


Policy Subject:	Screening Reports of Child and Vulnerable Adult Abuse/Neglect and Requests for Services
Effective Date:	This policy will become effective upon implementation of the Statewide hotline platform within each jurisdiction. Until such time, jurisdictions will comply with the current policies, SSA#13-11 and SSA-CW#15-29.
Approved By:	Michelle L. Farr  Executive Director Social Services Administration
Policy Number:	SSA-CW 21-10
Revision Date(s):	
Originating Office:	Child Protective Services/Family Preservation Services and Office of Adult Services
Supersedes:	SSA # 13-11 (See note under “Effective Date) SSA-CW # 15-29 (See note under “Effective Date)
Program Affected:	Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, Family Preservation Services, Permanency Services, and Placement Services



Legal Information & Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to seek uniformity across Maryland and to ensure that the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) have consistent procedures to respond to reports of child or vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation, including related emergencies by Child Protective Services (CPS), Adult Protective Services (APS), Family Preservation Services, and out-of-home placement (OHP) staff.

As a condition for receiving federal funding under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Maryland established “procedures for the immediate screening, risk and safety assessment, and prompt investigation” of reports regarding child maltreatment and certain risk of harm cases. 42 U.S.C. § 5106a(b)(2)(B)(iv). By regulation, suspected child abuse or neglect must be reported “immediately.” COMAR 07.02.07.04. Trained staff must be available to respond to these reports 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, including after regular working hours. COMAR 07.02.07.05C(1), (2).

Similarly, trained staff must be available to respond to reports of vulnerable adult abuse or neglect that mandated reporters must make “as soon as possible” after discovery of the abuse or neglect. Fam. Law. § 14-302(a)-(b). The law recognizes that APS calls may warrant an emergency response. Fam. Law §14-304.

The law requires that LDSS initiate investigations into reports of suspected child abuse within 24 hours and into reports of suspected child neglect within 5 calendar days. Fam. Law § 5-706(c). An LDSS must initiate investigations into reports of suspected abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation of an alleged vulnerable adult within 5 working days, or within 24 hours if the report indicates that an emergency exists. Fam. Law § 14-303(a). The LDSS must respond to reports of substance exposed newborns within 48 hours. Fam. Law § 5-704.2(g).

In addition, LDSS staff must be available to respond to emergencies involving children in OHP. Fam. Law § 5-525(d); COMAR 07.02.11.09 (providing for emergency removal).

In this policy, “trained staff or trained screener” is defined as those staff who have the technical skills and knowledge to receive reports/information about the above program areas and are able to make a recommendation to the supervisor for appropriate resolution. Trained staff, generally classified as Family Services Caseworker, Family Services Case Work Specialist, Social Worker, or their supervisors, are required to participate in ongoing child welfare and/or adult services training.

Policy

LDSS must apply all screening guidelines to reports of child abuse or neglect or other emergencies regardless of whether the report is made during business hours or when the LDSS is closed.

Child welfare statutes and policies requiring a response within a given timeframe apply regardless of what day or time of day a call is received:

- 24 hours – report of physical or sexual abuse, Request of Another Agency (ROA) if related to abuse, child neglect or Risk of Harm (ROH) if an emergency exists
- 5 calendar days – report of neglect, ROH, ROA if related to neglect
- 48 hours – report of Substance Exposed Newborns.

Adult Services statutes and policies requiring a response within a given timeframe apply regardless of what day or time of day a call is received:

- 24 hours – report of vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation if an emergency exists
- 5 working days – report of vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation.

Because these calls may involve a child or vulnerable adult in immediate danger or crisis, screening calls appropriately is of the utmost importance.

It is not uncommon for the LDSS to receive reports of child or adult maltreatment by means other than a telephone call. For reports received using other methods, such as email, text, fax, etc., the LDSS is responsible for responding to these reports as they would a telephone call.

Although each LDSS has its unique way of staffing the screening function during normal working hours, after-hours, and on weekends, each agency must meet certain minimum standards.

Procedural Guidance

Screening Calls During Normal Working Hours

Every LDSS must ensure that the following standards are met:

1. Callers are directed to utilize the Department of Human Services CPS/APS Hotline to make maltreatment reports or request child or adult welfare services.
2. LDSS are required to ensure “that a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is immediately directed to CPS for an appropriate response.” COMAR 07.02.07.05B.
3. If all screeners are busy, the caller will be placed in the queue. The queue may be monitored by a screening supervisor who can be aware of how long callers are waiting. No calls should be directed to voicemail.
4. To the greatest extent possible, a call should be routed directly to a trained screener. Taking messages, transferring calls, and requesting a call back number all substantially decrease the likelihood that a reporter will persist in reporting suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation. These activities also increase the likelihood that at-risk individuals will fail to receive the timely assistance or treatment they need and will continue to be abused or neglected.
5. As required by the current CPS Screening policy, “the screener must forward the case for approval to the screening supervisor immediately upon completing the referral.”

Screening Calls After-Hours or at Other Times When the Agency Is Closed

1. Every LDSS must ensure that the following standards are met for calls received during non-business hours:
2. LDSS must have a caseworker available to receive maltreatment reports or requests for services and a supervisor available for review and supervisory input.
3. Best practice is to have a live person answer a call to the number used to report child or vulnerable adult abuse or neglect or exploitation or other emergency. In many jurisdictions the call is forwarded to an answering service or local law enforcement.
4. LDSS are required to ensure “that a report of suspected child abuse or neglect is immediately directed to CPS for an appropriate response.” COMAR 07.02.07.05B. This regulation applies to after-hours as well as business hours.
5. If an answering service answers the call, they should be directed to immediately forward the information to the after-hours staff. After-hours staff should respond to the caller within 30 minutes of receiving the call from the answering service.
6. If law enforcement answers the call, the LDSS should create standard operating procedures with law enforcement to address the process for contacting LDSS staff after-hours.
7. After-hours staff shall obtain the verbal approval of the on-call supervisor for all reports recommended for screen in/out within 16 hours of receiving the report. If the after-hours staff knows the information to be a valid report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, staff must respond to the report as required by the identifiable safety and risk concerns and relevant statutes, regulations, and policies. If after-hours staff are unsure of the response time or validity of the report, they must promptly seek guidance from the on-call supervisor. All verbal approvals and decisions made about the report after hours must be documented in the Child Juvenile Adult Management System (CJAMS) by either after-hours or daytime staff.

Alignment with Practice Model and Desired Outcomes:

This policy supports the goals of the Integrated Practice Model to engage in the collaborative assessment process that is trauma-informed, culturally and linguistically responsive, and inclusive of formal and informal community partners.

Documentation

The details of all child abuse and neglect reports shall be recorded in the Intake section within CJAMS regardless of whether the report is screened in or screened out. The details of all vulnerable adult abuse and neglect reports should be recorded on an approved referral form until such time CJAMS is available to APS. This includes whether a call was received by staff during the course of the business day or during after-hours.