

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY & PROTOCOL

The Department of Social Services recognizes that parental substance misuse/abuse is an underlying factor in a significant number of child welfare cases. Substance abuse is a pervasive problem that has a significant impact on the functioning of families and on the safety of children. Recognizing the depth of this problem in our community, it is necessary to implement a consistent approach to identifying substance abuse as a contributing factor to child welfare issues and in implementing strategies to correct the problems created by the substance abuse.

The responsibility of the Department is to provide services to strengthen families and protect children. It is our primary function to assure the safety of children--either through the reduction of risk of harm or through identification and implementation of alternative solutions. It is not our primary function to either identify substance abusers nor to provide treatment to them. The Department of Social Services only has authority to intervene in the life of a family if a determination of harm to a child has been made.

At the time of the initial Child Protective Services Report an assessment will be conducted by the Child Protective Services Social Worker according to the protocol to determine if substance abuse is a contributing factor in this report. At any point in the life of the case that factors indicate the possibility of substance abuse, an assessment will be conducted according to the protocol to determine if substance abuse is contributing to risk of harm to the child. The Family Risk Assessment and case documentation will clearly address those factors contributing to the risk of harm to the child. If present, a connection between the parental substance misuse or abuse and safety risks to the child will be clearly established. A referral to a substance abuse treatment provider will be made in all cases where parental substance abuse or misuse is identified as a safety risk to a child. The Family Services Case Plan will address the specific risks to the child and specify services to reduce those risks.

At any point that the risk of harm to the child is high and the parent is unable or unwilling to assure the child's safety through correcting the risk factors or arranging for an alternative safe living arrangement, then the Department of Social Services will file a petition requesting court intervention, which may include custody. If risk of harm to the child remains at a moderate level for six months or longer and the parent has been unable or unwilling to assure the child's safety through meaningful efforts toward correction of the risk factors or arranging for an alternative safe living arrangement, then the Department of Social services will file a petition requesting court intervention, which may include custody.