

## **Understanding the CPS Investigation**

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When a child is murdered by a parent, many of us blame Child Protective Services (CPS). We often question their commitment to protecting children and to helping families in crisis. Though there is a perception that CPS doesn't "do their job" it is difficult to understand the role that CPS plays in our community.

All cases of suspected abuse begin at the statewide intake service for the Department of Family and Protective Services. This hotline (1-800-252-5400) was developed to allow the public a way to report child abuse and neglect. Intake staff determines if the report meets the definition of abuse or neglect. If so, the case is prioritized which determines the length of time before the case is investigated.

Cases are categorized either a priority 1 report or priority 2 report. Priority 1 cases are investigated within 24 hours of the report. To be classified a priority 1, requires that a child is in immediate danger of death or injury caused by abuse or neglect. All other cases are categorized as a priority 2 report, and are investigated within 10 days of the report.

Once the case is prioritized, it is assigned to a field case worker. The caseworker determines if a child has been abused or neglected within the referred family. To do this the caseworker will interview the family, the children, and any others who may be able to shed light on the allegation. On a priority 1 case, the caseworker must be accompanied by law enforcement. However, the caseworker will investigate a case on his/her own on a priority 2 report. The caseworker must also determine if a child is at risk of future abuse or neglect, so the caseworker will observe the family environment and the willingness of the family to seek assistance.

The caseworker has 30 days to conduct the investigation, unless an extension is granted. If the caseworker believes that the child may be in danger, the caseworker may recommend services to the family to address the problems or file a petition in court to have the child removed from the home.

Removing a child from the home is one of the last resorts for CPS. CPS tries to provide the family with education and other assistance in order to keep the family together. A child is either removed by a court order, or immediately due to a present danger. These present dangers include the guardians/parents being under the influence of a controlled substance, the home is being used for making methamphetamines, or the child has been sexual abused. If a child is removed without a court order, a hearing will be conducted in one day. A child that is removed is usually placed with another family member if possible.

Removing a child is the last resort for CPS. The goal of CPS is to assist the family not to punish. Removing a child from the home may be the most disruptive and in many cases

very hurtful to the child. If a child is removed, CPS will work with the family for reunification.

CPS conducted 13,827 investigations in Bexar County alone in 2007. That averages out to 38 investigations a day within Bexar County. Out of those investigations, there were 6,733 confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect. These numbers are staggering, which demonstrates the heavy amount of work that caseworkers must do for CPS and the high volume of reports of abuse and neglect that are made. CPS has the difficult job of protecting children, and at the same time, protecting families. With that in mind, we must send our prayers and encouragement to CPS and its caseworkers.