

A Visit from Child Protection

An information sheet for the public.

DISABILITY, CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

A Visit from Child Protection: An information sheet for Carers and Parents

No parent was born with a manual on parenting!

Raising children is not easy. All parents and carers need help from friends and relatives, the community and from professionals with expertise in child health, development and education. Things can go wrong and families experience problems. How children are brought up affects their whole life profoundly.

At times, children and young people do not get the care they need and there are occasions when they are unsafe. Adolescence can bring particular difficulties and, in spite of your best efforts, you may not be able to ensure that your adolescent is safe.

Someone has informed Child Protection that they believe there is a real concern for a child in your household. Most professionals will inform you that they will make a notification before they do. Child Protection has been given the legal responsibility to assess all notifications and, if their risk assessment indicates that they need to meet and talk to you and your child, they may make a home visit.

Who contacts Child Protection Services?

There is nothing to stop a parent or carer contacting Child Protection Services themselves to ask for help. When you are very stressed and think that your children may be at risk of harm because of this, it is one of the best things that you can do. Child Protection will try to put you in touch with support services or make a visit to explore the matter further.

You may be involved with an agency or a professional who is worried about risks of abuse or neglect to your child. You may decide to make a report together to Child Protection – this would be a very important step in making things better.

Most professionals who have contact with children are legally required to report if they believe that a child has been, or is at, risk of harm. This responsibility of professionals such as teachers, health workers, dentists, day carers etc. Children in situations where family violence is taking place are now also reported to Child Protection Services.

Under the law, anyone in the community can make a notification to the Department or to the Police about a genuine concern for a child. The report must be based on reasonable grounds – in other words people can be guilty of an offence if they make a false or malicious report.

Can I find out who made the notification?

The law does not allow Child Protection Services to tell you who gave the information unless that person agrees. Unless the information is very serious, Child Protection does not accept information from people who refuse to identify themselves.

If a notification is made, it is because someone was concerned about the safety of your child – we should all be looking out for the children in our community and making a notification is one way of showing that we care about them and their families.

What happens during the first visit?

The Child Protection Worker visits the home to follow up the information that has been received about the situation. The worker will:

- identify themselves by name and provide evidence that they work for Child Protection
- explain what they do and why they are there
- talk about how assessments of risk to children are made

- discuss the concerns that have been received about the child and talk to you about your situation, what works well and what strengths exist in your family as well as what may be affecting your child's safety
- see and talk to the child or young person
- ask your permission to check if your child has any bruising, burns or other signs of harm
- keep a record of the discussions with you as well as any observations of the child or conversations with him or her. It is important that accurate details are kept as they may be needed in the future if, for instance, the Court becomes involved.

What should I do if Child Protection visits?

It is important that you do all you can to make sure that any child in your care is safe and well looked after. When things have become very difficult it is often hard to solve problems on your own. If you see your extended family, your friends and neighbours, the Child Protection Service and the other services you are involved with as people you can work **with**, you are much more likely to find ways to solve any problems that are affecting the safety and wellbeing of your child.

Although you can choose not to discuss the concerns in the notification with the Child Protection Worker, it is much better if you can talk about them. Quick solutions to the situation will be more possible if you are able to share as much information as possible with the worker making the risk assessment. He or she will be looking for strengths as well as difficulties and they will explore all safe options possible rather than suggest that your child needs to be removed from your care.

It is also very helpful if you can tell Child Protection Services about people they can talk to, such as your Child Health Nurse, your child's teacher or an advocate from a specialist service who knows you and your family well.

What happens next?

Child Protection Services may need to look into the situation further. If this is the case, the worker may:

- Arrange another visit to talk to you and the child
- Get in touch with other people who can give their views and opinions on the child's situation
- Try to work out ways to help your family to reduce the level of risk, such as arrange for a referral to a parenting group or support service
- Organise a family meeting, case conference or a formal family group conference to bring everyone concerned about you and your child together to make plans for the future
- Arrange for a doctor or other specialist to examine the child, if this is necessary
- Place the child in the care of someone else, with your permission, for a short time, or
- If the judgement is made that the child is not safe in your care and there is no other way to protect him or her from risk or harm legal action may be taken to remove your child. This is the last resort for Child Protection Services.

What happens if legal action is taken?

The Magistrate's Court (Children's Division) handles child protection matters. Sometimes the Family Court is also involved. You have a right to have information about what any legal action involves, what your legal rights are and how you can obtain legal advice or representation.

The Child Protection Worker will also advise you of the arrangements that will be made for the child unless one of the following conditions apply:

- (i) the safety of the child would be at risk
- (ii) police are investigating an alleged crime, or
- (iii) the safety of the carer may be at risk

If these conditions apply, parents will still have the right to know:

- (i) the reason why your child has been placed away from home
- (ii) that your child is safe
- (iii) general information on the placement (eg whether he or she is with foster parents or in a family group home etc) contact arrangements and
- (iv) the reason why information on the child's exact whereabouts may be withheld.

Child Protection Workers can provide you with information and referral to supports such as Social Workers in the hospital, parenting support groups, advocacy and legal services such as the Legal Aid Commission, accommodation agencies etc.

Where can I get further information?

Having a visit from Child Protection Services can be a major shock to families and it is important that you understand why they have visited and what is happening at all times. If you don't understand, ask the worker to explain it more fully. Make sure you have the worker's name and contact details. The regional office numbers are also listed below.

Contacting DHHS Child Protection Services

If you need to contact a worker in one of the child protection offices following a visit, or have suggestions or a complaint to make, please call the worker, his or her supervisor or the manager on :

Child Protection North - Telephone: 6336 2376

Child Protection South - Telephone: 6230 7650

Child Protection North West - Telephone: 6434 6308

Contact number for Child Protection: 1300 737 693
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This Statewide number can be used 24 hrs a day to report concerns about children. However, outside of usual business hours (9-5) it should only be used to report emergencies or urgent concerns regarding risk of immediate harm.
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