

CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 1 of 7

Policy

The Department of Children and Families shall operate a Child Abuse and Neglect Careline as the centralized unit that receives all reports alleging suspected child abuse or neglect.

The Careline's hours of operation shall be 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

The Careline shall also respond to other types of calls related to DCF services (*e.g.*, voluntary services, DMST, adolescent re-entry, and competency restoration) for children.

Legal reference: Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-101 *et seq.*

Definition

Report means a verbal or written communication to DCF that alleges a reasonable cause to suspect or believe a child has been abused or neglected.

Child means any person under 18 years of age, except as otherwise specified, or any person under twenty-one years of age who is in full-time attendance in a secondary school, a technical school, a college or a state-accredited job training program.

Careline Collaboration with Area Offices

The Careline shall collaborate with the Area Offices to provide a comprehensive and continuous service delivery system that is responsive to the needs of client families 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Such collaboration shall ensure:

- the accurate receipt and processing of reports of suspected child abuse or neglect; and
- the commencement and completion of investigations in accordance with prescribed timeframes.

Who Makes a Report

Anyone may cause a verbal or written report to be made to the Careline (or a law enforcement agency) when that person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child as defined above, or any youth over the age of 18 who is still in DCF care, is in danger of being or has been abused or neglected.

Mandated reporters are those persons who are specifically required by statute to make a report when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child:

- has been abused or neglected;
- has had non-accidental physical injury, or injury that is at variance with the history given of the injury, inflicted upon the child; or
- is placed at imminent risk of serious harm

See: 21-1 Attachment for a list of those persons who are mandated reporters pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-101.

CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 2 of 7

What Must Be Reported

The following suspected child abuse or neglect situations must be reported to DCF:

- **Child abuse:** Any child or youth who has a non-accidental physical injury, or injury which is at variance with the history given of the injury, or who is in a condition that is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.
- **Child neglect:** Any child or youth who has been abandoned or is being denied proper care and attention, physically, educationally, emotionally or morally or is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances or associations injurious to his or her well-being or has been abused.
- **Child under age 13 with a venereal disease:** A physician or facility must report to Careline upon the consultation, examination or treatment for venereal disease of any child under the age of 13 years.

Reporting Requirements

A mandated reporter must make a report of suspected abuse or neglect to the DCF Careline or to a law enforcement agency as soon as practicable, but not later than 12 hours after having reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child has been abused, neglected or placed at imminent risk of serious harm.

If a law enforcement agency receives a report, it shall immediately notify the DCF Careline.

Within 48 hours of making a report, a mandated reporter shall submit a written report to the Careline (DCF-136, "Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect.")

Content of Reports

All reports shall contain the following information if known:

- the names and addresses of the child and the parents or other person responsible for the child's care;
- the age of the child;
- the gender of the child;
- the nature and extent of the child's injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- the approximate date and time the injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect occurred;
- information concerning any previous injury or injuries to, or maltreatment or neglect of, the child or the child's siblings;
- the circumstances in which the injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect came to be known to the reporter;
- the name of the person or persons suspected to be responsible for causing such injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- the reasons such person or persons are suspected of causing such injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- any information concerning any prior cases in which such person or persons have been suspected of causing an injury, maltreatment or neglect of a child; and
- whatever action, if any, was taken to treat, provide shelter or otherwise assist the child.

CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 3 of 7

Failure to Report

If, at any time, there is reason to believe that a mandated reporter has:

- failed to make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, or
- unreasonably delayed reporting suspected child abuse or neglect

the staff member shall notify the DCF legal division who shall review the matter in accordance with DCF policy 6-3, "Failure to Report".

Custodial Death Notification

Pursuant to Conn Gen Stat §4-8a, DCF must notify the Division of Criminal Justice of the death of any person in the care, custody or control of a person or entity under the Department's jurisdiction.

Most cases will come to the attention of the Careline Director. In cases that do not come to the attention of Careline, but are known to the Area Office, staff must notify the Careline Director as soon as possible but no later than the next business day. The Careline Director must effectuate notifications in a timely manner to the Division of Criminal Justice, specifically the Chief Inspectors. The Careline Director should report immediately to the Chief Inspector by telephone any death that is a homicide, suicide, or suspicious circumstances. For any death that is clearly the result of natural causes, notification may be made by email on the next business day.

Police Notification

DCF shall notify the appropriate law enforcement agency using form DCF-737, "Notification to State or Local Police of Suspected Child Sexual Abuse, Severe Physical Abuse or Severe Neglect" within 12 hours of receipt of a report alleging sexual abuse or serious physical abuse including, but not limited to, a report that a child:

- has died;
- has been sexually assaulted;
- has suffered brain damage or loss or serious impairment of a bodily function or organ;
- has been sexually exploited; or
- has suffered serious non-accidental physical injury.

Sexual assault includes vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and oral intercourse (fellatio or cunnilingus), as well as contact with the intimate parts (genital area, groin, anus, inner thighs, buttocks or breasts) of the victim's body for the purpose of sexual gratification of the perpetrator.

- Vaginal intercourse includes penetration, however slight, and includes manipulation of an object by the perpetrator into the genital or anal opening of the victim's body.
- Anal intercourse and fellatio do not require emission of semen.
- Indecent exposure to a child also constitutes sexual assault.

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CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 4 of 7

Police Notification (continued)

Sexual exploitation includes incest, selling the child to others for sexual purposes and human trafficking. Non-accidental serious physical injury includes significant burns, wounds from a stabbing or shooting, severe lacerations, ruptured viscera, broken bones, brain damage, loss or serious impairment of a bodily function or an organ, or any series of injuries. Also falling into this category are:

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- a child suffering from serious illness who must be moved immediately to ensure his or her safety but the provider or parent will not cooperate; and
- demonstrated threats of violence or death to a child.

DCF shall also notify law enforcement via the DCF-737, whether or not the report is accepted for investigation, in situations that involve possible criminal acts, such as:

- assault on a child by a person who is not the child's caregiver;
- a child under the age of 12 left unsupervised in a place of public accommodation or in a motor vehicle for a period of time that presents a substantial risk to the child's health or safety (*e.g.*, stores, restaurants, parks, malls); and
- domestic violence and human trafficking.

High Risk Newborns

"High risk newborn" is a descriptive category that applies to certain cases that meet the criteria set forth in DCF Policy 21-11, "High Risk Newborns".

Drug Endangered Child

A "drug endangered child" is a child who is allegedly:

- at risk of suffering physical or emotional harm as a result of illegal drug use or the possession, manufacture, cultivation or distribution of illegal drugs; or
- subject to a caregiver's substance misuse interferes with his or her ability to parent and provide a safe environment.

Safe Havens

Upon receipt of a Safe Havens report from a hospital, the DCF Careline shall take the following actions:

- accept the report and assign it for same day response;
- immediately invoke a 96-hour hold and fax a copy to the hospital;
- call the State Police to notify of the Safe Havens report and determine if there are any current reports of missing infants; and
- during regular hours, forward the Careline report to the appropriate DCF Office for assignment to an investigator or during after-hours, assign the report to a Careline investigator.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 21-12 Safe Havens for Newborns

CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 5 of 7

Access to the Central Registry

Information in the Central Registry is confidential and shall be limited to duly authorized persons or entities, including:

- DCF employees for purposes of obtaining information for the investigation of child abuse and neglect, background checks and other uses permitted by law; and
- prospective employers, licensing authorities and other public agencies permitted by law to request background checks for a person, provided the request is submitted on the DCF-3031, "Authorization for Release of Information for DCF CPS Search," and is signed by the subject of the background check.

Note: Pursuant to state statute, the Connecticut Departments of Public Health, Education and Social Services may request background checks under certain circumstances without the signature of the person

Legal references: Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-28(f) and §17a-101k(b)

Background Checks

The DCF Careline has a dedicated unit assigned to process background checks. Upon Request, the Background Check Unit will perform a search of the department's Central Registry and Child Abuse & Neglect history on an individual who will be working or providing a service directly or indirectly to children and/or families.

There are three types of background checks.

Child Abuse and Neglect Central Registry for Employment

The information disclosed is whether the applicant is or is not on the Central Child Abuse Registry. Information that may not be disclosed, includes:

- the existence of an unsubstantiated allegation of abuse and neglect;
- a substantiated allegation that has been reversed upon appeal or is pending an appeal;
- a substantiated allegation, if the timeframe for requesting an appeal has not yet expired; or
- a pending open investigation.

Adoption and Foster Care Background Checks

All information is disclosed including whether the person is on the Department's Central registry, substantiations, and unsubstantiated.

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All applicable history is disclosed.

The Careline may also refer the requestor to the DCF Office that conducted the investigation for further information as authorized by law. Further information regarding procedure and commonly asked questions can be found on the Department's internet home page.

CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 6 of 7

Information That May Not be Disclosed

The DCF Careline shall **not** disclose:

- the existence of an unsubstantiated allegation of abuse or neglect;
- a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect that has been appealed pursuant to DCF Policy if the appeal is pending, except as noted below; or
- a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect if the time frame for requesting an appeal has not yet expired.

Exceptions

DCF may disclose that a person is on the Central Registry before the time for requesting an appeal has expired or while an appeal is pending if the child abuse or neglect resulted in or involves:

- the death of a child;
- the risk of serious physical injury or emotional harm to a child;
- serious physical harm to a child;
- the arrest of the person due to abuse or neglect of a child;
- a neglect or termination of parental rights petition filed by the Commissioner; or
- sexual abuse of a child.

Deferred Appeals

A substantiated allegation of child abuse or neglect that has been appealed and deferred because of a pending court or administrative proceeding shall not be disclosed while the court matter is pending except as provided in the "Exceptions" section above.

It shall be the appellant's responsibility to notify DCF that the court or administrative proceeding is no longer pending and that the appellant would like to proceed with the appeal.

If the appellant does not notify DCF that he or she is ready to proceed with a hearing on a deferred case, the appellant's name shall appear on the Central Registry three years after the date of the deferral.

Notification to Subject of Background Check

If the name of the subject of a background check for purposes of licensing or employment appears on the Central Registry, the DCF Careline staff shall instruct the person or entity requesting the background check that:

- the requestor must inform the subject of the background check that he or she is listed on the Central Registry as a perpetrator; and
 - that the subject may be able to appeal the substantiation pursuant to DCF Policy.
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CARELINE AND INTAKE

Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

22-1 Page 7 of 7

Access to the computer system

The computer system contains most of the information about a family gathered during investigations and through the provision of services. This information is confidential.

Authorized persons whose identity has been verified may access information about a family on an emergency basis by calling Careline and requesting a query and immediate response over the telephone.

Calls to Careline for routine access to family information shall be referred to the DCF Office Social Worker (for information over the telephone on an open case) or the DCF Office of Legal Affairs (for documents).

Cross reference: DCF Policy 6-2, "Confidentiality."

Access to victim information for research purposes must be approved by the DCF Institutional Review Board. Calls to Careline for information related to research shall be referred to the DCF IRB.

Cross reference: DCF Policy 5-3, "Institutional Review Board."

Information and Referral Calls

Careline shall also receive calls for general information and referrals to services or other agencies.

Emergency Access to the computer system

The following persons or entities shall be eligible for emergency access to information in the computer system:

- DCF employees after hours for work-related matters;
- a legally-mandated public or private child protection agency investigating a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect;
- a law enforcement agency investigating a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect;
- a physician who has before him or her a child whom he or she reasonably suspects may be abused or neglected; and
- a person legally authorized to place a child in protective custody when such person:
 - has before him or her a child whom he or she reasonably suspects to be abused or neglected; and
 - requires the information to determine whether to place the child in protective custody.

Verification of Persons Requesting Emergency Access

Careline staff shall use a callback system to verify that emergency telephone requests for information are from persons and agencies authorized for such access.

Information shall be withheld pending verification of the caller's identity.