

Will my child be taken from my family?

The answer is almost always NO. Most likely, we will help you get services so you can care for your child at home. However, if a judge decides that it is not safe for your child to be home at this time, we may ask you to identify relatives and friends who could safely care for your child until it's safe for him or her to return home.

What happens after an investigation or assessment?

An investigation results in a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred: the report is either substantiated or unsubstantiated. A report is substantiated if it is found to be based on accurate and reliable information that would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected.

An assessment results in a decision about the family's need for ongoing services. This could include community-based services such as family counseling and substance abuse treatment, as well as an open case with Family Services. An assessment does not result in a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred.

You have the right to decline any services offered as the result of an assessment.

What happens to reports that are substantiated?

Information about persons substantiated for child abuse or neglect is entered into the Vermont Child Protection Registry — a database of substantiated reports dating back to January 1, 1992.

Having a registry record may affect a person's ability to:

- Become a foster parent, adoptive parent, or child care provider; and
- Work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

For more information about the Child Protection Registry, including a person's right to challenge a substantiation, please ask the Family Services worker for the Child Protection Registry brochure.

What if I have a disability or limited English?

Please let us know. *You have the right to reasonable accommodations if you have a disability and to interpretive services if you or your child has limited proficiency in English.*

To learn more about child safety interventions, including what they involve and what your rights are, please visit our website (www.dcf.vt.gov/fsd/policies) and read Policy 52.

Family Services Offices

Weekdays from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Central Office: (802) 241-2131

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 Protection Line:

1-800-649-5285



Child Safety Interventions

A Parent's Guide to Investigations & Assessments



01/11 • 15,000

Family Services Division

This brochure will help you understand:

- The Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families;
- The reason Family Services is involved with your family;
- What our involvement means; and
- The supports and services that may be available to help you.

Family Services Division

The Department for Children and Families is the state agency responsible for protecting children in Vermont.

Our Family Services Division does this by:

- Responding to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect;
- Evaluating children's safety through investigations and assessments;
- Supporting and strengthening families so children can safely remain in their homes; and
- Providing out-of-home care for children whenever necessary.

We believe the best place for children is with their families. That's why we help parents to build on their strengths and get the help they need to keep their children safe.

Why did Family Services contact my family?

1. We received a report that your child may have been abused or neglected.

This report may have been made by a:

- Relative, friend, neighbor, community member; or
- Professional required by Vermont law to report suspected child abuse and neglect (e.g., teacher, child care provider, doctor, or nurse).

You have the right to be informed about any report that concerns your child; however, the identity of the person making the report is confidential.

2. A supervisor accepted the report.

According to Vermont law, the report will be accepted if it alleges that:

- a. A person responsible for a child's welfare:
 - Harmed or is harming the child by physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or abandonment; or
 - Placed the child at significant risk of serious physical harm.
- b. Anyone:
 - Sexually abused a child; or
 - Placed a child at significant risk of sexual abuse.

Person responsible for a child's welfare includes the child's parent, guardian, or foster parent; any other adult residing in the child's home who serves in a parental role; an 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.

3. Family Services opened an assessment or investigation.

For each accepted report, a supervisor determines the appropriate child safety intervention. *You have the right to know whether the division will be conducting an investigation or assessment.*

CHILD SAFETY INVESTIGATIONS

We conduct an investigation when a report alleges that:

1. A child has been sexually abused;
2. The acts or omissions of a person responsible for a child's welfare resulted in a child's death; or
3. A person responsible for a child's welfare:
 - Abandoned a child;
 - Maliciously punished a child;
 - Physically abused a child under 3;
 - Physically abused a non-verbal or non-ambulatory child of any age; or
 - Allowed a child to be exposed to the production of methamphetamine.

CHILD SAFETY ASSESSMENTS

We conduct an assessment when:

1. An accepted report is not required by law or policy to be investigated;
2. There is no immediate threat to the child's safety or well-being; and
3. The family may benefit from services.

An assessment allows us to learn about the family's strengths, as well as the underlying factors that are interfering with the parents' care of their children.

We may decide to open an investigation at any time during an assessment if we believe it is appropriate.

You have the right to:

- *Get answers to your questions about the investigation or assessment process.*
- *Consult an attorney and have one with you —at any time.*

Both investigations and assessments typically include interviewing the child, visiting the child's home, and interviewing the child's parents, as required by state law.