

CPS on Call Protocol for After Hours (Abbreviated Version)

Trauma Informed Best Practice Guide

(NOTE: This guide is an abbreviated version of the actual county On Call CPS procedure indicating how to intervene and potentially remove in a trauma informed manner. The complete version contains the relevant State and Local policies for staff to reference while on call whereas in this version the specific policies are not cited. Having the trauma informed practices outlined in the Guide communicates to staff that being trauma informed is a priority, especially in removals, and therefore is an expected practice. -- *From Southwest Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center*).

ON CALL INVESTIGATION PROTOCOL:

- **State Policy Statement**
- **Local Policy Statement**
- **Local Trauma Informed Practice Procedure**

TRAUMA INFORMED HOME VISITS/INVESTIGATIONS ON CALL

- Do all one can to keep the home visit/scene calm and divert an angry and out of control parent or caregiver out of the child's presence, when possible.
- Seek to talk with the child in a safe and secure setting, even if within a home under investigation. Avoid locations within the home where abuse is more likely to have occurred and where the memories (i.e., traumatic reminders) of any abuse would be the strongest, such as the bedroom in a sexual abuse case. Postpone detailed questions until the child can be interviewed in a neutral, child-friendly setting.
- Explain in age-appropriate ways what is going on, answer the child's questions, ask what he/she is concerned about, and ask the child what would make him/her feel safe. Try to follow through as best as practical.
- Shield the child immediately from any crime scene where a body, seriously injured person or pet, or overt signs of violent death or injury are present.
- Focus the child on the familiar: school, pets, friends, safe relatives, etc.
- Ask the parent or caregiver to reassure the child that he/she is safe and the investigators are here to help the child.
- Treat the parent or caregiver with respect and use a calm tone of communication even when confronted with aggression and hostility. Trauma victims are often accustomed to losing power during traumatic events (e.g., child abuse, domestic violence, community violence) and may meet that loss of power with aggression or, alternatively, superficial compliance. Stress may cause a traumatic response and highly emotional, and less than rational, thoughts and actions. Workers should give the parent as much control over the environment as practical during the investigation to defuse some of the trauma-driven patterns. Seek opportunities to give the parent or caregiver a choice in how to proceed within the limits of good investigation.

Avoid threatening an adult domestic violence victim with removal in an effort to force protective action. Such actions may trigger or cause a trauma response that is unhelpful. Focus more on determining what protective actions have worked in the past and how those strategies can be strengthened with agency support.

REMOVAL PROCESS WHEN ON CALL:

- **State Policy Statement**
- **Local Policy Statement**
- **Trauma Informed Practice Procedure**

TRAUMA INFORMED REMOVALS

Enlist the parent as part of the solution which can help the child and the parent who may both be trauma victims. Explain to the parent that he/she is the expert on his/her child and ask the parent to give as much information as possible about how to make the child feel safe and comfortable in the foster care setting, even if it just for a short period. This includes everything from bedtime and morning routines; food likes, dislikes, and allergies; nicknames; favorite TV programs or other routines; lessons on how to help the child cope with stress; and related items. Collecting this information helps equip the substitute care provider with knowledge he/she can use to make his/her home feel somewhat familiar to the child. Some birth parents also report feeling respected by this approach and are more willing to engage with the worker. Some communities have developed simple forms that the parent can complete to be passed onto the foster parent.

Ask the parent or caregiver for copies of some family photos the child can take with them.

Explain to the child what is happening in age-appropriate language. Explain that it is normal to feel scared and confused and know the types of things kids his/her age worry about. Explain how he/she will be safe. Give the child as much information as possible about where he/she is going, who he/she will be staying with, what the placement or home is like (i.e., some workers show the child and/or the birth parents photos of the foster family or placement to reduce the fear of the unknown), explain how school will be handled tomorrow, and what is happening with siblings, parents, pets, and close relatives, as applicable.

Repeat information for the child, as needed, and give them written information and/or a phone number for someone they can call for more information, whenever possible.

Minimize the number of "hand-offs" a child has to experience during the removal and placement.

Ideally, the child would be able to be with the same person during the whole process.

Give the child some control and choice. Ask the child what will help him/her feel safe or sleep better and what he/she really want to take with him/her (e.g., transitional objects such as a stuffed animal or his/her favorite pajamas). Some answers will not be practical such as taking a pet or a parent, but at least the worker can explain the practical limits of what can be arranged. Walk the child around his/her room and ask the child if he/she wants to take anything with him/her.

Note: It is important that controls are in place in the foster care system not to misplace these important objects and favorite clothing once in placement or the worker betrays the trust and deepens the trauma.

Provide the parent with written information on the process and how he/she can help ease the child's transition into foster placement even if he/she is planning to contest the placement in court.