

What Happens After You Report Child Abuse and Neglect

Children deserve to grow up with their families. Whenever possible, CFSA connects families with services so that their children can stay at home safely. We remove children only when they cannot be safe at home.

Calling the Hotline

When you call the District hotline to report child abuse or neglect, you talk to a worker trained to gather as much information as possible. Expect a substantive conversation that will allow CFSA to decide how best to handle your report.

CFSA Decides on the Best Response

Based on your conversation, the hotline worker makes a preliminary assessment of the child's safety and how CFSA should respond. When the hotline determines that a child is in immediate danger, a Child Protective Services social worker responds immediately.

Otherwise, a multidisciplinary team meets three times a day to review all other reports and make the final decision about how CFSA will respond. The team directs reports along one of two pathways—**family assessment** or **investigation**. Occasionally, the team determines that a report does not meet legal criteria for CFSA intervention.

Family Assessment Response

Reports of child abuse and neglect vary widely. Across the U.S. and in the District, most reports are about child neglect that poses a low to moderate safety risk. For these reports, CFSA reaches out to conduct a **family assessment**. Families can opt to partner with CFSA to identify their needs and strengths and find ways to resolve issues that pose a risk to their children. They can then choose to participate in services from CFSA or community-based partners.

With the family assessment approach, the family does not enter the child welfare system, and CFSA does not seek to identify a maltreater. CFSA launches the family assessment process within 3 to 5 days and connects willing families with the services they need.

Investigation Response

When a report alleges severe physical or any type of sexual abuse or otherwise indicates a child at high risk, CFSA launches an **investigation**. A social worker goes out within 24 to 48 hours and must determine within 30 days whether a child has been abused or neglected and identify the maltreater.

At the end of an investigation, CFSA may open a case to stay involved with a family and help them overcome issues that pose a risk to their children. CFSA monitors many families and children in their homes and places children in foster care only when they cannot be safe at home.