports; and a **Research and Statistical File**, containing all reports ever made, without identifying information, for research and statistical purposes.

When a report is made to **ChildLine**, a caseworker gets as much information about the alleged abusive incident as possible. The caseworker checks the Pending Complaint File and Central Register to determine if any of the subjects were involved in a previous investigation. A file number is assigned, and the local child welfare agency or regional office is notified. The report is then filed in the Pending Complaint File and monitored by the ChildLine caseworker to insure that the results of the investigation are received within the mandated time period of 60 days.

When **ChildLine** receives the results of the investigation, a caseworker checks the report for completeness, accuracy, and compliance with the law. Letters are then sent to subjects of indicated reports, notifying them of the determination and their rights under the law. Indicated reports are entered in the Central Register under the name of the child (ren), parent (s), and perpetrator. Unfounded reports are destroyed; this process begins within one year of completing the investigation. Unfounded reports may be retained by the local children and youth agency up to 1 year and 120 days from the date agency services are terminated.

Who is a Mandated Reporter?

A person who, in the course of employment, occupation or practice of a profession, comes into contact with children shall report or cause a report to be made when the person has reasonable cause to suspect, on the basis of medical, professional or other training and experience, that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that person or of an agency, institution, organization or other entity with which that person is affiliated is a victim of child abuse, including child abuse by an individual who is not a perpetrator. Except with respect to confidential communications made to a member of the clergy and to an attorney which are protected, the privileged communication between any professional person required to report and the patient or client of that person shall not apply to situations involving child abuse and shall not constitute grounds for failure to report as required by this chapter.

Persons required to report include, but are not limited to, any licensed physician, osteopath, medical examiner, coroner, funeral director, dentist, optometrist, chiropractor, podiatrist, intern, registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care or treatment of persons, Christian Science practitioner, member of the clergy, school administrator, school teacher, school nurse, social services worker, day-care center worker or any other child-care or foster-care worker, mental health professional, peace officer or law enforcement official.

How to Report Child Abuse

OPTION A

- Call CHILDLINE at 1-800-932-0313

OR

OPTION B

- Call county children and youth agency

Chester County Department of Children, Youth & Families

610-344-5800

All oral reports must be followed by a written report to the county agency within 48 hours. This report is called a CY-47

Tips on Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Child Neglect

Provide as much of the following information as possible:

- Child's full name, birth date, and present location (correct spelling of name is important).
- Name, address, phone number (home and business) and date of birth of the child's parent(s) or legal guardian.
- Names and ages of all other household members, and their relationship to the child.
- County in which the abuse or neglect occurred.
- Account of what happened to the child, description of any injury, date the incident occurred, and what impact it has had on the child.
- Child's exact statement if disclosing sexual abuse.
- Child's school behavior/academic history/attendance.
- Information regarding parent(s) such as employment status, substance abuse, criminal record, cooperation with the school, past involvement with children and youth agency.

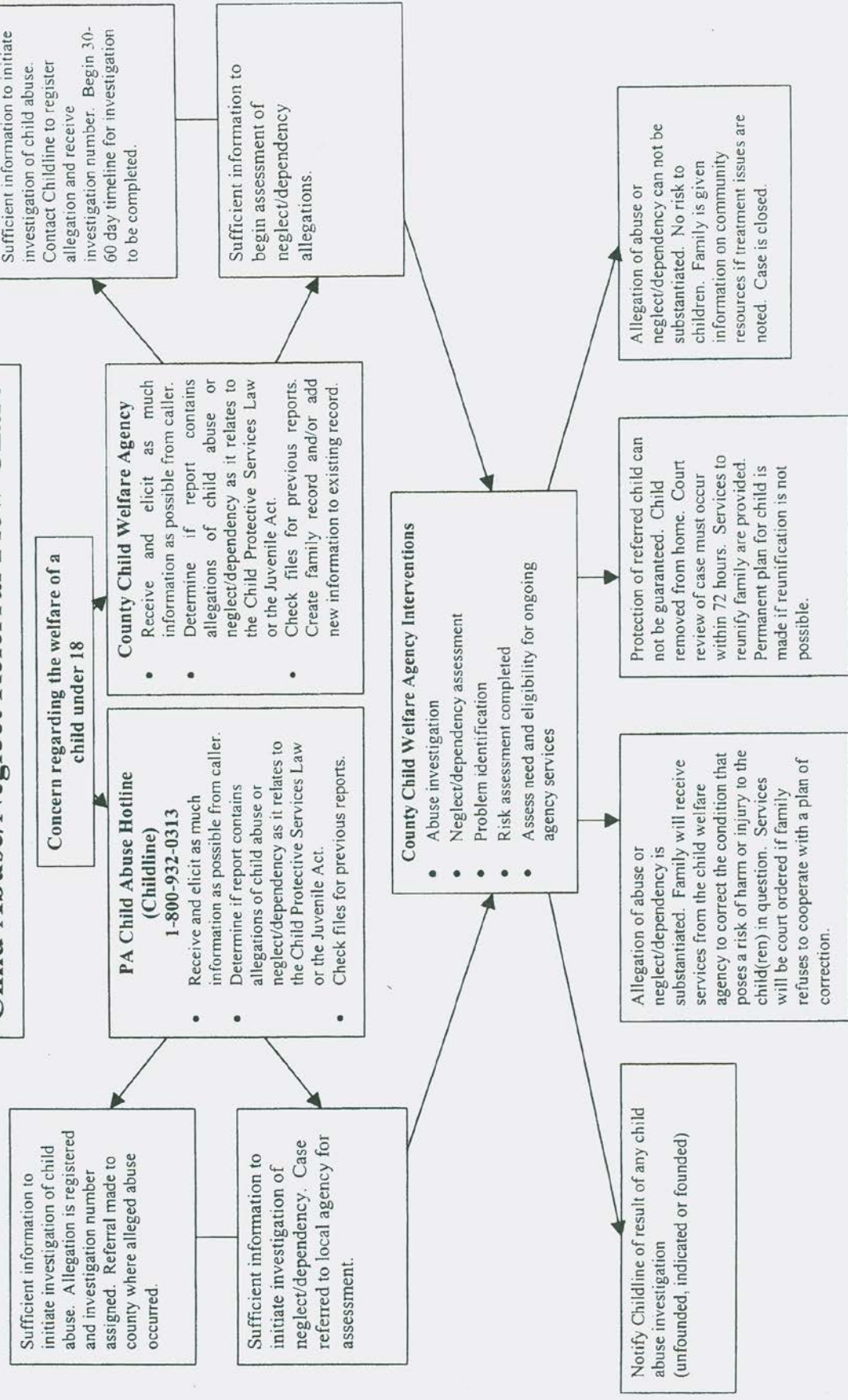
Do:

- Have school nurse document any injuries (photographs are permitted).
- Protect the child's privacy and confidentiality.
- Report without any delay to allow the county agency time to assign a caseworker and initiate an investigation.
- Provide the agency caseworker a private space to interview the child.
- Complete CY47 and forward to Children, Youth and Families.
- Re-contact the caseworker or supervisor if uncomfortable with the response given by access/intake worker.

Avoid:

- Conducting your own investigation.
- Asking leading questions to young children.
- Making the child's situation obvious to unnecessary staff or to students.
- Making any promises to the child which are outside of your ability to fulfill, particularly relating to placement, court involvement, and caseworker decisions.

Child Abuse/Neglect Referral Flow Chart



Frequently Asked Questions

What is child abuse?

Child abuse, according to the CPSL, includes: serious recent physical injury which is non-accidental; mental injury which is non-accidental; sexual abuse; or serious physical neglect of children under age 18 caused by the acts or omissions of a perpetrator. "Recent" is defined as an abusive act within two years from the date CHILDLINE is called. Sexual abuse has no time limit.

Child abuse also includes any recent act, failure to act, or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator that creates an *imminent risk* of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or exploitation of a child under 18 years of age. These are situations that would have caused serious injury if not prevented by happenstance or some other intervention.

Who can be a perpetrator?

A perpetrator of child abuse can be a child's parent, the person responsible for the welfare of a child such as a babysitter or day care staff person, an individual residing in the same home as the child, or a person having an intimate relationship with the child's parent. Abusive incidents perpetrated by persons outside of this group are referred to law enforcement.

What can I do if a child is not being cared for properly, but may not be an abused child?

Reports concerning the safety of children including inadequate housing, clothing and supervision should be referred to the county children and youth agency for assessment as *general protective services*.

What should I do when I suspect a child has been abused?

The law says that mandated reporters must immediately make a report, or notify the person in charge. The person in charge or the designee must make a report of suspected child abuse immediately to CHILDLINE at 1-800 932-0313.

Can a photo be taken if a child has a visible injury?

Yes. A mandated reporter may photograph areas of visible trauma on a child. This is especially helpful if needed as evidence for a subsequent court proceeding. The photos should be labeled and sent to the Department of Children, Youth & Families along with the completed CY-47 form. Mandated reporters have legal immunity in the taking of photographs. The caseworker will generally photograph injuries as part of the investigation.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will I know if the person in charge or the designee makes the report?

The person in charge of the agency or the designee must notify the reporter when the report is made to CHILDLINE.

What do I do if the person in charge of the agency does not make the report?

You should make the report yourself. Nothing prohibits mandated reporters from making a call to CHILDLINE directly; this call can be made confidentially.

When must child abuse be reported?

You must report without delay. State law requires that you report whenever you have "reason to suspect" that a child has been abused, regardless of any previous reports that have been made. This applies to physical injuries within the past two years, imminent risk of serious physical injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, serious physical neglect and emotional abuse.

What else must a mandated reporter do after contacting ChildLine?

Mandated reporters must also complete a report of suspected child abuse. This report is called a CY-47 and blank forms can be obtained from the children and youth agency in your county. The CY-47 MUST be completed within 48 hours of the report being made. (Sample form included in this booklet)

Do I have to know for sure that a child was abused?

No. Your responsibility is to make the report when you suspect a child is being abused. The local Children & Youth caseworker will conduct an investigation and determine whether the child was abused.

Must I report? What if I learn of the abuse from someone other than the child who was allegedly abused?

Yes. Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected abuse or cause a report to be made when they come into contact with children in the course of their employment. You must report when you have reason to suspect, on the basis of your medical, professional or other training and experience, that a child is a victim of child abuse, including child abuse by an individual who is not a perpetrator, regardless of whether or not the child has come before you.

Frequently Asked Questions

Must I give my name?

The law requires that mandated reporters identify themselves and where they can be reached. If clarification of the situation or additional information is needed, the caseworker will be able to contact you.

Will my name be released?

No. The Department of Children, Youth & Families maintains complete confidentiality in all cases. If law enforcement is involved, the name of the reporting source will be shared but will be treated as a confidential informant. The law allows only the Secretary of Public Welfare to release the name of the reporter or anyone who cooperated in the investigation. With your written consent, you can voluntarily have your name released as the reporter.

What could happen to me if I don't report?

A person required to report a case of suspected child abuse who willfully fails to do so commits a misdemeanor of the third degree for the first violation and a misdemeanor of the second degree for a subsequent violation.

Is there immunity when reporting suspicions?

Yes. Anyone reporting child abuse or neglect in good faith is provided civil and criminal immunity from legal liability that otherwise might result by reason of such action. In fact, good faith as a reporter is presumed under the law.

Will I have to testify in court?

Criminal charges are filed against some perpetrators. You may be subpoenaed to testify at a criminal proceeding. Some cases go to Juvenile Court if the agency petitions for custody of the child. You may be required to provide information in a civil proceeding.

What happens when a report is made?

If the report alleges child abuse, a caseworker from the county child and youth agency must see the identified child(ren) within 24 hours. A thorough assessment of the child and family is conducted to determine if the child is or was abused and what, if any, services are appropriate. The investigation is completed within 30 to 60 days. In some situations, the Department of

Children, Youth & Families is mandated to report suspicions of alleged abuse to police and the District Attorney for possible criminal investigation. Agency staff is required by law to make immediate telephone reports, followed by a written report, when suspicions involve the following: sexual abuse or exploitation, suspected homicide, serious bodily injury involving risk of permanent disability, disfigurement or protracted loss of function of an organ or bodily member, or when the alleged perpetrator is not related to the child by blood or marriage.

Who will tell the parents that a report has been made?

The Department of Children, Youth & Families caseworker investigating the report has the obligation to inform the parent(s) and subjects of the report. Verbal notification usually occurs within a few hours of receiving the report; written notification of the report is provided to parents within 72 hours in all cases. The exact time at which the parent(s) is told is up to the discretion of the caseworker in planning for the safety of the child(ren). Certain professionals in ongoing relationships with families they are reporting may prefer to advise those persons involved of their legal requirement to report. The Department of Children, Youth & Families encourage this if disclosure does not jeopardize the safety of the child(ren) or interfere with an investigation.

Can the agency caseworker take custody of the child or remove the child from home or school?

No. The Department of Children, Youth & Families does not have the authority to take emergency, protective custody of a child - only law enforcement officials can do this. If it is believed that a child is at high risk of injury or harm, a caseworker may assume custody of a child under the following conditions:

- Law enforcement has taken protective custody of child and caseworker has initiated a court order to assume custody of child; a hearing in Juvenile Court must occur within 72 hours of taking custody
- A court order has already been issued from Juvenile Court giving the caseworker legal authority to assume custody of the child
- A parent or parents have given written consent and authorization for the Department of Children, Youth & Families to take custody of the child

How do I learn the outcome of the investigation and what is being done to protect the child from further abuse?

Mandated reporters may receive information from the county children and youth agency regarding the final status of the report, whether it was *unfounded*, *indicated* or *founded*, and the services provided or arranged by

the agency. It is recommended that the mandated reporter call the caseworker that conducted the investigation for this information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a "serious mental injury"?

The Child Protective Services Law defines a serious mental injury as "a psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment, that:

- Renders the child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed, socially withdrawn, psychotic or in reasonable fear the child's life or safety is threatened; or
- Seriously interferes with a child's ability to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.

What is a "serious physical injury"?

The Child Protective Services Law describes a serious physical injury as an injury that:

- Causes a child severe pain; or
- Significantly impairs the child's physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

What will be done for the abused child?

It is the goal of the law and the county children and youth agency to preserve the family whenever the child's safety can be assured. If the child is found to be at risk of continued harm, the child may be removed from the home and placed in a safe environment. If placement is necessary, the Department of Children, Youth & Families will work closely with the family, school and placement provider to create a comfortable and nurturing atmosphere for the child until reunification occurs. If reunification with parents is not possible, a permanent plan in the best interest of the child will be made. If placement is not necessary for the child, the agency will work with the family to resolve the problems that necessitated agency intervention. Through counseling, training and other supportive services, the family is assisted in learning new ways to parent their children safely and effectively.

WHAT'S THE SCOOP?

S- Suspect a child is abused/neglected

C- Call to report

O- Offer assistance to child

O- Obligation to complete CY-47

P- Phone CYF for outcome

The Child Welfare System and the Physician

Physicians play a vital role in the reporting and investigation of child abuse. Beyond the fact that they are crucial to the identification of child maltreatment, a physician's expertise in diagnosing abusive injuries is an important part of the child welfare investigation. The actual reporting of child abuse is usually not the physician's last step in the process. Child Welfare workers are not medical experts. The child welfare agency will rely on the opinion of the physician to establish that an abusive act occurred. Many physicians have confused a child welfare worker's requested clarification about a diagnosis of abuse as questioning medical expertise. Part of an investigation, however, involves ruling out other explanations for an injury given to the worker by the child's parent or caretaker. Often, this can only be accomplished through further consultation with the physician. In situations involving sexual abuse of young children, questions will also be asked about the events that led up to the disclosure of abuse. Given the suggestibility of young children, it is important for the worker to establish the credibility of the child's statements, and have knowledge of the specific questions leading up to the disclosure of abuse. This is also true regarding questions asked after medical evidence has been discovered. It is important to note that notifying the parents regarding suspicion of interfamilial sexual abuse may prevent the child welfare worker and law enforcement officer from interviewing the child prior to the alleged perpetrators attempts to suppress any information the child may be willing to tell. This is especially true in situations where the medical evidence is not strong, and the investigation rests on getting a credible interview. The Child Protective Services Law requires that all children who appear to have injuries that meet the legal test of abuse, be seen by a physician to document the injury. Without this documentation, many cases will not stand up to the test of an appeal hearing in the court of common pleas, or the DPW administrative appeal hearings often granted to caretakers accused of abuse. In many situations, the child welfare system is powerless without the assistance of the medical community.

When receiving a report of abuse or neglect, the physician will be asked a number of questions relating to the history they have with a family, and any other previous concerns they may have had in regards to a specific child. If this is not the first referral in regards to a specific family, the physician may assume the agency has retained the record of the last report. This may not be accurate. On average, 70% of the investigations of child abuse are not

substantiated in the state of PA. All information pertaining to unfounded abuse investigations is expunged (destroyed) within one year of case determination. No record, except for the memory of the child welfare worker, may exist for prior reports of abuse. The physician should always reference prior reports and concerns they have on file.

All mandated reporters, including physicians, have the right to get information regarding the results of an investigation they initiated, and what services will be provided to the referred family. This information will generally need to be requested by the physician. In many instances, the physician will be aware of agency decisions through the ongoing contacts with the worker involved with the child. While the physician is certainly deserving of a call from the agency with the results of the investigation, often times the worker in the midst of several investigations will not make this call when they have completed their work with the family.

The child welfare agency receiving the report of abuse from a physician is first responsible to assess the risk to the child in question and to make a safety plan to prevent further harm or injury. Placement out of the home will occur only in those situations where the child's safety can not be assured. In many situations, the alleged perpetrator is asked to leave the family residence while the investigation is being conducted. The severity of the abusive or neglectful incident, parent's cooperation, and the presence of an adult ally will all impact on a decision to remove a child from his or her home.

Information for Law Enforcement

Are police officers and law enforcement officials required to report all suspicions of child abuse brought to their attention in the course of their duties?

Yes. All those in law enforcement are considered to be mandated reporters of child abuse under the Child Protective Services Law. A report of suspected child abuse should be immediately reported to either ChildLine or the county children and youth agency. Also, mandated reporters must complete a CY-47 Written Report of Suspected Child Abuse within 48 hours of making the report and send this to the children and youth agency.

As a law enforcement official, am I required to investigate child abuse?

All reported cases of suspected child abuse would be investigated by a caseworker from the county children and youth agency or the regional office of the Department of Public Welfare. When there are circumstances surrounding the allegations that could be classified as criminal, law enforcement would work with the caseworker in conducting a thorough investigation. Under no circumstances does law enforcement need to delay initiation of a criminal investigation pending contact with the Department of Children, Youth & Families. Many times, police intervention assists, and may even provide the necessary influence, in assuring that those in need receive services.

What information in the report will be shared with law enforcement?

The Department of Children, Youth & Families is permitted to share all information contained in a report of suspected child abuse, including the name of the reporting source. The reporting source will be regarded as a confidential informant. Law enforcement may also obtain any available reports of child abuse when investigating certain serious crimes, including reports of missing children and homicide.

When should law enforcement consider taking physical custody of a child?

The Juvenile Act authorizes the taking of emergency protective custody of a child when there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child is suffering from illness or injury or is in imminent danger from his surroundings, and that his removal is necessary. A child may also be taken into custody if

there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child has run away from his parents, guardian or other custodian.

Abuse Investigation Outcomes

The Department of Children, Youth & Families determines the disposition of a child abuse investigation. It is important to note that this decision is based on the **Child Protective Services Law**. There are three final status determinations:

1. **Indicated** - There is substantial evidence that abuse exists based on available medical evidence, the child protective services investigation, or an admission of abuse by the named perpetrator.
2. **Founded** – There has been a judicial adjudication based on a finding that a child who is a subject of the report has been abused, including the entry of a plea of guilty or nolo contendere or a finding of guilt to a criminal charge involving the same factual circumstances involved in the allegation of child abuse.
3. **Unfounded** - There is not enough evidence to support a determination of abuse as defined in the Child Protective Services Law.

No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child's welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.

When it's NOT Abuse

What about those situations where there is concern about a child but no injury? Can this still be reported? Yes. The Department of Children, Youth & Families conducts just as many "non-abuse" investigations as abuse investigations. Simply stated, when there is an injury or allegation of sexual abuse, the case is classified as an "abuse investigation." All of the other concerns about a child are classified as "dependency assessments." Dependency is a legal term used to describe a child who *"is without proper parental care or control, subsistence, education as required by law, or other care or control necessary for his physical, mental, or emotional health, or morals."* This can include out-of-control teenagers, school attendance and behavior problems, neglect issues and other problems that are having a direct impact on the health and welfare of a child. The criteria for "dependency" is written in The Juvenile Act, enacted in 1972 as part of the general legal trend granting children a variety of constitutional protections. The Juvenile Act attempts to delicately balance the right of children to be protected and the right of families to be free of state intrusion. The Department of Children, Youth & Families offers the same services to "dependent" children as are offered to "abused" children and their families.

When should "dependency" concerns be reported?

Concerns should be reported when there is a direct correlation between what the caretaker is, or is not, doing and the resulting impact on the child. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Abandonment
- Lack of adequate food, shelter and/or clothing
- Medical neglect (physical, mental, emotional, dental)
- Lack of age-appropriate supervision
- Failure to comply with compulsory school attendance regulations
- Lack of necessary care for special needs

If you are not sure a situation meets the criteria for a dependency assessment, call the access department at

Children, Youth & Families and ASK. It is better to be overly concerned about the safety of a child. Don't take chances by not making the call!

Should "dependency" concerns be reported to ChildLine?

Any concerns about a child where there is not an injury or allegation of sexual abuse should be called in directly to the county children and youth agency. These reports are not registered with ChildLine and do not have the same investigative outcomes. The purpose of a dependency assessment is to determine if the identified child (ren) is at risk and to arrange for any needed services for the family. These services may be provided by the Department of Children, Youth & Families or by other community organizations.

How are cases accepted for service?

All new calls to the Department of Children, Youth & Families involving child welfare issues are screened by the Access Unit. Access is a distinct service unit located within the Intake Department of the agency. The service is designed to enable the prompt, efficient receipt of requests for information and referral and/or agency services, and an initial evaluation. The major goals of the Access Unit are to:

- Provide the community with access to information and/or services regarding the welfare of children.
- Assess the referral source's allegations with regard to the definitions of Abuse and Dependency to determine acceptance for investigation/assessment.
- Elicit as much information as possible from the referral source so that a preliminary assessment of risk can be completed and an informed decision about an intervention strategy can be made.
- Provide information and referral services where appropriate that will meet the needs of the caller as well as the subject family.
- Maintain positive working relationships with other service providers in the community.

How soon does a dependency assessment begin?

It depends on several factors. When the Department of Children, Youth & Families receives a report about a child, a caseworker in the Access Department completes an Access Response Priority Assessment. This assessment helps the caseworker in determining 1) whether the child is currently safe; 2) whether the child is likely/unlikely to be abused or neglected in the near future; and 3) the severity of the alleged abuse or neglect. The assessment tool also takes into account the age of the identified child, how many children are in the home, prior agency

involvement with the family, and if there are concerns of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health problems or criminal behavior. The response time given for a dependency assessment ranges from an immediate response up to 10 days. Cases are assigned to an investigator in the Intake Department of the agency.

Critical Decisions in an Investigation

Caseworkers involved in the investigation and/or assessments of child abuse and neglect situations are faced with immediate critical decisions concerning what, if any, services will be provided to the family. The focus of these decisions is on what should be done in the best interest of the child or children. Caseworkers have four options:

1. **Close the case** – If the situation does not warrant continued agency involvement and the children are not at risk of injury or harm, the case will be closed. Also, in situations of false reporting or gross misunderstandings, the case will be closed following the completion of the investigation.
2. **Offer help to the family** - When there is an obvious need for assistance for the continued care and safety of the children, services will be offered. These services may be provided through the county children and youth agency or through other community organizations. It is important to note that services from the children and youth agency are provided on a **voluntary basis** to the family; any family can refuse services.
3. **Initiate court intervention** - When there is reason to believe that the children in the home would be at increased risk if supportive services are not provided, and the family is not willing to accept services, the agency can file a petition for court-ordered services.
4. **Remove the child or children from the home** - The child or children who are in imminent danger of injury or harm will be removed from their home. This can only be done with a court order initiated by the agency or by law enforcement taking emergency protective custody.

Other factors to consider:

- Age of child
- Severity and/or frequency of abuse/neglect
- Prior abuse/neglect
- Extent of emotional harm to the child
- Age, maturity level, emotional status of the parent(s)
- Cooperation of the parent(s)
- Parenting knowledge and skills
- Substance abuse issues

- Domestic violence issues
- Parental relationship with child
- Condition of the home
- Family or community supports available
- Current stress factors facing the family

Guidelines for Children Left Alone

Neither Pennsylvania law nor departmental policy specifies the age at which a child can be left alone. The caseworker's evaluation of the child is primarily based on the child's age, abilities, home environment, safety plans and length of time alone. The following guidelines may be used if the child has no physical or mental disabilities, the situation is not chronic and the environment is safe:

Pre-school	Never left alone without adult supervision.
Grade school	Can be left alone for approximately one or two hours during the day if he has access to a responsible adult, is not caring for younger children and demonstrates the ability to be responsible and mature.
Middle School	Can be left alone for periods of time, approximately four hours, during the daytime or evening hours and can care for one or two younger children if there is constant access to a responsible adult.
High School	Can be left alone and can care for younger children unless the responsibility is too great (such as four younger children), the length of time too long (such as all night, every night) or the teenager is not reliable and mature.

Cultural differences, neighborhoods which have familiar arrangements and other factors can be exceptions to these guidelines. Action taken by the caseworker when a child is found alone is contingent upon the degree of danger in which the child is found. An infant found alone, regardless of the length of time or time of day, is considered to be in imminent danger and emergency custody is requested if the caretaker can not be easily located.

When a young child is found alone, the parents are contacted and requested to provide immediate adult care for the child. If the parents can not be located or are unwilling to provide care for the child, he is taken into emergency custody. If the parents do provide immediate care for the child, follow-up is indicated. A caseworker does not enter the house of children left alone. If the situation appears to be dangerous, such as a child who is

hurt, the police are summoned to gain entry into the home.

Confidentiality of Case Files

Confidentiality is a fundamental and essential element in the relationship between the client and the child welfare worker. Every caseworker must respect the privacy of the people served by the Department of Children, Youth & Families. All information received must be used in a responsible and professional manner. Information received, whether received in a context of confidentiality or otherwise in the normal course of duties, may not be disclosed or otherwise passed on to third persons except when authorized by the client or required by law.

Juvenile court records are confidential by law. All petitions filed by the agency under the Juvenile Act or the Child Protective Services Law, and records of later court proceedings, are closed. Access is limited to those persons who have standing in the court proceedings.

Services Available for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect from Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families

INTAKE SERVICES

The Intake Unit is the “front door” to the agency and is responsible for assessing calls from the community requesting help for either their own children or other children. Many of the callers are provided with information and brief services that may alleviate the problem, or they may be referred to another appropriate agency.

If the caller is reporting a situation in which a child is suspected of being abused, neglected, or is at risk of harm, a professional staff person will evaluate to determine if the agency can provide a service to the family and child to correct the problem and to insure the child’s safety.

Service Planning is provided to families who need child welfare services or whose needs must be explored in greater depth to make that determination. Service activities include:

1. receipt of referrals from the community
2. assessment of risk to children referred and implementation of protective action when necessary
3. thorough exploration of service needs and discussion of options with clients
4. facilitation of the provision of additional diagnostic assessment including psychological, medical, etc., indicated
5. development of a Service Plan with the client.
6. prompt provision of needed services by referral to an appropriate community resource and
7. client advocacy to insure delivery of the needed services.

IN-HOME SERVICES

Parenting education, emotional support, counseling, referral, as well as linkage to community agencies are the primary services provided by the In-Home Services Unit of the Agency. The goal of this service is to protect children living in their homes from child abuse and neglect and to maintain and strengthen their family life.

Protective Services is ongoing casework and case management directed toward the protection of children. Counseling, education, and referral are the main facets of this service. Additional services (e.g. child welfare day care, parenting program, day treatment) may also be purchased from community agencies.

Life Skills Education is a specialized in-home service that teaches basic life skills: budgeting, meal planning and household management. In addition, child development, methods of discipline and parenting skills are taught when necessary.

Intensive Brief Services are available for children at risk of placement. Family Preservation Services and Intensive Family Support Services are 90-day programs that provide intensive support and/or intervention to families in crisis.

Family Intervention Service is an intensive brief service providing a family focused intervention that can be used as a segueway into longer term counseling in a more formal setting.

Reunification Services are intensive brief services utilized to reduce the duration of out-of-home placements. Reunification workers provide services to return children to their families and then continue intensive services in order to reduce recidivism.

(The) Child and Adolescent Services Team provides intensive brief supportive services to families involved with the County Juvenile Probation Office. The program assists in improving family functioning and in reducing the risk of placement for the child.

PLACEMENT SERVICES

The Placement Services Department provides services for families and children who require separation in order to protect their child's health, safety and well-being.

Short-term **Emergency Shelter Care** (up to 30 days) is available 24 hours per day for children needing immediate protection while the family's situation and child's needs are being evaluated. Placement may be recommended at the completion of the evaluation if all efforts to ensure the child's protection within the family have failed. Once placement occurs, casework services focus on correcting (through counseling, education, and the use of community resources) conditions necessitating the placement. The goal is to reunite the family at the earliest possible time.

During a child's placement, **Reunification Services** are provided. If the child is returned home, services are provided to ensure maintenance of the family unit. If the child does not return home, a plan is developed, with parental participation, to address the child's right to a stable, permanent home. This permanent home may be with relatives or with an adoptive family.

The Agency offers a variety of temporary placement resources. For those who can benefit from a family living experience, **Foster Family Care** is available through this Agency's own studied, approved, and supervised foster homes, as well as through private foster care agencies.

Congregate Care is provided to children whose special needs cannot be met by a family living experience. **Independent Living Services** are available to prepare older youth for self-sufficiency; job readiness and life skills training are provided, along with counseling services.

When children and their families cannot be reunited, **Adoption Services** provide the child with a permanent home and new legal parentage. This may be placement with a relative or possibly adoption by non-family members. Placement is supervised until the adoption is finalized. Following finalization, **Post Adoption Services** offer adoptive families, adoptees, and birth parents professional assessment, counseling, and search and information services.

Although most expectant parents decide to keep their child, **Options Counseling** offers them voluntary services to explore alternatives (temporary foster care, pre-adoptive foster care and adoption services) concerning their expected child.

Just a few words on placement and permanency planning...

Out of home placement for a child who is alleged to have been abused is utilized only when the child's safety can not be reasonably assured with other interventions. For a child, especially a child in crisis, separation from the family often triggers feelings of abandonment, rejection, worthlessness and self-blame. Regressive behaviors are common as the child mourns an enormous loss of all that is familiar - family, friends, school, toys, routine, etc. - at the same time feeling tremendous anxiety with being thrust in a totally unfamiliar situation. Thus, while placement may ensure a child's safety, it is often at the expense of the child's well being in other areas. In considering all of the ramifications, any decision to remove a child from family must be made only after considering all other possible interventions.

By law, a child has a right to a safe and permanent home. The Department of Children, Youth & Families will make reasonable efforts to reunite families when children have been placed out of the home. Out of home placement is meant to be temporary while parents make the necessary changes to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their child (ren). Under The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the Department of Children, Youth & Families is required to file a court petition requesting termination of parental rights when a child is in placement for 15 out of 22 months. When a judge grants a *termination of parental rights*, a child becomes legally eligible to be adopted. If a child has been staying with relatives, this termination may allow for an adoption by the relative or another planned arrangement. Parental rights will not always be terminated if the child is with a relative on a permanent basis.