

## Child Abuse and 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.
- Call the child abuse and neglect hotline at **1-800-392-3738** IMMEDIATELY if child abuse or neglect is suspected.
- Hotline workers are trained CD Children’s Service 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 hundreds of calls each day. 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 allegations meet the criteria to be accepted as a CA/N report under Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) Those criteria are:
    - The child is under age 18 at the time of the call;
    - The alleged perpetrator has care, custody and control of the child, as outlined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#); and
    - The allegation of abuse and/or neglect meets the legal definition.
  - If the criteria listed above are met and the report is accepted as a CA/N report, CA/N Hotline staff use a structured flow chart to assess if the child is in imminent danger and his/her safety needs to be ensured immediately *or* if the allegations do not pose an immediate threat to safety and an investigation or assessment can be opened within 24 hours.
  - Staff at the CA/N Hotline then uses a separate structured flow chart to 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.
- As defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#), **Care, Custody and Control** of the child includes but is not limited to the parents or guardian of a child, other members of the child’s household, or those exercising supervision over a child for any part of a 24-hour day. Those responsible for the care, custody and control also include any adult who, based on their relationship to the parents of the child, members of the child’s household or the family, has access to the child.
- The legal definition of abuse and/or neglect is defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) as:
  - **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.

- **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.

### **CA/N Investigations and Family Assessments**

- Children's Division workers in the 45 Missouri Judicial Circuits investigate or conduct a family 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 steps listed below:
  - Contacting the reporter, if known, for additional information before proceeding with the investigation;
  - Contacting appropriate law enforcement to request a co-investigation, if appropriate;
  - Determining child safety;
  - Contacting the school district liaison if the victim is school-aged;
  - Determining the safety of all other children in the household;
  - Consulting with the CD chief investigator;
  - Contacting anyone 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 the report as substantiated or unsubstantiated;
  - 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 are 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 completes it.
- Families receive prompt and effective delivery of services in order to address their needs as part of the investigation or family assessment.
- Unless court-ordered, all community services offered to parents are voluntary. CD thoroughly discusses with families the reasons services are being offered and ramifications of failing to participate in services to address the risks of abuse or neglect to their children.

### **Investigations**

- Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) defines an investigation as:
  - "the collection of physical and verbal evidence to determine if a child has been abused and/or neglected."
- 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 also:
  - Prompt a visit to the home to ensure the safety of the child.
  - Generate a call to law enforcement for possible co-investigation of criminal actions.
- At the end of each CA/N investigation, the worker reaches a conclusion. Possible conclusions include:

- **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.
- **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 exists and where few or no indicators are identified and the Children’s Service Worker has not identified a specific threat exists for the child.

### Family Assessments

- Family assessments are defined in Section [210.110 RSMo.](#) as:
  - “an approach which provides for a prompt assessment of a child and their family when the child has been reported to the Children’s Division as a victim of abuse or neglect by a person responsible for the child’s care, custody or control. Family assessments include the provision of community-based services to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect and to support the family. This approach takes the place of the traditional investigation.”
- 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. Family assessments also:
  - Prompt a visit to the home to ensure the safety of the child.
  - Are designed to connect the family to services like anger management, drug treatment, counseling or parenting assistance.
  - 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.
- At the end of each family assessment, the worker reaches a conclusion. Possible conclusions include:
  - **Services Needed:** The family has an identified need for services. CD will continue to work with the family after the assessment is completed and will continue providing services for some period of time.

- **Services Needed-Linked Initial 45 Days:** The family has an identified need for community services. The identified services were linked with the family during the 45-day family assessment process. CD will not continue working with the family when the family assessment process is completed. The Children's Service Worker should contact referral providers to verify that the family is receiving services.
- **Services Needed-Family Declined:** The Children's Service Worker has identified a service that may be beneficial to the family; however, the family declined to receive the services. The child's safety has been assessed, and there is no evidence that warrants court intervention.
- **Services Not Needed:** The family does not have an identified need for additional services. Families may be receiving services prior to the date of the hotline. Services Not Needed is used only when the family does not have additional service needs.
- **Non-cooperative/Child Safe:** Enough information has been obtained to ensure that the child is safe; however, the family refuses to participate in the family assessment process and the allegations do not warrant court involvement.

#### **Non CA/N Referrals and Documented Calls**

- 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
- **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 by medical professionals about the health and safety of newborns (up to the age of one year), 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; or
  - In which there is no allegation that meets the definition of child abuse or neglect.