



Children and Youth Services

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A Parent's Handbook about Child Welfare Services

Who can I talk with if I have concerns or need more information?

Centre County Children and Youth Services
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Bellefonte, PA 16823

Caseworker's name: _____

Caseworker's phone number: _____

Caseworker Supervisor: _____

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A Parent's Handbook about Child Welfare Services

If you are reading this, you have been visited by a caseworker from Centre County Children and Youth Services (CYS) because of a report made to our office or to the Child Abuse Hotline (ChildLine). This handbook was written to explain how the child welfare system works, and some of the tools and programs that are available to help you. We are focused on working with you to ensure your child's safety.

Throughout your time involved with the child welfare system we want you to focus on one goal: making sure your child is safe in a loving home. If your child has been placed in out-of-home care (foster care), there will be steps to take to be reunified with your child.

One thing to remember is that, whenever you need help or have questions—ask us. We know you are under stress. The child welfare system can be complicated and confusing. Your emotions and the situation can seem overwhelming, but you are not in this alone. Everyone involved wants to help you and your child achieve safety, stability and well-being.

Many families have faced the same situation you are facing now. This handbook has been created with the guidance of parents who have been successful in working with the child welfare system and in building a stronger family.

The Importance of Cooperation

It is important to cooperate with anyone who contacts you about your Child Welfare Case. This includes; your Children and Youth Services worker, their supervisor, or another service provider (for example; Parenting Plus, Family Intervention Crisis Services or other agencies/programs which your worker has asked to help your family).

- Share openly and honestly what you understand about what happened to bring you to the attention of the Child Welfare System.
- Sign Releases of Information for the team members to discuss your case with one another.
- Answer questions that are asked with as much detail as you can give.
- Share with your team members your goals for the Child Welfare process and help them know what goals fit best with your family's situation.
- Ask questions if you are not sure you understand what your worker is saying/asking you to do.
- The more cooperative you are with anyone involved in your Child Welfare Case, the faster and smoother the process will be for you and your family.

Remember, the main goal of the team is to work together with everyone involved to make sure your child is safe and stable. We know that the best outcome for children and their families is to keep them in their home, whenever possible.

What Is Child Welfare Services?



Child Welfare Services is a part of government which protects children from abuse or neglect, helps families stay together safely, and makes sure that children are cared for in temporary or permanent homes. In Centre County, the Children and Youth Services (CYS) division of our County Government is responsible for this system, working within the authority of the Courts.

Centre County Children and Youth Services provides child welfare and foster care services to families in need. Centre County Children and Youth provides child welfare services under federal and state laws and is responsible, either directly or through providers, to address child abuse and neglect and increase well-being of children and families.

Centre County Children and Youth Services maintains a mission statement that is as follows:

- Centre County Children and Youth Services is dedicated to the task of assuring a safe home environment, free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, for all Centre County children who are referred to the Agency.
- When a child's safety in his/her home cannot be reasonably guaranteed, the Agency will provide or make arrangements for the least restrictive living arrangement necessary to meet the child's individual needs. At the time of a child's placement, appropriate services with the child and his/her family will be initiated to achieve the goal of family reunification. When unifying the family is not possible, the Agency will pursue the most permanent living arrangement for the child.
- In the development and delivery of both in-home and out-of-home services to client, children, and their families by the Agency, the safety and well-being of the child will have the highest priority. Agency staff, while delivering or arranging for necessary services to Agency clients, will exhibit the highest standards of professionalism.

Your Rights at this time:

What are my child's rights?

All children have the need and right to be nurtured and live safely in their homes, and the right to:

- Safety and supervision
- Food, clothing, and shelter
- Protection from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect
- Diagnosis and treatment of medical and emotional conditions

Children who are the subject of a court order related to child protection have additional rights.

These rights include:

- To visit or be visited by parents and/or brothers and sisters, if the child is in foster care and if the visits are in the child's best interest
- To have a person (a "guardian ad litem") appointed by the court to look after the child's best interest

What are my rights?

If you are a parent or caregiver in a child protection assessment/investigation, you have the right to know:

- The nature of the reported child abuse or neglect
- How the assessment/investigation will be done and how long it will take
- The suspected harm or risk of harm to the child
- What the social worker has found regarding the reported child abuse and neglect
- What could happen as a result of the assessment
- What action Children and Youth Services may take, if any

In addition, parents have the right:

- To request to review their record
- To have relatives given priority consideration as temporary caregivers

When Children and Youth Services seeks custody of a child through court action, parents have the right to:

- Have an attorney represent them in court
- Be told about any legal action involving their child
- Be offered services for the problems of child abuse and neglect
- Have a clear, written plan for services to help stop the abuse and/or neglect
- Visit with their child as long as the visits are in the child's best interest

First Response from the Child Welfare System

Reports are made to Centre County Children and Youth Services in different manners. A report with concerns related to a child's safety can be made by calling the Agency directly, calling the State Child Abuse Hotline (ChildLine), or by walking into the Agency's office. Once information has been provided, the situation is evaluated by an intake screener and caseworker supervisor. Reports are classified into one of two designations; General Protective Service (GPS) or Child Protective Services (CPS). Response times are determined based on the presence of safety concerns and the nature of the referral allegations. Response times can include: immediate, 5-days, 7-days, or 10 days.



If it is determined that an in-person response must be made, an intake caseworker will take steps to assure the safety of all children within the family's home. School visits are often used as a venue for completing safety checks and conducting initial interviews with minor children. Home visits are completed within the family's home and contact is established with identified parents, caretakers, or legal guardians to discuss/address the referral allegations.

With the Agency's initial contact, two assessments are completed and focus on the presence of safety threats and risk factors.

- Safety is defined as factors that would lead to the belief that a child is in immediate danger of being hurt, harmed, abused, or neglected.
- Risk is defined as factors that would lead to the belief that a child is in danger of being hurt, harmed, abused, or neglected in the future (i.e., one week, two months, a year).

Centre County Children and Youth Services tries to keep families intact if at all possible and provides a wide range of services through the visits from a Caseworker and contracted providers. Most families receive in-home services which may include family counseling, parenting classes, child abuse prevention training, life skills training, crisis intervention, and/or family reunification services. Services are tailored for each family's situation. A large part of every in-home service is to teach family members to use and get involved with family and community-based services.

If it is determined there are risk factors but no safety threats, or any safety threats have been reduced, a child will remain in the home with his or her parents. A caseworker will work with the parents to assure any identified children are kept safe. Intake services will be provided for a period of up to 60 days. The worker will offer the parents community resources that can help strengthen the family's support system in order to minimize the risk to the child.

If there is a high risk of harm to the child and a clear safety threat, the Agency will work with available family members and resources to develop a safety plan. The safety plan will involve due process and is a concrete plan to assure a child's safety. The safety plan may restrict contact between family members or hold other caretakers responsible for meeting a child's basic needs. A safety plan does not immediately change the existing custody arrangement through the Centre County Courts.

If there is an immediate danger to a child and no protective resources for the family, Centre County Children and Youth Services may be required to ask the court for emergency custody of the identified child. This would be done to assure the child is safe. In the event that a child is removed on an emergency basis, services will be provided in an effort to facilitate a successful reunification.

GPS – General Protective Referral

General Protective Services (GPS) is a type of report received by Centre County Children and Youth Services. GPS reports are calls with concerns related to the safety, stability, and general well-being of children under the age of 18 years old. Reports can address a number of issues ranging from supervision to home conditions to drug use.

General Protective Service reports are handled by an intake caseworker over the course of a 60 day intake period. Services will occur within the family's residence and will follow one of the three "paths" listed below. All work completed by a caseworker will be reviewed with a casework supervisor on a consistent and regular basis during case consultation/conferencing. "Risk" and "Safety" will be assessed on each and every contact with a family.

Services will be provided in an effort to validate/disprove the referral allegations. In the event that services are warranted or necessary to address any identified needs, this Agency will be responsible for assisting the family with accessing the appropriate service/intervention.

The following "paths" are utilized by Centre County Children and Youth Services and will provide a description of various Agency responses.

- **Intake Services (Path 1)**
 - Intake services are provided and steps are taken to address the referral allegations. Strengths, resources, and deficiencies will be identified and evaluated. If the intake caseworker determines that the child is safe, the allegations are unsubstantiated or inconclusive and that there is a low risk of future child maltreatment, the referral will be closed.

- If the family might benefit from community resources or supports, the worker may refer the family to a community-based organization (i.e., see list of regularly used community resources). Community-based service providers may maintain their involvement with the family despite a closure of intake services.
- With the end of intake services there is no further involvement from Centre County Children and Youth Services related to the specific incident.
- **Protective Services/On-Going Services (Path 2)**
 - If the intake caseworker identifies that a child is safe, but the allegations are found to be true, or there may be future risk to a child, the referral can be opened for “protective services.”
 - Protective services provides the Agency with the ability to work with a family beyond the 60 day intake period. Services will be provided to address any identified needs related to the safety and stability of the identified children. A family service plan with specific goals will be developed with the family.
 - The family will be transitioned to a protective services worker through Centre County Children and Youth Services. The protective services caseworker will take over all case responsibilities from the intake worker. (An incomplete assessment, due to lack of cooperation during intake services, may lead to protective services being provided to a family.)
- **Placement Services (Path 3)**
 - If the intake caseworker determines that the child is not safe, the allegations are found to be true, and there is high risk/immediate danger of child maltreatment, the Agency may petition the court for emergency custody of any identified children.
 - Any children removed from the family’s home will be placed within a safe and stable home environment to protect them from at-risk and dangerous situations.
 - A child permanency plan will be developed with the family. Goals and tasks will be created to help address the identified concerns.

CPS – Child Protective Services Referral

Child Protective Services (CPS) reports are a type of report received by Children and Youth Services that address a specific instance of abuse or neglect. CPS reports are registered through the Pennsylvania State Child Abuse Registry (i.e., ChildLine). They are specific in nature and result in a formal investigation process. Reports can address the presence of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, or the presence of imminent risk.



Due to the formal nature of the investigation process, CPS reports (i.e., abuse reports) are handled by a caseworker over the course of a 30 day investigation. With the serious nature of abuse allegations, often times the reports will result in law enforcement being notified. With law enforcement's involvement, the pending investigation may be extended to 60 days under certain circumstances. In an effort to assure the child's safety and preserve the integrity of the investigation, a safety plan is typically developed to prevent the alleged perpetrator from having contact with any minor child.

In the State of Pennsylvania, the Child Protective Services Law defines abuse. This law governs the investigation process and provides direction for the caseworker in evaluating allegations of abuse. All work completed by a caseworker is reviewed with a casework supervisor on a consistent and regular basis during case consultation/conferencing. "Risk" and "Safety" are assessed at each and every contact with a family.

With the conclusion of the formal investigation, Centre County Children and Youth Services is required to file a determination with the State Child Abuse Registry in Harrisburg, PA. The Agency is required to determine if the report of suspected child abuse is "*unfounded*", "*indicated*", or "*founded*".

- An *Unfounded* report is any report in which no evidence of child abuse is present or the injury does not meet the definition of abuse as defined by the Child Protective Services Law.
- An *Indicated* report is a report in which the county Agency determines that the child was abused and the evidence gathered meets the definition of abuse as defined by the Child Protective Services Law.
- A *Founded* report is a report in which a court determines that the child was abused.

The following “paths” are utilized by Centre County Children and Youth and will provide a description of various Agency responses.

- **Abuse Services (Path 1)**
 - An abuse investigation is completed and steps are taken to address the referral allegations. Strengths, resources, and deficiencies will be identified and evaluated.
 - If the abuse caseworker determines that the child is safe, the allegations are unfounded, and there is a low risk of future child maltreatment, the referral will be closed.
 - If there is a higher risk level and it is believed that the family might benefit from community resources or supports, the worker may refer the family to a community-based organization (i.e., see list of regularly used community resources).
 - With the conclusion of the abuse investigation and/or implementation of services, there will be no further involvement from Centre County Children and Youth Services related to the specific allegations of abuse.

- **Protective Services/On-Going Services (Path 2)**
 - If the abuse caseworker identifies that a child is safe, but the allegations are found to be true, or there may be future risk to a child, the referral may be opened for “protective services.”
 - Protective services provides the Agency with the ability to work with a family beyond the formal investigation period. Services will be provided to address any identified needs related to the safety and stability of the identified children.
 - The family will be transitioned to a protective services worker within the Agency who will take over all case responsibilities.
 - The Department of Public Welfare mandates that protective services be provided to the victim child in all instances where an indicated finding is filed with the State Child Abuse Registry.

- **Placement Services (Path 3)**
 - If the abuse caseworker determines that the child is not safe and there is high risk/immediate danger of child maltreatment, the Agency may petition the court for emergency custody of any identified children.
 - Any children removed from the family’s home will be placed within a safe and stable home environment to protect them from at-risk and dangerous situations.

Frequently used service providers in Centre County:



Name	Address	Phone	Description of Service
Family Group Decision Making	325 West Aaron Drive State College, PA 16803	(814) 237-5731	Family and resources develop a plan to resolve concerns/keep child safe
Parenting Plus	325 West Aaron Drive State College, PA 16803	(814) 237-5731	A parent education and support program, serving families with children ages 0-10.
DeClutter Program	325 West Aaron Drive State College, PA 16803	(814) 237-5731	Assistance to families and individuals facing loss of housing or custody due to unsanitary and cluttered conditions.
Family Intervention Crisis Services (FICS)	310 W. Linn St. Bellefonte, PA 16823	(814) 355-3807	In-home intensive individual and family therapy program.
Centre County Custody Monitoring Program	310 W. Linn St. Bellefonte, PA 16823	(814) 355-3807	Program to address the needs of families and children in Centre County who during a custodial action also require the services of Children and Youth.
McCloskey Counseling Center	205 Mill St, Milesburg, PA 16853	(814) 357-2400	Counseling services for victims of child abuse/neglect. Forensic Evaluations for child abuse investigations.
Burrowes Street Youth Haven	330 S. Burrowes St. State College, PA 16801	(814) 234-2100	The shelter serves youths who are homeless or who are runaways, or those who are at risk of running away or being homeless due to difficulties within their homes.

If a Child Welfare Case Is Opened

If a protective services/on-going services case is opened, that does not necessarily mean your child will be placed in foster care. There are three possible outcomes:

1. Non-Court Family Maintenance

If a case is opened for in-home services but the Court is not involved a protective services worker will be assigned to your child. The protective services worker will visit the home to continue to ensure your child's safety. Your child will remain in your care while you work with the protective services worker to resolve the issues identified during the intake process. The goal of protective services is to keep the child in the home and keep the child safe. A Family Service Plan (FSP) will be developed with the family in the first 60 days of being opened for protective services. The plan will be reviewed every 6 months from when the case was opened for protective services and will continue until the goals from the Family Service Plan (FSP) are met.

2. Court Family Maintenance (In-home Dependency)

In-home dependency, or Court Family Maintenance, means your child will stay with you, but the court will be involved for your child's safety and well-being until you can resolve some issues. This happened because a protective services worker identified some abuse or neglect issues in your home or there is a high risk that your child could experience some abuse or neglect in the future without some support. The goal of everyone involved is to make sure that your child is safe and that you get the help you need to keep your child safe in your home. As part of this process, the protective services worker files a petition for in-home dependency with the Juvenile Court and an Adjudication Hearing is scheduled. You can read more about this in the *Going to Court* section.

3. Family Reunification (Child Is Placed in Out-of-Home Care or Foster Care)

If protective services workers find that there are immediate safety concerns for your child, he or she will be removed from your home and placed in a safe environment away from your home. A court hearing will be held within 72 hours. For more information, please see the section, *Court and Foster Care Services*.

Working with Your Protective Services Worker

What's the role of protective services workers?

Protective services workers are required by Federal and Pennsylvania laws to make reasonable efforts to keep families together or to try to reunify families in abuse and neglect cases. This means that your protective services worker will be coordinating services that meet your needs and your child's needs, enabling you to work towards keeping your child in your home or reunifying your family. If the protective services worker refers you for services such as parenting classes or crisis intervention, it should be within a reasonable distance from your home. If transportation is an issue, your caseworker may be able to assist with transportation. If your child has special needs, services should be in place to address your child's special needs. Services should also meet your needs based on ethnicity and cultural background.

Will I have the same protective services worker the whole time?

You could have more than one caseworker. Often times two protective services workers are assigned to one case. The use of multiple workers assures that you and your family receive a high level of focus/attention/service.

What can I do if I have a complaint about my protective services worker?

- If you have a complaint about your protective services worker, try to discuss the issue with the protective services worker first. If you feel uncomfortable doing this alone, you could ask someone you trust to accompany you.
- If this doesn't work for you or you feel that your protective services worker is not being reasonable, call or write to his or her supervisor. Try to stay calm even if you feel angry. You will accomplish more when you discuss your concerns clearly.
- If you don't feel you can resolve your difficulties, you can file a complaint with: CYS Director or the Department of Public Welfare (DPW - 1-800-222-2117)

Keep a written record

It is helpful to have specific information, especially if you make a complaint. Keeping track of the day and time of phone calls, meetings, letters, etc. in a written or recorded journal is a good method of having a clear picture of what is happening. It not only helps you remember what was said and done, it helps keep information organized to show others that you are taking your case seriously.

How are decisions made?

In an effort to assure that all families receive a high level of quality service, a number of checks and balances have been built into the Child Welfare System. For example, all decisions regarding the services provided to a family are made in conjunction with Casework Supervisors or members of the Agency's Administration.

Listed below are a few of the different ways decisions are made:

- Case Conference:
 - Caseworkers review open cases (GPS/CPS) with a Caseworker Supervisor every ten days. Discussions are held regarding the family's progress towards goals and plans are developed in an effort to meet identified needs.

- Family Service Plans:
 - Family Service Plans (FSP) are developed with families in an effort to resolve any ongoing or high risk situations. Family Service Plans are reviewed with the family every six months.
 - As goals are completed, they are no longer considered as risk factors for the family. Additional goals may be added to address any upcoming or newly identified problems.
 - The Family Service Plan is used as a "road map" to lead the family and service providers.

- Team Meetings:
 - Team meetings are held on a regular basis when other service providers are involved with a family (i.e., Family Intervention Crisis Services, Parenting Plus, etc.). Team meeting assure that service providers are on the same page with recommendations provided to the family. This helps to avoid a family being told separate things by different providers.
 - Team Meetings are also used to make decisions related to the necessity of CYS' involvement with a family, the appropriateness of services, and when court involvement is necessary.

- Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT):
 - A Multi-Disciplinary Team meeting is used to provide feedback/direction to the Agency in situations where the family has had a significant history with the Agency or there are multiple allegations of abuse/neglect.
 - The legal basis for the establishment of the M.D.T. is found in the Child Protective Service Law of 1975 and in the regulations which state:
 - The Child Protective Services shall consult with and utilize the services of professional disciplines within their communities such as health, mental health, social services, education, law and law enforcement for the purpose of developing, reviewing and implementing treatment plans for abused children and their families, and for receiving recommendations as to the improvement of overall service delivery by the Child Protective Services.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can my child be separated from me if I am abusing drugs or alcohol?

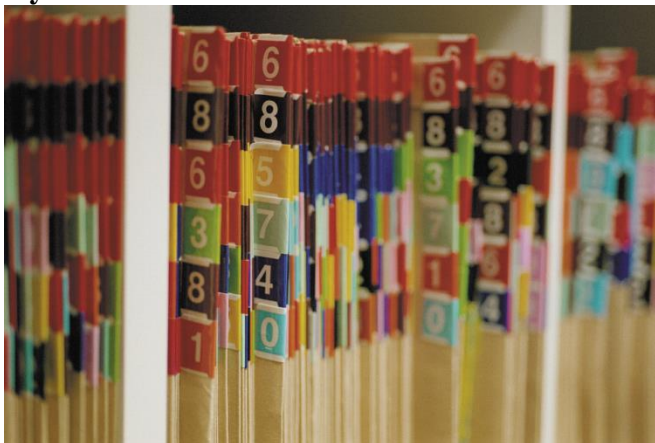
Yes. If your drug or alcohol use is putting your child in danger, he or she could be placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home, shelter care) or a comprehensive safety plan may need to be developed. Also, if you are pregnant and use drugs or abuse alcohol, your baby may be born prematurely, ill, or experience developmental delays. If so, the hospital may not release the baby into your custody. It is very important—for your baby’s health as well as your own—to have medical care during your pregnancy. There are many programs that can help you if you are pregnant and using drugs and alcohol.



Can my child be placed in foster care because I’m homeless?

No. Your child will not be placed in out-of-home care just because you are homeless or living at a shelter. However, if you are unable to keep your child safe due to your homelessness, then yes, your child could be placed in out-of-home care. The assigned caseworker will check to see if you are trying to use resources such as homeless shelters, food banks, etc. If you are using these services, it shows that you are making a good effort to provide for your child and make sure your family is safe.

Does the Child Protective Services report made to the ChildLine hotline go into a record anywhere?



- If Children and Youth Services determines your family is in need of services and the case is accepted for services, our Agency will retain a record of the incident.

- If Children and Youth Services determined a suspected incident of abuse was unfounded, but additional services are provided to the family, a record of the case file will be maintained for five years before being expunged by the Agency.
- Reports of suspected child abuse that are determined to be unfounded and are not provided additional services are expunged within one year and 120 days from the date the report was received by the Department of Public Welfare.
- If the Agency's investigation (an indicated report) or a court hearing (a founded report) determines that abuse has occurred, a record will be maintained with the Agency and Department of Public Welfare on an indefinite basis.
 - Any person who has been named in the Childline Central Registry as a perpetrator of a founded abuse may not be employed in any child care services or be a foster parent or adoptive parent for a five-year period, according to Act 33 of 1985, which amended the Child Protective Service Law.
 - Any person named as a perpetrator of an indicated child abuse may be effected if employed as a provider of child care services.
 - Any person convicted of any of the crimes listed in Section 6344 of the Child Protective Services Law may never be employed in any child care service, public or private school, or be a foster or adoptive parent.

OVERVIEW OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY
CENTRE COUNTY CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

INTAKE

- Determine response time
- Services completed within 60 days
- Services Included:
 - Interview with child/parent to address specific allegation(s)
 - Unannounced/Announced home visits
 - Determination of safety threats
 - Collateral contacts
 - Drug/Alcohol testing
 - Referral to community/CYS resources

PROTECTIVE SERVICES

- Services initiated upon completion of Intake/Assessment process and case being accepted for services or through Court Order
- Ongoing monitoring of child safety
- Services Provided:
 - Family Service Plan developed/monitored
 - Unannounced/Announced home visits
 - Minimum of monthly meetings with family
 - Drug/Alcohol testing
 - Collateral contacts
 - Monitor services involved with the family

PLACEMENT

- Services initiated through an emergency placement by intake or protective services
- Voluntary Placement Agreement Vs. Dependency
- Services Include:
 - Child Permanency Plan developed/monitored
 - Minimum of monthly contact with child & family
 - Explore kinship resources and permanency options
 - Reunification referrals
 - Monitor child & family progress during placement
 - Assessment of child's safety in placement & on visits with family
 - Collateral contacts & service coordination
 - Visitation