

CPS Glossary

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Adjudicatory Hearings - held by the juvenile and family court to determine whether a child has been maltreated or whether another legal basis exists for the State to intervene to protect the child.

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) - signed into law November 1997 and designed to improve the safety of children, to promote adoption and other permanent homes for children who need them, and to support families. The law requires CPS agencies to provide more timely and focused assessment and intervention services to the children and families that are served within the CPS system.

CASA - court-appointed special advocates (usually volunteers) who serve to ensure that the needs and interests of a child in child protection judicial proceedings are fully protected.

Case Closure - the process of ending the relationship between the CPS worker and the family that often involves a mutual assessment of progress. Optimally, cases are closed when families have achieved their goals and the risk of maltreatment has been reduced or eliminated.

Case Plan - the casework document that outlines the outcomes, goals, and tasks necessary to be achieved in order to reduce the risk of maltreatment.

Case Planning - the stage of the CPS case process where the CPS caseworker develops a case plan with the family members.

Caseworker Competency - demonstrated professional behaviors based on the knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and values a person holds.

Central Registry - a centralized database containing information on all substantiated/founded reports of child maltreatment in a selected area (typically a State).

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) - the law (P.L. 93-247) that provides a foundation for a national definition of child abuse and neglect. Reauthorized in October 1996 (P.L. 104-235), it was up for reauthorization at the time of publication. CAPTA defines child abuse and neglect as "at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm."

Child Protective Services (CPS) - the designated social services agency (in most States) to receive reports, investigate, and provide intervention and treatment services to children and families in which child maltreatment has occurred. Frequently, this agency is located within larger public social service agencies, such as Departments of Social Services.

Concurrent Planning - identifies alternative forms of permanency by addressing both reunification or legal permanency with a new parent or caregiver if reunification efforts fail.

Cultural Competence - a set of attitudes, behaviors, and policies that integrates knowledge about groups of people into practices and standards to enhance the quality of services to all cultural groups being served.

Differential Response - an area of CPS reform that offers greater flexibility in responding to allegations of abuse and neglect. Also referred to as "dual track" or "multi-track" response, it permits CPS agencies to respond differentially to children's needs for safety, the degree of risk present, and the family's needs for services and support. See "dual track."

Dispositional Hearings - held by the juvenile and family court to determine the disposition of children after cases have been adjudicated, such as whether placement of the child in out-of-home care is necessary and what services the children and family will need to reduce the risk of maltreatment and to address the effects of maltreatment.

Dual Track - term reflecting new CPS response systems that typically combine a nonadversarial service-based assessment track for cases where children are not at immediate risk with a traditional CPS investigative track for cases where children are unsafe or at greater risk for maltreatment. See "differential response."

Evaluation of Family Progress - the stage of the CPS case process where the CPS caseworker measures changes in family behaviors and conditions (risk factors), monitors risk elimination or reduction, assesses strengths, and determines case closure.

Family Assessment - the stage of the child protection process when the CPS caseworker, community treatment provider, and the family reach a mutual understanding regarding the behaviors and conditions that must change to reduce or eliminate the risk of maltreatment, the most critical treatment needs that must be addressed, and the strengths on which to build.

Family Group Conferencing - a family meeting model used by CPS agencies to optimize family strengths in the planning process. This model brings the family, extended family, and others important in the family's life (e.g., friends, clergy, neighbors) together to make decisions regarding how best to ensure safety of the family members.

Family Unity Model - a family meeting model used by CPS agencies to optimize family strengths in the planning process. This model is similar to the Family Group Conferencing model.

Full Disclosure - CPS information to the family regarding the steps in the intervention process, the requirements of CPS, the expectations of the family, the consequences if the family does not fulfill the expectations, and the rights of the parents to ensure that the family completely understands the process.

Guardian ad Litem - a lawyer or lay person who represents a child in juvenile or family court. Usually this person considers the "best interest" of the child and may perform a variety of roles, including those of independent investigator, advocate, advisor, and guardian for the child. A lay person who serves in this role is sometimes known as a court-appointed special advocate or CASA.

Home Visitation Programs - prevention programs that offer a variety of family-focused services to pregnant mothers and families with new babies. Activities frequently encompass structured visits to the family's home and may address positive parenting practices, nonviolent discipline techniques, child development, maternal and child health, available services, and advocacy.

Immunity - established in all child abuse laws to protect reporters from civil law suits and criminal prosecution resulting from filing a report of child abuse and neglect.

Initial Assessment or Investigation - the stage of the CPS case process where the CPS caseworker determines the validity of the child maltreatment report, assesses the risk of maltreatment, determines if the child is safe, develops a safety plan if needed to assure the child's protection, and determines services needed.

Intake - the stage of the CPS case process where the CPS caseworker screens and accepts reports of child maltreatment.

Interview Protocol - a structured format to ensure that all family members are seen in a planned strategy, that community providers collaborate, and that information gathering is thorough.

Juvenile and Family Courts - established in most States to resolve conflict and to otherwise intervene in the lives of families in a manner that promotes the best interest of children. These courts specialize in areas such as child maltreatment, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, divorce, child custody, and child support.

Kinship Care - formal child placement by the juvenile court and child welfare agency in the home of a child's relative.

Liaison - the designation of a person within an organization who has responsibility for facilitating communication, collaboration, and coordination between agencies involved in the child protection system.

Mandated Reporter - individuals required by State statutes to report suspected child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities (usually CPS or law enforcement agencies). Mandated reporters typically include professionals, such as educators and other school personnel, health care and mental health professionals, social workers, childcare providers, and law enforcement officers. Some States identify all citizens as mandated reporters.

Multidisciplinary Team - established between agencies and professionals within the child protection system to discuss cases of child abuse and neglect and to aid in decisions at various stages of the CPS case process. These terms may also be designated by different names, including child protection teams, interdisciplinary teams, or case consultation teams.

Neglect - the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional. *Physical neglect* can include not providing adequate food or clothing, appropriate medical care, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat or coats). *Educational neglect* includes failure to provide appropriate schooling, special educational needs, or allowing excessive trancies. *Psychological neglect* includes the lack of any emotional support and love, chronic inattention to the child, exposure to spouse abuse, or drug and alcohol abuse.

Out-of-Home Care - child care, foster care, or residential care provided by persons, organizations, and institutions to children who are placed outside their families, usually under the jurisdiction of juvenile or family court.

Parent or caretaker - person responsible for the care of the child.

Parens Patriae Doctrine - originating in feudal England, a doctrine that vests in the State a right of guardianship of minors. This concept has gradually evolved into the principle that the community, in addition to the parent, has a strong interest in the care and nurturing of children. Schools, juvenile courts, and social service agencies all derive their authority from the State's power to ensure the protection and rights of children as a unique class.

Physical Abuse - the inflicting of a nonaccidental physical injury upon a child. This may include, burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming a child. It may, however, have been the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age.

Primary Prevention - activities geared to a sample of the general population to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring. Also referred to as "universal prevention."

Protocol - an interagency agreement that delineates joint roles and responsibilities by establishing criteria and procedures for working together on cases of child abuse and neglect.

Protective Factors - strengths and resources that appear to mediate or serve as a "buffer" against risk factors that contribute to vulnerability to maltreatment or against the negative effects of maltreatment experiences.

Psychological Maltreatment - a pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incidents that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value to meeting another's needs. This can include parents or caretakers using extreme or bizarre forms of punishment or threatening or terrorizing a child. The term "psychological maltreatment" is also known as emotional abuse or neglect, verbal abuse, or mental abuse.

Response Time - a determination made by CPS and law enforcement regarding the immediacy of the response needed to a report of child abuse or neglect.

Review Hearings - held by the juvenile and family court to review dispositions (usually every 6 months) and to determine the need to maintain placement in out-of-home care or court jurisdiction of a child.

Risk - the likelihood that a child will be maltreated in the future.

Risk Assessment - to assess and measure the likelihood that a child will be maltreated in the future, frequently through the use of checklists, matrices, scales, and other methods of measurement.

Risk Factors - behaviors and conditions present in the child, parent, or family that will likely contribute to child maltreatment occurring in the future.

Safety - absence of an imminent or immediate threat of moderate-to-serious harm to the child.

Safety Assessment - a part of the CPS case process in which available information is analyzed to identify whether a child is in immediate danger of moderate or serious harm.

Safety Plan - a casework document developed when it is determined that the child is in imminent or potential risk of serious harm. In the safety plan, the caseworker targets the factors that are causing or contributing to the risk of imminent serious harm to the child, and identifies, along with the family, the interventions that will control the safety factors and assure the child's protection.

Secondary Prevention - activities targeted to prevent breakdowns and dysfunctions among families who have been identified as at risk for abuse and neglect.

Service Agreement - the casework document developed between the CPS caseworker and the family that outlines the tasks necessary to achieve goals and outcomes necessary for risk reduction.

Service Provision - the stage of the CPS casework process when CPS and other service providers provide specific services geared toward the reduction of risk of maltreatment.

Sexual Abuse - inappropriate adolescent or adult sexual behavior with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism, sexual exploitation, or exposure to pornography. To be considered child abuse, these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for the care of a child (for example a baby-sitter, a parent, or a daycare provider) or related to the child. If a stranger commits these acts, it would be considered sexual assault and handled solely by the police and criminal courts.

Substantiated - an investigation disposition concluding that the allegation of maltreatment or risk of maltreatment was supported or founded by State law or State policy. A CPS determination means that credible evidence exists that child abuse or neglect has occurred.

Tertiary Prevention - treatment efforts geared to address situations where child maltreatment has already occurred with the goals of preventing child maltreatment from occurring in the future and of avoiding the harmful effects of child maltreatment.

Treatment - the stage of the child protection case process when specific services are provided by CPS and other providers to reduce the risk of maltreatment, support families in meeting case goals, and address the effects of maltreatment.

Universal Prevention - activities and services directed at the general public with the goal of stopping the occurrence of maltreatment before it starts. Also referred to as "primary prevention."

Unsubstantiated (not substantiated) - an investigation disposition that determines that there is not sufficient evidence under State law or policy to conclude that the child has been maltreated or at risk of maltreatment. A CPS determination means that credible evidence does not exist that child abuse or neglect has occurred.