

Department of Children and Families

Family Assessment Response

35-1

Policy

The Department of Children and Families shall apply a differential response approach to all accepted child protective services reports.

The differential response approach ensures child safety by tailoring the process by which DCF responds to reports of abuse and neglect to the severity of the case.

There shall be two available responses:

- investigation; and
- Family Assessment Response (FAR).

Legal reference: Conn. Gen. Stat. [§17a-101g](#).

See also [Family Assessment Response Practice Guide](#).

Track Determination

Child protective services reports for which Careline designates a response time of less than 72 hours shall be assigned to the investigations track.

Following completion of the SDM Screening and Response Priority Tools, the Careline shall review all accepted child protective services reports that have been designated for a 72-hour response time and determine whether the report will be assigned to the investigations track or the Family Assessment Response (FAR) track based on "rule out" criteria.

The following rule outs shall require the investigation track:

- a new CPS report on an active ongoing services case (excluding Voluntary Services) or a new report connected to an active investigation;
- a report involving congregate care, foster care (excludes allegations involving biological or adoptive children of the foster parent) or a person entrusted;
- a current report with allegations of sexual abuse against a parent, guardian or person given access to the child by a parent or guardian
- prior child fatality due to abuse and neglect; and
- previous adjudication of abuse or neglect in Superior Court for Juvenile Matters.

For the remaining 72-hour reports, the track shall be determined based on an assessment of the family following face-to-face contact.

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Track Modification

Prior to case assignment, the Area Office Program Manager may modify the response track from FAR to an investigation when:

- new information becomes available that makes the case ineligible for FAR (*i.e.*, a rule out has been identified); or
- a new CPS report is accepted and designated as an investigation by the Careline.

Note: CPS reports designated by Careline as requiring an investigation response cannot be changed to a Family Assessment Response.

Social Work Supervisor Responsibilities

For all reports designated as a Family Assessment Response, the Area Office Social Work Supervisor shall:

- review, discuss and assign the case to a Social Worker;
- conduct and document a minimum of three supervisory conferences at the following distinct points in time during the FAR process:
 - upon assignment;
 - midpoint; and
 - at time of closing;
- document case consultations, response determination reviews and assignments in LINK;
- assess the family's appropriateness for continued FAR services, considering emerging safety concerns, risk factors, CPS history (patterns or trends), and the family's willingness to address or mitigate safety or risk concerns.

Following face-to-face contact with the family, the Social Work Supervisor shall consult with the Program Manager on cases in which a track change is recommended.

Timeline for Initial Contacts with Family

Whenever possible, the preferred method for initial contact with the family is by telephone.

The Social Worker shall make an initial phone call to the family to schedule a face-to-face meeting. Both the telephone call and the attempted face-to-face meeting shall occur within 72 hours of the acceptance of the report.

If phone contact is unsuccessful, the Social Worker shall make an unannounced home visit to meet the family within the designated response time. All efforts to contact the family shall be documented in the protocol.

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Timeline for Initial Contacts with Family (continued)

The Social Worker shall notify the Social Work Supervisor of any delays in face-to-face contact with the family.

Note: "Commencement" of the assessment is defined as the initial face-to-face contact (or attempt at face-to-face contact) with the family. The telephone call prior to the home visit is made as a courtesy to the family and does not mark the commencement of the assessment.

Response Guidelines

Because the allegation(s) in the CPS report must meet the statutory definition of abuse or neglect (or involve human trafficking) in order to be accepted by Careline, a thorough assessment of child safety and risk shall be required.

During the first face-to-face meeting the Social Worker shall:

- inform the family of DCF's protective services mandate and the need to assess child safety;
- assess child safety and potential risk factors within the family, including domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health concerns;
- observe and conduct interviews with the following:
 - parent(s);
 - the child(ren) identified in the report;
 - siblings and other children in the home;
 - all household members; and
 - family resources and supports;
- obtain all demographic information necessary to conduct mandatory background checks; and
- obtain necessary releases of information.

Note: Even when the initial determination is that a Family Assessment Response is appropriate, DCF staff shall utilize any measures necessary, up to and including removal, to ensure child safety.

All FAR-related activities shall be documented by the Social Worker within five business days in the Family Assessment Response Protocol.

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Required Case Contacts

The Social Worker shall:

- engage and interview all household members;
- engage and interview the non-custodial parent;
- engage and interview children who reside with the non-custodial parent if they have contact with the referred household;
- document interviews and efforts to engage these individuals in the FAR Protocol; and
- if no contact was made, document the barrier to contact or provide a rationale for the decision not to contact these individuals.

The frequency of home visits and the required case contacts shall be determined in supervision taking into consideration:

- case circumstances;
- risk and safety concerns;
- age of the children; and
- the children's visibility in the community.

At a minimum, following the initial contact with the family, visits shall occur at the midpoint of the assessment and prior to the case closing. For cases that remain active beyond 45 days, the frequency of visitation shall be determined in supervision.

Mandatory Background Checks

The Social Worker shall conduct the Department of Public Safety criminal background checks and the protective services history background checks on the parents, guardians and household members over the age of 16 years.

The Social Worker shall utilize and incorporate criminal and protective services histories as part of the overall assessment of the family.

Collateral Contacts

In order to enhance the assessment of the family, the Social Worker shall request that the family sign releases of information for the following collateral contacts:

- school;
 - pediatrician;
 - substitute caretaker or day care Provider; and
 - service providers involved with the family or adult caregiver.
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Collateral Contacts (continued)

If the family declines to sign a release, DCF shall abide by the wishes of the family. The Social Worker shall inform the Social Work Supervisor of the status of the collateral contacts and develop strategies to gather information to help inform the assessment.

The Social Worker shall document information gathered from the collateral contacts in the Family Assessment Protocol. If the family declines to sign releases, the Social Worker shall document this in the FAR Protocol.

Safety Assessment Completion

The Social Worker shall be responsible for assessing child safety during the initial face-to-face contact with the family, utilizing the SDM Safety Assessment.

The assessment results shall be documented in LINK within five days of the initial face-to-face contact with the family and approved by the Social Work Supervisor no later than 15 days after its completion.

Note: A new Safety Assessment shall be completed whenever new information becomes available that suggests a change in the child's safety status.

Safety Decision

A safety decision may be designated as follows:

- "safe" shall continue to receive Family Assessment Response services;
- "conditionally safe" shall be evaluated with the Supervisor and Program Manager regarding appropriateness for continued Family Assessment Response services; and
- "unsafe" shall immediately result in a track change to investigations (the FAR Protocol shall be completed no later than three business days from the decision to switch tracks.)

Consideration shall be given to the duration and severity of the safety factor to determine the appropriate continued response.

Note: For cases that are transferred to investigations without a new report, the investigations protocol shall be completed within 45 days from date of the original CPS report.

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Assessing Family Strengths and Needs

The Social Worker shall discuss the protective factors with the family to help identify its strengths and needs to inform service delivery.

The Social Worker shall review each protective factor with the family and document the discussion from both the perspective of the family and the Social Worker's assessment of the strengths and needs using the Protective Factors Worksheet. The assessment shall be based on observations and information collected through interviews and collateral contacts.

Risk Assessment

To enhance planning and service delivery to families, DCF shall utilize the SDM® Risk Assessment tool to identify potential risk factors that influence future risk of harm.

The risk assessment shall be completed by the Social Worker prior to the end of the Family Assessment Response process and shall be approved by the Social Work Supervisor within 45 days of the Careline report.

Family Team Meetings

The Social Worker shall offer a family team meeting once a need has been identified from any source. The discussion and outcome of these meetings shall help inform the Service Plan.

Service Plan

The Service Plan is a family driven, dynamic document that utilizes the protective factors to assess the strengths of the family and empowers it to develop and employ strategies to accomplish its identified goals. The Service Plan shall guide the activities of the family, its community supports and DCF and is required for all cases being referred to the Community Partner Agency.

Disposition

A Family Assessment Response disposition shall be made within 45 days of the acceptance of the Careline report.

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Recommended Case Dispositions

Results of SDM Safety Assessment	Results of SDM Risk Assessment	Case Disposition
Unsafe - children removed	Very Low ☉ High	Transfer to the investigations track. Following completion of the investigation, the case shall be transferred to Ongoing Services. Services are required.
Conditionally Safe - safety factors have been identified, interventions are in place.	Very Low ☉ High	Transfer to Ongoing Services. Services are required.
Children are safe	Very Low ☉ Low	Recommend for closure. Referrals for services in the community may or may not be initiated on behalf of the family based upon its level of need and willingness to engage in services.
Children are safe	Very Low ☉ High	Recommend for transfer to the Community Partner Agency if multiple needs are identified. This transfer is predicated on the family's willingness to receive services and supports from the contracted agency.
Children are safe	Moderate ☉ High	Recommended for transfer to Ongoing Services. This transfer is predicated on the family's willingness to receive ongoing services and need for continued DCF involvement.

Notification Family Assessment Response Results

At the conclusion of the Family Assessment Response, the Social Worker shall notify the parent or guardian and any mandated reporter, in writing, of the assessment determination

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**Transfer to a
Community
Partner
Agency**

At any point during the Family Assessment Response, if DCF determines the family has multiple needs and will benefit from ongoing community support, DCF shall assess the family's interest in engaging in services with the Community Partner Agency prior to the end of the 45 day assessment period.

A transition meeting shall be held as soon as possible with the family, its supports (if available), and the Social Worker to:

- exchange information;
- review the strengths and needs of the family;
- review the goals that have been established;
- discuss the activities currently under way; and
- discuss what is needed to continue to support the family.

Following this meeting, DCF shall close its case.

**Transfer to
Ongoing
Services**

If the child has been identified as "safe" and the family is willing to engage in ongoing services and DCF supports continued involvement, the case shall be transferred to ongoing services.

If at the conclusion of the Family Assessment Response, the child is designated as "conditionally safe," the case shall be transferred to ongoing services.

The Program Manager or designee shall schedule a transfer conference at a time and location convenient to the family.
