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|  | GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL | | | |
| | Chapter: | (4) Initial Safety Assessment | Effective Date: | August 2016 |
| | Policy Title: | Introduction to Initial Safety Assessment | | |
| | Policy Number: | 4.0 | Previous Policy #: | N/A |

CODES/REFERENCES

O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5 Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect
O.C.G.A. § 49-5-8 Powers and Duties of Department of Human Services
O.C.G.A. § 49-5-1 and 49-5-8 Children and Youth Act
O.C.G.A. § 49-5-41 Persons and Agencies Permitted to Access Records Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Sections 471(a)(9) and 471(a)(15)(F) 45 CFR Parts 1356.21(d), 1356.21(k), 1356.21(b)(4), and 1356.67 Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997
Child Abuse Prevention, Adoption, and Family Services Act of 1988
Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) as Amended by P.L. 111-320 CAPTA and the Born-Alive Infants Protection Act of 2002
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Section 106(b)(2)(F)

REQUIREMENTS

As the designated child welfare agency in Georgia, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is legally mandated to respond to reports of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect; including physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, or negligent treatment or maltreatment under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is threatened.

DFCS has a two-track differential response system to address accepted reports of known or suspected child abuse and neglect. The tenets of differential response systems as recognized by the Child Welfare League of America and the American Humane Association are incorporated into Georgia's practice model, which includes:

1. Response options (track assignments) established via state policy with two discrete response pathways for accepted child abuse and neglect reports. This includes Investigations and Family Support Services.
2. Pathway assignment based on an Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) and a determination that a child is safe or unsafe.
3. The initial non-investigative pathway assignment to the Family Support Services program can change to Investigation at any time a present danger situation or impending danger safety threat is identified.
4. In the non-investigative, Family Support Services pathway:
 - a. A family assessment is required, however, families may accept or refuse services so long as there are no safety concerns;
 - b. There is no formal determination of child maltreatment; and
 - c. No one is named as a maltreater.
5. In the Investigative pathway:

- a. A full family functioning assessment is required, during which a determination is made regarding whether or not the caregivers have sufficient caregiver protective capacities to protect a child and meet the child's well-being needs;
- b. A determination regarding child safety and whether or not maltreatment occurred is made and a formal finding recorded;
- c. Families are linked to formal or informal supports/services to strengthen them; however the participation in these supports/services is not voluntary; and
- d. When necessary, the removal of a child from the custody of the caregiver may occur through court action when a child's safety and well-being is determined to be in danger, and in-home services are insufficient to control or eliminate the safety threat(s).

In order to determine the track assignment for an accepted report of maltreatment, an Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) is conducted. The ISA is designed to provide an initial response to the reported maltreatment within an assigned timeframe of Immediately, Within 24 hours of the intake report, or within 72 hours of the intake report to assess the safety of the alleged victim child (ren). After the initial response, DFCS has up to an additional 72 hours from the expiration of the assigned response time to complete the ISA process. This includes seeing all household members and making a track assignment determination.

The ISA provides a more comprehensive method of determining the level of intervention that may be required as the initial assignment to Family Support Services or Investigations is made based on a discussion with the alleged victim child and his or her family, instead of relying solely on the information received during an intake report. Once contact is made with the family and the information is discussed with the Supervisor, if there is an indication of present danger situations or impending danger safety threats the case is assigned to the Investigations track. If there are no indications of present danger situations or impending danger safety threats the ISA is assigned to the Family Support Services track.

NOTE: There are exceptions to ISA's that are required to be assigned to the Investigations track regardless of a present danger situation or an impending danger safety threat.

DFCS utilizes a Solution-Based Casework (SBC) Practice Model. Grounded in a framework of safety, and wedded to full family engagement, the SBC practice model is best thought of as the architecture that holds our practice to a consistent focus on safety outcomes. At the heart of SBC is the belief that by building a partnership with the family, a true focus on developing pragmatic solutions to the everyday problems in life the family is facing can be developed. Documenting and celebrating the successes of the family are also acknowledged and provide a framework for the family to sustain positive change moving forward. By using the SBC model the case manager is able to follow a conceptual map for family-centered practice from assessment through case closure.¹

DFCS believes in a family-centered approach to working with families. At the core of this family-centered practice is the belief that children have a right to be safe and secure, to be with their families, to be associated with their culture and to experience the least trauma or interference in their lives as is possible. Caregivers and children have the right to family, integrity, privacy and due process when their constitutional rights may be deprived by a government entity.

¹ Solution Based Casework TM Training: SSA, L.L.C. © Dana N. Christensen PhD; 2013

Caregivers also have the right to be informed and involved, have and care for their children and receive prompt responses regarding their children.

The scope of DFCS intervention should be the least intrusive necessary and no greater than what is absolutely essential to assess child safety, to implement actions, services and controls that assure a child's safety, and to make a determination regarding the need for ongoing or permanency services. To that end, the ability to engage the family during the ISA process prior to making a decision regarding the level of DFCS intervention provides an opportunity for a more consistent and informed decision concerning the level of response needed for the accepted report of child abuse or neglect.