

Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline Overview

- Section [210.145 RSMo](#) specifically directs the Children's Division (CD) to operate a single, statewide toll-free telephone number at all times for receiving reports of child abuse and neglect.
- The Division's Child Abuse and Neglect (CA/N) Hotline has been operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week since August 15, 1975.
- The hotline now accepts more than 100,000 calls each year.
- Hotline workers are fully trained Children's Division Workers who interview callers, classify and prioritize calls based on child safety and refer allegations of abuse or neglect to CD field staff for investigation or assessment.
- An intake screening tool, implemented in 2005, assists CA/N hotline staff in achieving greater consistency in prioritizing and classifying calls. The intake screening tool uses decision trees to help staff make key assessments regarding child safety and necessary response time.
- Staff directs callers through a standardized interview so that pertinent information about a child is not missed and is gathered in a timely manner.



CA/N Hotline Reports

- The CA/N hotline receives more than 100,000 calls each year. For the latest statistics regarding hotline calls, refer to the [Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect Annual Report](#).)
- When a call is placed to the CA/N Hotline, workers initially determine:
 - If the child is in imminent danger and his/her safety needs to be ensured immediately; or
 - The allegations do not pose an immediate threat to safety and can trigger the opening of an investigation, family assessment, or juvenile assessment within 24 hours.
 - If the allegations meet the criteria to be accepted as a report under Section [210.110 RSMo](#). Those criteria are:
 - The child is under age 18;
 - The alleged perpetrator has care, custody and control of the child, as outlined in Section [210.110 RSMo](#).
- **Care, Custody and Control** of the child includes, but is not limited to:
 - The parents or legal guardians of a child;
 - Other members of the child's household;
 - Those exercising supervision over a child for any part of a twenty-four-hour day;
 - Any adult person who has access to the child based on relationship to the parents of the child or members of the child's household or the family;
 - Any person who takes control of the child by deception, force, or coercion; or
 - School personnel, contractors, and volunteers, if the relationship with the child was established through the school or through school-related activities, even if the alleged abuse or neglect occurred outside of school hours or off school grounds.

- The report meets the legal definition of abuse and/or neglect as defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#):
 - **Abuse** is any physical injury, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse inflicted on a child other than by accidental means by those responsible for the child’s care, custody, and control except that discipline including spanking, administered in a reasonable manner, shall not be construed to be abuse. Victims of abuse shall also include any victims of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking.
 - **Neglect** is the failure to provide, by those responsible for the care, custody, and control of the child, the proper or necessary support, education as required by law, nutrition or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the child’s well-being. Victims of neglect shall also include any victims of sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking.
- If the allegations meet the statutory definition of abuse or neglect, the hotline worker will classify the call as either an investigation, family assessment, or juvenile assessment based on the nature of the allegations.
- An **investigation**:
 - Is defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) as:
 - “The collection of physical and verbal evidence to determine if a child has been abused and/or neglected.”
 - Is a response to a report of child abuse or neglect when there is an identified need to collect physical and/or verbal evidence to determine if a child has been abused or neglected and to decide whether an individual should be listed in the Central Registry
 - Triggers a visit to the home to ensure the safety of the child
 - Generates a call to law enforcement for possible co-investigation of criminal actions
- A **family assessment**:
 - Is defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) as:
 - “An approach...which will provide for a prompt assessment of a child who has been reported to the division as a victim of abuse or neglect by a person responsible for the child’s care, custody or control and of that child’s family, including risk of abuse and neglect and, if necessary, the provision of community-based services to reduce the risk and support the family”.
 - Is forwarded immediately to the office in the judicial circuit in which the incident occurred for investigation or assessment
 - Is a response to a report of child abuse or neglect that does not focus on whether a specific individual should be listed in the Central Registry as a perpetrator of child abuse or neglect
 - Triggers a visit to the home to ensure the safety of the child
 - Is designed to connect the family to services based on their needs. Examples may include anger management, drug treatment, counseling or parenting assistance
 - Prevents at-risk children from entering the foster care system
 - If the allegations do not meet the criteria for abuse or neglect, as identified under Section [210.110 RSMo.](#), they can be classified as non-CA/N referrals or be documented by the hotline
- A **juvenile assessment**:
 - Section [210.148, RSMo.](#) defines a juvenile with problem sexual behavior as ‘any person, under fourteen years of age, who has allegedly committed sexual abuse against another child’.
 - For the purpose of juvenile assessments sexual abuse by children under fourteen (14) years of age is defined as any sexual or sexualized interaction with a child including, but not limited to, acts that are age or developmentally inappropriate and:
 - Involve force or threats of the use of force;
 - Are intrusive;
 - Are unwelcome;
 - Result in physical injury or cause emotional trauma to the victim child; or
 - Are coercive or manipulative.
 - Juvenile assessments will be screened in by the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Unit when any child under the age of fourteen (14) is alleged to have committed an act of sexual abuse against any person under the age of eighteen (18).
 - A family assessment and services approach is used to conduct juvenile assessments with the focus on providing intervention and treatment for the alleged child initiator.

- **Non CA/N referrals** fall in these categories:
 - Preventive Service Referrals are calls of concern which are referred to local service providers for intervention with the family.
 - Newborn Crisis Assessments are calls of concern about the health and safety of newborns, either because of drug exposure or the capacity of a caregiver to meet the needs of the infant.
 - Non-Caretaker Referrals are situations in which a child has been abused by someone who does not have care, custody and control of the child. CD refers these calls to law enforcement or the juvenile office but may also provide services.
 - Non-CA/N Fatality Referrals are regarding the deaths of children when no child abuse or neglect is alleged. The Children’s Division receives information about all child deaths in the state.
- **Documented** calls do not meet the criteria for either a CA/N report or a non-CA/N referral. Information from these reports is maintained for one year in case additional information later becomes available. These include calls:
 - Referring to children 18 and older
 - With insufficient information to locate the family
 - Those named in the call reside and are located out of state and the reporter is not a Missouri mandated reporter
 - In which there is no allegation that meets the definition of child abuse or neglect

CA/N Investigations, Family Assessments, and Juvenile Assessments

- Children’s Division workers in the 46 Missouri Judicial Circuits investigate or conduct a family or juvenile assessment for each report to determine if abuse or neglect has occurred and to evaluate a family’s need for services.
- Thorough investigations and assessments require hours of interviews and information collection, and usually include the major steps listed below:
 - Contacting the reporter, if known, for additional information;
 - Contacting appropriate law enforcement to request a co-investigation, if appropriate;
 - Assessing child safety;
 - Contacting the school district liaison if the victim is school-aged;
 - Assessing the safety of all other children in the household;
 - Consulting with the CD chief investigator;
 - Contacting individual(s) with personal knowledge of the family or child (known as a collateral contact);
 - Interviewing witnesses;
 - Interviewing the non-offending parent;
 - Interviewing the alleged perpetrator(s);
 - Evaluating and documenting all information collected and observed;
 - Concluding an investigation as substantiated or unsubstantiated for abuse or neglect;
 - Evaluating a family’s need for services and making appropriate referrals for needed services; and
 - Notifying the child’s parents, alleged perpetrator, school district liaison, and if applicable, the mandated reporter of the report conclusion and related findings.
- Section [210.145 RSMo.](#) requires that investigations and assessments be completed within 45 days, unless good cause for the failure to complete the investigation is specifically documented in the information system. For cases involving a fatality or a near fatality, the case may remain open until the Children’s Division obtains the evidence needed to inform the investigation conclusion.
- Families who are investigated and those who receive the Family Assessment or Juvenile Assessment response both receive prompt and effective delivery of services to address their needs.
- Staff at the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline assign either the investigative or assessment “track,” based on the information provided by the hotline reporter during the initial call. However, the track can be changed depending on what is observed by the investigator or assessor while working with the family.
- Unless court-ordered, all community services offered to parents are voluntary. CD thoroughly discusses with families the reason(s) services are being offered and ramifications of failing to participate in services to address the risk of abuse or neglect to their children.

Investigations

- Investigations are a response to a report of child abuse or neglect when there is an identified need to collect physical and/or verbal evidence to determine if a child has been abused or neglected and to decide whether an individual should be listed in the Central Registry. Investigations are co-investigated with law enforcement when possible. Investigations primarily include reports of child fatality, sexual abuse, serious physical abuse, serious neglect and reports of child abuse or neglect involving institutions such as schools, residential facilities and child care centers.
- At the end of each child abuse/neglect investigation, the worker reaches a conclusion. Possible conclusions are:
 - **Preponderance of the Evidence**
 - Defined in [statute](#) as: “that degree of evidence that is of greater weight or more convincing than the evidence which is offered in opposition to it or evidence which as a whole shows the fact to be proved to be more probable than not [[210.110 \(13\) RSMo.](#)] – i.e., more than 50% of the evidence shows that abuse or neglect has occurred.
 - Results in the perpetrator’s name becoming part of the Central Registry, defined in [statute](#) as: “a registry of persons where the division has found probable cause to believe prior to August 28, 2004, or by a preponderance of the evidence after August 28, 2004, or a court has substantiated through court adjudication that the individual has committed child abuse or neglect or the person has pled guilty or has been found guilty of a crime pursuant to (state law) [[210.110 \(2\) RSMo.](#)]. The registry is one source of information included in background checks for certain types of employment.
 - **Child Abuse/Neglect Present, Perpetrator Unidentified**
 - This conclusion is reached when the elements of abuse or neglect are proven, but the perpetrator cannot be determined.
 - **Court adjudicated**
 - This is a final judgment of a court that a specific individual is responsible for child abuse or neglect.
 - **NOTE:** The term “substantiated” is used in some instances to refer collectively to findings of preponderance of the evidence and court adjudicated, the two findings which will result in an alleged perpetrator’s name being added to the Central Registry.
 - **Unsubstantiated-Preventative Services Indicated:** A finding that insufficient visible signs, physical and/or credible evidence exist, but where the Children’s Service Worker determines that indicators are present which, if unresolved, could potentially contribute to child abuse/neglect.
 - **Unsubstantiated:** A finding that insufficient physical or credible verbal evidence of child abuse or neglect exists. The Children’s Service Worker has not identified that a specific threat exists for the child.

Family Assessments

- Family Assessments are a response to a report of child abuse or neglect that does not focus on whether a specific individual should be listed in the Central Registry as a perpetrator of child abuse or neglect. Instead, the focus of an assessment is to ensure child safety, work with the child and the child’s family to identify factors that may place the child at risk of future abuse and neglect, and to offer voluntary, community based services to reduce the risk and support the family. Family assessments typically include mild or moderate reports of physical abuse or neglect, including medical neglect and educational neglect.
- The following are definitions for Family Assessment conclusions:
 - **Agency Responded, No Concerns Found:** The Division responded to the report, assured child safety, spoke with the parent/caretaker, visited the child’s home, and found no concerns for the child’s safety.
 - **Agency Responded, Concerns Addressed:** The Division responded to the report and assured child safety. The Division identified concerns but assisted the family to address those concerns through the assessment process, community resources, or other resources.

- **Agency Responded, Services Provided:** The Division responded to the report and identified concerns but worked with the family to develop a plan to assure child safety. The concerns continued beyond the 45-day assessment period. The Division will continue to work with the family to connect them with services and ensure safety of the child.
- **Agency Responded, Refer to Family Centered Services (FCS) or Alternative Care (AC) Case Opened:** The Division responded to the report and, at some point during the assessment, it was determined the family would benefit from treatment and support services (Family Centered Services) or that it was necessary for the child to be placed out of the home and in Children’s Division custody (Alternative Care) for their safety.
- **Family Declined Services, Child Safe:** The Division responded to the report, visited the home, and was able to determine the child is safe. The Division found the family may benefit from treatment and support services and the family has declined services.

Juvenile Assessments

- Juvenile assessments are a response to a report of child abuse and neglect when a child under the age of fourteen is alleged to have sexually abused another child. The intent of juvenile assessments is to provide an avenue for intervention and treatment for these children. In addition to addressing the needs of the victim(s), the Division completes a holistic assessment of the child with problem sexual behaviors and their family. The purpose of the assessment is to help determine if the incident involved problematic behavior and to address any safety and service needs. The Division completes a safety plan when an act of sexual abuse has been witnessed by an adult; there has been a disclosure from the child victim, when the child has admitted to problem sexual behavior, and/or when a parent/caregiver is concerned that their child is exhibiting problem sexual behavior. The Division makes a referral to the juvenile office prior to beginning the assessment process when the act involved a weapon or serious physical injury. The child may also be referred to the juvenile office when the parent/caregiver does not engage in the assessment process, when there is no evidence the parent/caregiver(s) are taking steps to prevent future problem sexual behavior, when there is a repeated incident, and/or when the assessment reveals the child’s behaviors are of such severity that the child cannot be safely maintained in the home and/or community.
- Juvenile assessments are concluded the same as Family assessments.