

This brochure will help you understand:

- The Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families;
- The reason we are involved with your family; and
- What our involvement means.

Family Services Division

The Family Services Division (FSD) is responsible for making sure children and youth are safe, their basic needs are met, and families are supported to achieve these goals.

We do this by:

- Responding to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect;
- Evaluating children's safety through investigations and assessments;
- Helping parents get the services and supports they need to keep their children at home safely;
- Placing children in out-of-home care when it's necessary to keep them safe;
- Working with parents and others towards children's return home; and
- Finding permanent homes for children who can't go home safely.

Why has Family Services contacted my family?

You likely came to our attention because:

1. We received a report alleging that your child was:

- Abandoned;
- Physically, emotionally, or sexually abused;
- Not provided adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care;
- At significant risk of being abused or neglected; or
- Without proper parental care or subsistence, medical, or other care necessary for his/her well-being.

2. A supervisor accepted the report for intervention.

A supervisor reviewed the report and determined that it could be accepted for intervention — according to Vermont law and departmental policy. The supervisor considered several factors, including:

- The child's age;
- The alleged abuser's relationship to the child; and
- The nature of the allegation.

3. The supervisor determined the appropriate child safety intervention.

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention: assessment and investigation. While the preferred intervention is typically assessment, an investigation is required when a report alleges that:

- A child was sexually abused by someone over the age of 10;
- A child is at risk of harm for sexual abuse by an adult;
- Something a *person responsible for a child's welfare*¹ did or didn't do resulted in a child's death or in serious injury to a child; or
- A *person responsible for a child's welfare* abandoned a child, maliciously punished a child, physically abused a child under three or a child of any age who is non-verbal or nonambulatory, or allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

¹ Person responsible for a child's welfare includes the child's parent, guardian, or foster parent; other adult living in the child's home who serves in a parental role; employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

Assessment vs Investigation

The main difference between the two interventions is that an investigation requires a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred and should be substantiated, while an assessment does not.

The start of a child safety intervention is typically when the parents first become aware that Family Services is involved with their family.

What happens during an intervention?

Both assessments and investigations could include similar steps:

1. Assessing a child's immediate safety;
2. Assessing the risk of future maltreatment;
3. Determining the outcome of the intervention; and
4. Opening a case for ongoing services if needed.

See next page for more on these steps.

To learn more about child safety interventions, read *Family Services Policy 52 - Child Safety Interventions: Investigations & Assessments*.

<http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd/policies>

The following steps may happen for both investigations and assessments.

1. Child Safety Assessment

The social worker's first priority is to assess the child's immediate safety. Using the *SDM® Assessment of Danger and Safety Tool*, the social worker seeks answers to questions such as: Is the child safe now? If not, what needs to be done to promote safety? Is out-of-home care necessary? If so, is someone the child knows available to provide care?

At the end of the assessment, the worker makes a determination about the child's immediate safety:

- Safe;
- Conditionally safe; or
- Unsafe.

2. Family Risk Assessment

Using the *SDM® Risk Assessment Tool*, the social worker assesses the risk that a family will maltreat a child in the next 12 to 18 months without intervention. At the end of the assessment, the worker determines the final risk level:

- Low risk;
- Moderate risk;
- High or Very High Risk.

3. Outcome of the Intervention

- Both interventions result in a determination of the need for ongoing services—based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment. If the risk is high or very high, we'll open a case to provide your family with ongoing services and develop a plan to address the identified risks.
- An investigation also results in a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred. If the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected, the report is *substantiated* and information about the *person substantiated* is entered into Vermont's Child Protection Registry.

4. Open Case for Ongoing Services

If a case is opened for ongoing services, the social worker will work with you to complete an initial *Family Support Case Plan*. The goal is to keep your family safely together, prevent the need for out-of-home care, and help you move beyond our involvement with your family.

Family Services Offices

Barre: (802) 479-4260

Bennington: (802) 442-8138

Brattleboro: (802) 257-2888

Burlington: (802) 863-7370

Hartford: (802) 295-8840

Middlebury: (802) 388-4660

Morrisville: (802) 888-4576

Newport: (802) 334-6723

Rutland: (802) 786-5817

Springfield: (802) 885-8900

St. Albans: (802) 527-7741

St. Johnsbury: (802) 748-8374

Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-649-5285

If you have a disability or limited English, please let us know. You have the right to:

- Reasonable accommodations if you have a disability; and
- Interpretation services if you or your child has limited English proficiency.



Child Safety Interventions

A Guide to Investigations & Assessments