



# A Parent's Handbook About Child Welfare Services

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO  
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY  
FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES



## Who can I talk with if I have concerns or need more information?

Social worker's name \_\_\_\_\_

Social worker's phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Social worker's supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor's phone number \_\_\_\_\_

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# A Parent's Handbook About Child Welfare Services

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If you are reading this, you may have had a visit with a protective services worker from the San Francisco Human Services Agency (HSA) because of a report made to our Child Abuse Hotline. The protective services worker has had a visit with you and your child and believes that your home is unsafe or is at risk of becoming unsafe for children.

This handbook was written to explain how the child welfare system works, and some of the tools and programs that are available to help you. We want to partner with you to ensure your child's safety.

Throughout your time involved with the child welfare system we encourage you to focus on one goal: making sure your child is safe in a loving home. If your child has been placed in out-of-home care (foster care), there will be steps to take to be reunified.

One thing to remember is that, whenever you need help or have questions—ask us. We know you are under stress. The child welfare system can be complicated and confusing. Your emotions and situation can seem overwhelming, but you are not in this alone. Everyone involved wants to help you and your child achieve safety, stability and well-being.

Many families have faced the same situation you are facing now. This handbook has been prepared with the guidance of parents who have been successful in working with the child welfare system and in building a stronger family.



## What Is Child Welfare Services?

Child Welfare Services is a branch of government which protects children from abuse or neglect, helps families stay together safely, and makes sure that children are cared for in temporary or permanent homes. In San Francisco County, the Family and Children's Services (FCS) Division of the Human Services Agency (HSA) is responsible for this system, working within the legal authority of the Courts.

HSA provides child welfare and foster care services under Sections 300 et seq. and 16500 et seq. of the California Welfare and Institutions Code. HSA administers child welfare services under federal and state statutes and regulations and is responsible, either directly or through providers, to obtain or provide interventions and services to address child abuse and neglect and increase well-being of children and families. The four traditional service components of Child Welfare Services are Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanent Placement.

# First Response from the Child Welfare System

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Once a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is received by the Family & Children's Services Hotline, it is evaluated using an evidence-based assessment known as Structured Decision Making (SDM), which helps to guide toward the most appropriate response. If it is determined that an in-person response must be made by an Emergency Response (ER) social worker, the worker will assess further involvement by Family & Children's Services through one of three response "paths." This family-centered, community-based approach is known as the Differential Response model.

## **Community Response (Path 1)**

If the ER social worker determines that the child is safe, the allegations are "unfounded" (found not true) or "inconclusive" (uncertain if allegations are true), and that there is a low risk of future child maltreatment, the referral will be closed. If the family might benefit from community resources and support, the worker may refer the family to a community-based organization. There is no further involvement by Family & Children's Services.

## **Differential Response (Path 2)**

If the ER social worker determines that the child is safe, but the allegations are "substantiated" (found to be true), and there may be future risk of child maltreatment, the referral will be closed. The family will be transitioned to an appropriate Differential Response Family Resource Center or community-based organization that will provide voluntary case management to the family. There is no further involvement by Family & Children's Services.

## **Traditional Child Welfare Services Response (Path 3)**

If the ER social worker determines that the child is not safe, the allegations are "substantiated" (found to be true), and there is high risk of child maltreatment, the referral will be closed and a Family & Children's Services case will be opened.

## **If a Child Welfare Case Is Opened**

Even if a case is opened because a protective services worker has found evidence of abuse or neglect, that does not mean your child will necessarily be placed in foster care. There are three possible outcomes:

### **1. Non-Court Family Maintenance (Child Remains in the Home)**

If there are high-risk factors but no safety threats, or any safety threats have been mitigated (reduced), a child can stay in the home with his or her parents. Protective services workers will partner with the parents on a Safety Plan, and the worker and parents will meet at least monthly. The worker will offer the parents community resources that can help strengthen the family's support system in order to minimize risk to the child.

If there is a high risk of harm to the child, but not immediate danger, the protective services worker may offer services to the family in order to avoid having to place the child in out-of-home care (foster care). These services may be non-court involved, or they may be required by the court. The protective services worker will work with the family to develop an action plan (or case plan) that allows the child to remain in the home and helps the family reduce the risk of harm to the child.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can my child be separated from me if I am abusing drugs or alcohol?

Yes, if your drug or alcohol use is putting your child in danger, he or she could be placed in out-of-home care (foster care). Also, if you are pregnant and use drugs or abuse alcohol, your baby may be born prematurely or ill. If so, the hospital may not release the baby into your custody. It is very important—for your baby’s health as well as your own—to have medical care during your pregnancy. There are many programs that can help you if you are pregnant and using drugs and alcohol. Call 211 for a referral.

### Can my child be placed in foster care because I’m homeless?

No, your child will not be placed in out-of-home care just because you are homeless or living at a shelter. However, if you are unable to keep your child safe due to your homelessness, then yes, your child could be placed in out-of-home care. The protective services worker will check to see if you are trying to use resources such as homeless shelters, food boxes, etc. If you are using these services, it shows that you are making a good effort to provide for your child and make sure your family is safe.

### What is Structured Decision Making (SDM)?

You will hear workers talking about Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment tools. These tools are a research-based assessment process that workers use to make consistent decisions. Protective services workers follow guidelines to more objectively, accurately and consistently assess families according to the likelihood of subsequent child maltreatment. It takes into account the family’s strengths, too, such as cultural connections, a support system, how the children are doing in school, etc. This tool is used at every decision-making step as you move through the Child Welfare system.

### Does the report made to the Hotline go into a record anywhere?

Child welfare agencies are required by law to report the name of anyone with either a substantiated or inconclusive allegation of child abuse or severe neglect to the Department of Justice (DOJ) for listing in the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI). If your name becomes listed in the CACI and your case didn’t go through the juvenile court system, you have the right to a grievance hearing to ask that your name be removed. This hearing is sometimes called a “Gomez Hearing.”

## 2. Court Family Maintenance (In-home Dependency)

In-home dependency, or Court Family Maintenance, means your child will stay with you, but the court will be involved for your child’s safety and well-being until you can resolve some issues. This happened because a protective services worker identified some abuse or neglect issues in your home or there is a very high risk that your child could experience some abuse or neglect in the future without some support. The goal of everyone involved is to make sure that your child is safe and that you get the help you need to keep your child safe in your home. As part of this process, the protective services worker files a petition for in-home dependency with the Juvenile Court and a Jurisdictional Hearing is scheduled. You can read more about this in the *Going to Court* section.

## 3. Family Reunification (Child Is Placed in Out-of-Home Care or Foster Care)

If protective services workers find that there are immediate safety concerns for your child, he or she will be placed in a safe environment away from your home. A court hearing will be held within 72 hours. For more information, please see the next section, *If Your Child Is Placed Away from Your Home*.

# If Your Child Is Placed Away from Your Home

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Most calls to the FCS Hotline do not result in a child being placed in out-of-home care. This happens only in the most serious cases, where safety factors have been identified and can't be mitigated (resolved).

## Who can separate my child from me?

Before interviewing/assessing your child, a protective services worker must obtain your permission, obtain a warrant from the Juvenile Court, or assess that there is an emergency safety concern. After reviewing the safety concerns and speaking with the child and any adult in the home, a protective services worker may make a decision that the child is not safe remaining in the home, or they may ask the police to remove the child to a safe place without your permission.



## What happens to my children if they are not able to remain in my home?

In most instances the child is first taken to the Child Protection Center for a medical exam and to make the decision about the best possible placement for the child. If your child does need to be separated from your home due to safety concerns, he or she will be placed in one of the following places:

- the home of the other parent, if appropriate and you do not live together; or
- the home of a responsible relative or a non-relative caregiver; or
- a foster home or group home.

If you are present at the time that a decision is made to place the child in out-of-home care, you may tell the protective services worker or police officer about any relatives or extended family members who can take care of your child. (See “Keeping Your Child with Family” on page 12.).

## If I wasn't present, when am I supposed to receive notice from my protective services worker that my children cannot remain in my home?

If you were not present at the time your child was separated from your home, the protective services worker will notify you immediately, making every effort to find you. The worker is required to arrange a visit between you and your child within five days of the out-of-home placement. The protective services worker is also required to ask you about relatives or friends of the family that may be willing to provide a safe place for your child to stay.

## What happens to me and my child next?

As soon as possible after your child is placed in-out-of-home care, you will be notified about a TDM (Team Decision-making Meeting.) The purpose of this meeting is for you and anyone who can support you to meet with the protective services worker to determine if a safety plan can be developed that would allow your child to be returned to you. This meeting is facilitated by a trained facilitator and the focus of the meeting is to create a plan to safely return your child. If it is not possible to remove all the safety concerns, your child will remain in out-of-home care and a court hearing will be scheduled.

## Timeline if Your Child Is Placed in Out-of-Home Care (Foster Care)

**Day One:** Your child is placed in out-of-home care. The worker assigned to your case has 48 hours (two days) to gather facts about you and your child and to prepare a Petition for the Juvenile Court. This could include statements from you, the child, relatives, school, police, doctors and observations from others about you and your child. All efforts will be made to locate both maternal and paternal relatives as soon as the decision is made to place your child in out-of-home care.

**Day Two:** You will be notified about the date and time of your child's Detention Hearing. Every effort will be made to locate you and give you this information.

**Day Three:** Based on the facts gathered, the protective services worker will submit the Petition to the Juvenile Court explaining why it was determined that your child could not remain in your home and why the protective services worker is requesting that the court protect your child.

**Day Four:** A Detention Hearing will be held by the court within 72 hours (three working court days) of placement to decide where your child will stay. (The hearing could be postponed due to a weekend or holiday). You will be assigned an attorney at this first Detention Hearing.

## Can I visit my child at the Child Protection Center?

No, but you have the right to contact your child by telephone an hour after your child has been taken into custody. You can visit with your child within five days unless the judge orders otherwise at the Detention Hearing. The protective services worker will set up a visiting plan for you and your child.

## Does CalWORKs (cash aid) stop if my child is removed?

Each case is different. Contact your CalWORKs worker as soon as possible, because sometimes there are CalWORKs supportive services available to help you as you reunify with your child.

### What Are Family Team Meetings and Team Decision-making Meetings?

**Team Decision-making Meetings (TDM)** are specifically about whether your child can be safely at home, or, if not, what is the best placement for your child. We will ask the team about things like what strengths your family has, what is best for your child, and who can take care of your child while you are working towards reunification. You will have a TDM soon after your child has been placed in out-of-home care (before the Detention Hearing) and any time a placement change may happen. A TDM may also be held prior to reunification with your child.

**Family Team Meetings** mean that we call all people involved with you and your child to meet together and create and maintain a plan for your child and family. The plan needs to address the concerns and questions raised in the original report and the investigation of your

family situation. In the meeting, you will work on whatever issues have come up, including with CalWORKs, visitation, support you need to meet your goals, and questions about where your child is being placed. These meetings can happen at any time they are needed.



# Going to Court

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## What are Juvenile Court hearings?

A series of hearings will take place during your involvement with the child welfare system called Juvenile Dependency Court hearings. You have all the normal trial rights during all court hearings, and the court will advise you of your rights and appoint an attorney if you don't have one. **You should attend all hearings or notify your attorney if you cannot, or your rights may be affected.**

There are four types of hearings that take place in Juvenile Dependency Court. These hearings sometimes take place on the same day, during the same court session, depending on what is happening with your case. They are Detention Hearings, Jurisdictional Hearings, Dispositional Hearings and Dependency Review Hearings.

### 1. Detention Hearing

A Detention Hearing is held when the protective services worker files a petition with the Juvenile Court and your child has been placed in out-of-home care without a court order. This is the first opportunity for the judge to determine if your child needs the protection of the court. You should attend this hearing. At the Detention Hearing, the court will decide whether your child can safely be:

- reunified with you
- placed with the child's other parent
- placed with a relative or a non-relative caregiver
- placed in a temporary foster home or group home

If you do not attend the Detention Hearing, you will be sent a letter telling you about the next hearing (Jurisdictional Hearing) that will be held about two weeks after the petition has been filed with Juvenile Court.

At the Detention Hearing, decisions will be made about your child. If you attend, you can help make these decisions, and by being there you show the court that you care about your child. Before the hearing begins, you should be given the opportunity to read the petition and ask questions about its allegations. (The allegations are statements a court officer believes can be proven in court.)

### 2. Jurisdictional Hearings

At the Jurisdictional Hearing you admit or deny the statements in the petition. The court will decide if some or all of the statements in the petition are true. If the court finds the petition true, the court will hold a Dispositional Hearing, which can take place at the same time as the Jurisdictional Hearing or at a later date.

If the court finds that none of the statements in the petition are true, the case may be dismissed and your child will be ordered returned to you or, if your child is already living with you, the court case will be closed. You will have a chance to respond to the petition and request changes to it.

### 3. Dispositional Hearing

At the Dispositional Hearing, the court considers the protective services worker's written report and any other evidence and arguments offered by any party. You are entitled to receive and read the written report before the hearing is conducted. You will have a chance to discuss allegations and recommended services and possibly make changes to them.

The things that will be decided at the Dispositional Hearing are:

1. Whether your child should be placed with you or with someone else.
2. If your child is separated from you, the Court will make orders about how and when you may visit with your child, including the need to have the visits supervised.
3. The Court will also make orders about what services you will be expected to participate in.

The court will order a plan for you to follow, or could also dismiss the case. *If you don't show up at this hearing, the court will proceed in your absence!*

### **What if there is a trial or Contested Hearing?**

If there is disagreement over any issue concerning your child, there is a court session called a trial or Contested Hearing in which the judge makes the final decision. It is best to try to deal with any disagreements thoroughly but quickly because your child is waiting for you to resolve the issues that brought your family to the court. There are time limits for the services and requirements for reunification.

### **4. Dependency Review Hearings**

Every six months, the court will review a report from the protective services worker on your progress with your case plan and to decide whether to continue or terminate services. These are called Dependency Review hearings. These hearings are to: make sure that you are working on your case plan and receiving the services you need; decide if your child can be returned to you or, if your child is living with you, whether the case can be dismissed; and to make sure your child is being well taken care of. The first Dependency Review hearing happens about six months after the Dispositional Hearing. The court may dismiss a case at any point if the issues that brought the family into court have been remedied and the child is no longer at risk. A Permanency Hearing must be held within 12 months of a child's entering foster care. In certain situations, the deadline for reunification may be extended to 18-24 months. If the parents are unable to reunify within specified time periods, efforts will be made to find a permanent home through adoption, legal guardianship or another planned permanent living arrangement.

#### **Your Attorney**

##### **Do I have the right to an attorney?**

Yes, the court will appoint one at your first hearing or you can hire your own attorney.

##### **What if I can't afford an attorney?**

If you can't afford an attorney, the court will appoint one free of charge. If you have the money, you may have to repay all or part of the cost to the court.

##### **Why do I need an attorney?**

The attorney represents you in court to get the dependency dismissed, and will answer questions about your rights.

##### **What if my attorney doesn't represent me the way I want?**

First try talking to your attorney. If it doesn't work, tell the judge or your protective services worker. If you cannot solve your differences with your attorney, the court may appoint a new attorney for you.

##### **What if I disagree with the things that the protective services worker is saying happened to my child?**

You have a right to deny the allegations. It is more effective if you can provide your attorney with documented proof.

# Visiting Your Child

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We know how hard it is for you and your child to be separated from each other. We want you to be successful in reuniting with your child and creating a safe home environment for your family. Visits with your child are a very important part of this process for both you and your child.

## **My child was placed in out-of-home care. When do I have the right to visit?**

Unless your visit would be considered harmful to your child, you have the right to visit your child within five calendar days after he or she has been placed in out-of-home care. You will have time to be with your child under supervision, and you will be offered services to help you reunify with your child and strengthen your family in other ways.



## **What about other visitations with my child?**

You and your worker will create an ongoing visitation plan which describes the parenting behaviors you want to work on during your visit. Also, at your first court hearing, your attorney will advise you of your visiting rights. You have the right to disagree with the decision and appeal it to the court. Discuss it with your attorney and protective services worker.

## **What if my child is staying with our relatives?**

You may be able to visit your child in the home of your relatives if this is approved by the court, or you may meet at a local FRC. In either case, your visits will still be supervised.

## **When will I get to have unsupervised visits with my child?**

The goal is for you to have unsupervised and increased visits with your child, and then to be reunited. The exact time when you can have unsupervised visits depends on your plan and how well the supervised visits are going.

## **What if I am worried about my safety or my child's safety during visitations?**

If you or your child might be in danger of assault or abduction, we can provide you a secure visitation space.

## **Will I have a chance to talk to my child's foster parents?**

You may be able to talk to the foster parents about how your child is doing. Ask your protective services worker about making time to talk with them. You know your child best, so you can help the foster parents understand your child's needs. The foster parents can also help you, by being a resource to talk about parenting issues.

## **What if I am incarcerated? How can I visit with my child?**

The Incarcerated Parent Services program offers outreach services to incarcerated parents to ensure that they have access and participate in their children's lives. Dedicated coordinators at the prison and jail facilities work with incarcerated parents to ensure that they are engaged in the process with their children and, upon release, to help facilitate reunification.

# Keeping Your Child with Family

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**Family matters.** It is one of our highest priorities to keep children with their families, and we place nearly half of all children with relatives. If your child cannot be with you right now because of allegations of abuse or neglect, we want to find other members of your family who can take care of your child until you can be reunified. This can be your child's other parent (if you do not live together), grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, even close family friends or neighbors. If you and your child cannot be reunified, we will look to these same people to give your child a permanent home.

## **When will I have a chance to talk about family members who can take care of my child?**

You will have a chance to discuss this at the Team Decision-making Meeting (TDM) soon after your child has been placed in foster care. Your relatives can attend the TDM with you to help the protective services worker decide which home would be best for your child until you are reunified. You can also talk to your protective services worker privately about relatives you think would not be good foster parents. You are an important part of deciding who can best take care of your child right now while you work on your issues.

In addition, we are required to use due diligence to notify all grandparents, adult siblings and other adult relatives, including those suggested by the parents, within 30 days of a child's removal from the home. We will ask you for help with this, and may ask your child as well. We also work with family finding agencies to help find all the family members and support people who might be able to care for your child.

## **What is needed in order to place my child with relatives?**

In order for relatives to be able to take care of your child, they must pass a background check, and so must anyone who lives with them. Their home has to pass foster home licensing standards, and they have to have a place for the child to sleep. And of course, your relatives have to be physically and emotionally able to care for a child.

The protective services worker must also discuss with relatives whether they could offer a permanent home for the child if you cannot be reunited with your child in the future. This can be upsetting to you, but it's important to have a plan in case you are unable to reunify, so that your child can have a permanent loving home with someone they already know. We know that you want your child to stay with you, and will do everything we can to help that happen. Even if the child cannot live with you, all efforts will be made to maintain safe connections with you.

## **What if my relatives can't afford to take care of my child?**

Your relatives will receive monthly payments based on federal and state eligibility requirements. Ask your protective services worker for more information.

## **If my child is not placed with my relatives, can I appeal this decision?**

Yes. If you feel that your child should be placed at your relative's home and your protective services worker does not, you should discuss this with your attorney if you want to contest the decision, or tell this to the judge at any of the court hearings.

## **If my child is placed in foster care, do my relatives have the right to visit?**

Usually grandparents have the right to visit if it is appropriate. Other relatives may come on a visit with you, but you need the authorization of your protective services worker.



# Case Plans and Services

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## What is a case plan?

A **case plan** is a family-involved plan that outlines the service plan, next steps and timelines that are required to help resolve the safety and risk issues that brought your family to the attention of the child welfare system. At a family team meeting within the first few weeks of your contact with child welfare, you and the protective services worker, along with identified support people and community providers, will develop an initial case plan. At the meeting, your family's strengths and those areas where you need supportive services will be discussed. The case plan may or may not involve the court, depending on the assessment of needs by the protective services worker, and will be updated periodically or as needed.

The case plan is designed to help you to have the dependency dismissed if the child is remaining in your home, or get your child back and have the dependency dismissed if the child has been in out-of-home care.



## Do I have the right to be involved in making a case plan?

Yes, the case plan is a joint effort between you and your protective services worker. You are expected to be involved, and will be asked to sign the plan showing that you understand and agree.

## Do I have the right to speak in my native language and receive services in that language?

Yes. If your protective services worker or attorney does not speak your language, you have the right to an interpreter. An interpreter can also be provided for all court hearings.

## Calling 2-1-1 for Other Resources

We encourage you to use all the resources you can to stabilize your life. In addition to the resources suggested by your social worker, you can call 2-1-1 for more help. This is a free number staffed 24/7 by people who can refer you to local nonprofit or county agencies. They can help with resources for food, shelter, counseling, employment assistance, quality child care, financial help, legal services and much more.

They can even tell you more about which Human Services Agency programs might be useful for you.

The operator will do a brief assessment and then give you suggestions for agencies to call. Help is available in more than 150 languages, and all calls are confidential.

**Call 2-1-1 or 800-273-6222 for help today.**

# Your Rights

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## What are my child's rights?

All children have the need and right to be nurtured and live safely in their homes, and the right to:

- safety and supervision
- food, clothing, and shelter
- protection from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect
- diagnosis and treatment of medical and emotional conditions

Children who are the subject of a court order related to child protection have additional rights. These rights include:

- to visit or be visited by parents and/or brothers and sisters, if the child is in foster care and if the visits are in the child's best interest
- to have a person (a "guardian ad litem") appointed by the court to look after the child's best interest

## What are my rights?

If you are a parent or caregiver in a child protection assessment/investigation, you have the right to know:

- the nature of the reported child abuse or neglect
- how the assessment/investigation will be done and how long it will take
- the suspected harm or risk of harm to the child
- what the social worker has found regarding the reported child abuse and neglect
- what could happen as a result of the assessment
- what action Family and Children's Services may take, if any

In addition, parents have the right:

- to request to review their record
- to have relatives given priority consideration as temporary caregivers

When Family and Children's Services seeks custody of a child through court action, parents have the right to:

- have an attorney represent them in court
- be told about any legal action involving their child
- be offered services for the problems of child abuse and neglect
- have a clear, written plan for services to help stop the abuse and/or neglect
- visit with their child as long as the visits are in the child's best interest



# Working with Your Protective Services Worker

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## What's the role of protective services workers?

Protective services workers are required by federal and California laws to make **reasonable efforts** to keep families together or to try to reunify families in abuse and neglect cases. This means that *your protective services worker will be coordinating services that meet your needs and your child's needs*, enabling you to work towards keeping your child in your home or reunifying. For example, if they refer you to a parenting class, it should be within a reasonable distance from your home. If you don't have transportation money, your worker may be able to assist you with transportation. If your child has special needs, your child should get services. Services should also meet your needs based on ethnicity and cultural background.

## Will I have the same protective services worker the whole time?

No. You will have different protective services workers at different stages of your case. You will probably work with one worker for the first two weeks, and then be transferred to a court worker. If your case continues, you will work with a new worker for the long term.



## What can I do if I have a complaint about my protective services worker?

- If you have a complaint about your protective services worker, try to discuss this issue with the protective services worker first. If you feel uncomfortable doing this alone, you could ask someone you trust to accompany you as you meet with your protective services worker.
- If this doesn't work for you or you feel that your protective services worker is not being reasonable, call or write his or her supervisor. Try to stay calm even if you feel angry. You will accomplish much more when you discuss your concerns clearly.
- If you don't feel you can resolve your difficulties, you can file a complaint with the Family and Children's Services Ombudsman by calling (415) 558-2828.

## Keep a written record

It is helpful to have specific information, especially if you make a complaint. Keeping track of the day and time of phone calls, meetings, letters, etc. in a written or recorded journal is a good method of having a clear picture of what is happening. It not only helps you remember better what was said and done, it helps keep information organized to show to others that you are taking your case seriously.

## Are You or Your Child American Indian or Alaskan Native?

There are several community-based services in San Francisco specifically for American Indian and Alaskan Native children and families.

Additionally, ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act), a federal law passed in 1978, aims to "protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families" (25 USC § 1902). If you or your child has American Indian or Alaskan Native heritage, please inform your social worker.

# Appendix: Types of Neglect and Abuse

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## Neglect

Child neglect occurs when a parent or guardian fails to provide proper care or protection for their child, or exposes a baby to drugs before it is born. There are different kinds of neglect.

**Severe Neglect:** Failure to protect a child from severe malnutrition; medically diagnosed failure to thrive; intentional failure to provide food, clothing, shelter or medical care; abandoning a child; providing a hazardous and unsanitary household environment; and constant inattention to the child's personal hygiene.

**General Neglect:** Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, mental health care or medical care; failure to provide supervision where no physical injury has occurred, such as leaving a young child home alone; leaving a child poorly supervised; not following through on medical treatment; not enrolling a child in school; not getting a child to school or allowing a child to be absent too often from school; or constant inattention to avoidable hazards.

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a parent, or any person who has legal custody over a child, deliberately inflicts injury to the child in any way other than by accident, willfully inflicts cruel, inhumane or unjustifiable corporal punishment or injury, creates a situation where there is a risk of serious physical injury, knowingly allows someone else to harm their child, or otherwise fails to protect their child from harm.

Physical abuse can occur when a child is hit, bitten, kicked, slapped, burned or injured in any other way. These injuries can result from the use of a hand or foot, or an object such as a belt, extension cord, stick, cigarette lighter or any other object. Physical abuse may be the result of extreme discipline or actions that got out of control.

## Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse includes both sexual assault and sexual exploitation. Sexual assault includes sex acts with children, intentional masturbation in the presence of children, and child molestation. Sexual exploitation includes preparing, selling or distributing pornographic materials involving children, performances involving obscene sexual conduct with children, and child prostitution.

## Emotional Abuse or Mental Suffering

Child emotional abuse or mental suffering includes isolating, ignoring or depriving the child of normal social experiences or stimulation, terrorizing by verbally assaulting, bullying, frightening, and therefore creating a climate of fear, degrading or calling a child stupid, failing to respond to the child's emotional or social needs, corrupting by encouraging behavior that makes the child unfit for normal social experience, or refusing to acknowledge a child's worth and needs.



**City and County of San Francisco**  
**Human Services Agency**

[www.sfhsa.org](http://www.sfhsa.org)

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