



Working with Child Welfare Professionals in Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Efforts

The child welfare system in all states is complicated. Professionals working with child welfare as partners should understand how their system works in their state to reduce frustrations, increase efficiency, and increase effectiveness when working together. Child welfare workers have substantial responsibilities and play an important role in helping children and families by:

- Investigating child abuse and neglect
- Identifying/assessing the safety of children
- Identifying and assessing the risks to children
- Gathering and analyzing information and evidence to inform decisions
- Providing targeted services
- Ensuring child safety and well-being
- Providing permanency to children

The first line of contact with child welfare that many professionals experience is often the child abuse and neglect hotline. Other professionals should make themselves knowledgeable on the questions that will be asked of them prior to making a child abuse hotline call. Child welfare agencies often use an information-gathering sheet to assist in determining whether it has enough evidence to meet state law requirements for initiating an investigation. Rather than providing brief information, all professionals should shift their focus to providing as much information as possible to aid child welfare in determining whether it can and should investigate. All professionals become a collaborative partner with child welfare in identifying children who have been abused or neglected or are at significant risk.

The information provided to child welfare at any point can help illustrate potential child maltreatment. Detailed information, pictures, and videos from professionals may be critical in enabling child welfare to help the child(ren) and family. The more information provided, the better equipped child welfare is to make decisions about whether to or how best to intervene with the children and families involved.

The type of information that should be included in a report to the hotline typically include:

- *Name, age, sex, & address of the child*
- *Nature & extent of the child's injuries or condition*
- *Name & address of the parent or other person(s) responsible for the child's care*
- *Any other information relevant to the investigation.*

Depending on the requirements under state laws, child welfare time frames to see the alleged child victims may include:

- Immediate response: The child is in imminent danger/risk of harm or has already been harmed.
- 24-hour response: The child is not in imminent danger/risk of serious harm, or the child is at moderate risk.
- Multiple-day response: There are no current safety threats; there is lower risk to the child.
- No response: There is not enough information regarding abuse or neglect.

Child welfare often does not have a lot of time to complete a child abuse and neglect investigation. The time frames to close an investigation vary from 30 days to six months or more, all of which is dependent on state law and policy. Cases can be open longer as needed to keep children safe and with services in place.