



Child Protection

What is Child Protection?

Child Protection is a county agency that reviews reports of maltreatment and decides how to deal with those reports. If the report seems to show that a child is in danger, they investigate to find out if maltreatment happened. They also decide if the family needs services. In some cases, Child Protection may file a court case and ask for your children to be put in foster care.

If the report doesn't seem to show that the child is in danger, the county may close the file or, if they think you need some help, they may offer a Family Assessment. If you agree to a Family Assessment, a child protection social worker works with you to find services you may need and want.

What is maltreatment?

Maltreatment means the abuse or neglect of a child.

Abuse is physical or emotional harm to a child that is not an accident. It is things like:

- broken bones and bruises
- burns
- hitting that is not normal discipline
- sexual abuse of any kind
- emotional harm



Neglect is when the child doesn't get necessary things like:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- education
- medical care
- supervision
- protection from harm

What can Child Protection workers do?

- **Offer Family Assessment**

Family Assessment means a social worker from Child Protection meets with you to talk about the maltreatment report. When a family agrees to the Family Assessment, Child Protection **won't** do an investigation. They won't make a decision about whether maltreatment happened or not. They are there to help you find services for you and your child so the problems can get better.

But, if you do not cooperate with the Family Assessment and there is a risk of future harm to your children, Child Protection may transfer your case to be investigated.



- **Investigate**

Child Protection workers investigate maltreatment reports when the report seems to show that the child is in danger because of abuse and/or neglect.

The investigation can include:

- phone calls or meetings with the suspected abuser
- a visit to your home
- an interview with the child
- interviews with other people like doctors or teachers

When they finish the investigation, Child Protection must decide 2 things:

- Was the child abused or neglected?
- Does the family need services?

If child protection decides the family needs services, they must also decide what services will protect the child and rehabilitate the family.

- **Make Maltreatment Determinations**



When a Child Protection worker is done investigating, the worker must decide if maltreatment happened or not. If the worker believes that the parent did maltreat the child the worker makes a "maltreatment determination." You get a letter to let you know about the decision. The letter tells you about your right to appeal and how to appeal. You only have 15 days to appeal.

It could be very important to appeal because a maltreatment determination shows up in background checks. This may keep you from getting or keeping jobs that involve caregiving. These are jobs like:

- child care provider
- teacher's aide
- bus driver
- nurse or personal care attendant
- foster parent

Sometimes the worker makes a maltreatment determination even though they don't offer any services.

If you don't appeal the maltreatment determination it stays on your record even after the end of any court case brought by Child Protection.

See our fact sheet [What is maltreatment and how can it affect my job?](#)

- **Provide Services**

If a child was abused, is likely to be abused, or has been neglected, Child Protection may open a case file. Then they can offer services like foster care, chemical dependency treatment, therapy, and counseling. They can offer services without going to court, if the parent agrees to cooperate.



- **Recommend Removal of the Child**

Workers can't take a child out of the home unless a parent says it is ok, OR if they have a court order. If a worker feels a child is in immediate danger but can't get the parent to agree, they call the police. Police can take the child from the home to a shelter.

There must be a court hearing within 72 hours (weekends and holidays do not count) to decide if the child should stay in foster care longer.

- **Go to Court**

Child Protection workers can ask Juvenile Court to place children away from the home of the parent who is suspected of abuse or neglect. The child may be placed with a relative, in foster care, or in a residential facility.

In most cases Child Protection must work to reunite the family. But if it seems like the child can't go home safely, Child Protection collects evidence to support a permanent placement of the child away from the abusive or neglectful parent.

What should I do if Child Protection contacts me?

- Write down the name and number of any worker that contacts you. Call them when you need information about the case.
- Keep notes of all meetings with workers, including the date, who was there, and what was said.
- Be cooperative and honest, but careful, when talking to workers. Remember, your comments can be used against you in court. Legally, they can't force you to talk to them. But if you don't talk to them they may find that suspicious.



Bring a friend, advocate or lawyer to meetings if you can.

You have the right to a free court-appointed lawyer if you have a low income but not until Child Protection is:

- Making a foster care plan or
 - Filing a court case
- Keep copies of all papers from Child Protection. If the worker finds there is not abuse or neglect, they send you a letter saying so. The letter also says that you can choose to have the whole file destroyed. Many times, it is better to ask the worker to keep the file, so if there is ever a question about what happened, you have the records.

If the worker finds that there is abuse or neglect, you need to appeal that decision right away.

- If your child needs to be out of your home, work with the child protection worker to find and place your child with your relatives, if that is what you want. If you are a relative, get involved in the case immediately! Relatives can be placement options but are also encouraged to be involved as resources for the child when in foster care.
- You have the right to take part in making a case plan that helps you and your family. Be honest! Tell the worker what things will help your family fix the problems so you get a good case plan.
- Follow the case plan. If you do not, the worker will go to court.
- Go to all meetings and court hearings.
- You can contact a private or legal aid lawyer for advice. Normally, you do not get a free lawyer until the first court hearing.

The court appointed lawyer may represent both parents at the first hearing. If you feel your interests are different from the other parent, you must let the judge know. Then you can get a separate lawyer.

If you think you should get a free lawyer, call the court and ask that a judge appoint a lawyer for you under Minnesota Statute 260C.163, subd. 3 and Juvenile Protection Procedure Rule 25.02, subd.2.

- If you are a grandparent and the child lived with you at any time in the last 2 years, you have the right to make yourself a “party” to the case by “intervening.” This means you ask the court to let you be a part of the court proceedings. A father who is not currently considered a “party” can intervene also. You can get the forms you need at the courthouse.

You can also get the [court forms you need](#) to “intervene” at www.mncourts.gov.



- click on *Get Forms* towards the top of the page
- click on *Child Protection* in the list that comes up
- click on *CHIPS Motion to Intervene*
- choose the *[Packet]*. It has everything you need. Read the instructions carefully!

What kinds of court cases can Child Protection file?

- **Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) cases.** They may file a CHIPS case if they believe your child is not safe in your care or you have not cooperated by accepting services aimed at keeping your child safe.

The county must make efforts to return the child to you. You have a chance to work with the county to make a case plan. You have 6 to 12 months to complete the plan.

If the child remains in foster care and you do not follow the case plan, the county files a permanency case.

- **Permanency Cases.** Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) is the preferred permanency option for children who can’t be returned to the care of their parents.

For more information see our fact sheets [Your Rights Under the Indian Child Welfare Act](#), and [Paternity and Child Custody](#), and [What is a Guardian Ad Litem?](#)

When a case goes to court, the judge appoints a guardian ad litem (GAL) for your child. The GAL makes a report to the court on what is in the best interests of the child. The GAL is NOT the child’s lawyer. If your child is age 10 or older, the child has a right to their own court appointed lawyer. If the child is under 10, the court won’t appoint a lawyer. The county attorney is the lawyer for Child Protection.

Foster parents or relatives who took care of the child temporarily may attend court hearings and ask the Judge’s permission to speak about what they think is best for the child.



Out of Home Placement

There are 2 ways for a child to be placed in foster care:

- **Involuntary Placements.** These are Out of Home placements ordered by the court even though the parent disagrees.
- **Voluntary Placement Agreements.** When the parents agree that it would be best for their child to be in foster care or treatment for a period of time, the county and the parents may enter into a Voluntary Placement Agreement. The Agreement includes information about services which are provided to the parent and the child that will allow the child to move back home.

Parents can change their mind about the voluntary placement and ask that their child be returned home. The county must return the child unless they go to court and prove that the child would not be safe at home.



What about my child's culture or religion?

If the child has to be taken out of the home, they should be placed with family or in a foster home with an understanding of the child's ethnic or cultural background when possible. But, there is no requirement to place children with families of the same ethnic or cultural background. A parent can ask for the child to be put in a foster home of the same religion.

The culture standard is different for Indian children. See our fact sheet [Your Rights Under the Indian Child Welfare Act.](#)

Fact Sheets are legal information NOT legal advice. See a lawyer for advice.

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