

A publication of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Santa Barbara County — because their world depends on us!
 Member of the Coastal Tri-Counties Child Abuse Prevention Council

I Made the Report. Now What?

(This story is continued from our October CAPC Connection issue.)

“Did my call help this family?” That is certainly our intent when we make a report to the hotline. This article continues our examination of a “typical” case from the last issue to help us understand how Child Welfare Services might respond to one of our legally mandated reports.

In the last issue, based on a mandated report from the teacher, the case worker had established a safety plan for the family while leaving the children in the home. Now she has 30 days to decide whether to open a case that will lead to further services for the family.

During those 30 days the investigating social worker has three main tasks: decide whether there is sufficient evidence for child abuse and neglect to substantiate* the referral; decide what resources or services will most benefit the family; and decide whether to provide emergency response services during this period, such as emergency shelter care, substance abuse testing or parenting training.

In the case of our family, the social worker, who, based on her observations at the visit and meetings with the mother and father, is considering the children to be at high risk of neglect, now returns to the Structured Decision Making tool and completes a family risk assessment to help her determine next steps for the family. At this point a so-

cial worker may also call a Team Decision Making meeting if the family is involved with various service providers or there are other people playing an important role in the family’s life. When deciding whether to open a case on the family, the social worker researches and takes into account such circumstances as whether there have been any prior investigations on this family for any type of abuse or neglect, the age of the children, whether any of the children have physical, mental or learning disabilities, whether one of the parents has mental health or substance abuse problems, and whether there is any domestic violence or criminal history in the family. In our case, the social worker arrives at a “high risk level recommendation” based on the fact that the younger child seems developmentally delayed and is not receiving any services, the mother seems severely depressed at times and neither of the parents is consistently taking care of the physical needs of the children. This recommendation in turn causes the



social worker to open a formal case for services for this family. A letter is sent to the mandated reporter stating that the report was substantiated. This is the final communication with the mandated reporter.

The Case Plan

Because the social worker deems it safe for the children to stay at home, but considers the risk too serious for voluntary engagement of the family, the case is now passed on to the **Court Services** Unit, which will file a dependency petition for the children with the juvenile court. In our case, the court agrees to keep the children at home and the family is assigned to the **Family Maintenance** Unit. A different social worker from this unit now takes over and develops a case plan with the family. The case plan is based on assessing strengths and needs of the family. Goals that are included for our family are stabilizing the mother’s depression, engaging the father in providing adequate and appropriate parenting, and arranging for an assessment and possible services for the younger sibling. The social worker’s role is to help the family access services, monitor the family’s progress toward the agreed upon goals and continuously evaluate the children’s safety and well-being. The parents’ role is to actively participate in taking steps towards resolving the issues they are facing. Throughout this process, the social worker is bound by very strict timelines and regulations once a petition has for-

mally been filed in court. The Family Maintenance social worker is required to conduct a formal risk re-assessment at least every six months, including any time that circumstances for the family change. In addition, the social worker is required by law to meet with the family and others involved in the case from one to four times a month depending on the severity of the risk. At those meetings, which are often but not exclusively in the caregivers' home, the social worker reviews with the family progress toward the plan's goals and current needs, and continuously re-assesses the child's safety.

What help does the family receive?

As in many cases encountered by Child Welfare Services social workers in their daily practice, our family's problems are serious and require specialized services. These services, particularly in languages other than English, are often impacted and waiting lists make it difficult to obtain timely assessments. In addition, many families have been dealing with the issues for years before they come to the attention of a mandated reporter. Luckily our family is able to schedule an assessment of their younger child with Tri-Counties Regional Center within the week. The assessment indicates that the child requires therapeutic intervention and would benefit from interaction with peers and trained pre-school teachers. The social worker helps the family identify an inclusion pre-school with an opening for subsidized care. Out of concern for the parents' ability to transport the child regularly to the program, the social worker works with them specifically on anticipating barriers and finding solutions. She also explains to the parents the importance of regular attendance for the child's development. In the mother's case the family is less for-

tunate. There are no current openings for mental health assessments or depression support services where the family lives. After considerable research and many phone calls, the social worker is able to identify a community agency that will transport the mother once a week to the county's mental health clinic, where once diagnosed she will be receiving services or referred for further treatment.

The father, who initially was very angry about Child Welfare Services' involvement and refused to acknowledge his younger son's developmental delays and his wife's mental health struggles, is now resigned to participate to ensure that his children are not removed from home. He agrees to be present at home visits conducted by a community-based Safe-Care® worker trained to help families struggling with neglect.

This is the point at which we leave our family. The case worker may stay with this family up to a year, but more typically will close a case after 6 months to one year. It is too soon to tell whether, once the intensive support provided by the social worker ends, the family will be able to continue their progress by independently utilizing the services that are surely necessary for some time to come. We also don't know whether the father will continue to stay involved once the threat of losing the children is removed.

The little boy, who originally prompted the teacher's referral, is no longer hungry or excessively tired, but is still struggling to keep up in class and the teacher is looking for tutoring or after-school services to help him make progress. The teacher is also committed to communicating with the parents regarding the child's progress in class. After an initial physical and mental health assessment,

the child was not considered in need of any specific services outside of the help the family is receiving.



Did our call help this family?

There are many factors that influence the outcome of a specific case. Often a family's difficulties are rooted in chronic problems requiring continued community services and resources that the family will have to access long after a CWS case has been closed. Making those connections for the family is an important part of case management, as is ensuring that the family develops enough resilience to ask for help when needed and an ability to resolve stressful situations and new problems as they arise. It is also important that the family stays connected to others in their community who can support them in raising their children, such as the teacher or the neighbor in our story.

There are no easy solutions for struggling families, and our best responses remain prevention and early intervention through community services and supports. However, without the teacher's initial call, this family—like many others—may not have gotten help in time to prevent serious damage and to give the children a chance at growing up with the support they deserve.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS: KNOWLEDGE OF PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Parenting is a learning experience, and prepared parents do better at raising their children. Similarly, childhood brings new stages every year—sometimes every month—and parents and children have to develop hand-in-hand to continue responding appropriately to the new challenges that come with growth. Knowledge about developmental stages and effective parenting skills allow parents to guide and respond, rather than react to behaviors. The relationship between parent and child becomes less stressful and parent and child behaviors become more measured.

If your school is not currently offering parenting resources, such as classes, referrals to community-based organizations or parent support groups, consider working with parents to bring those resources to your site. Parents consistently rate teachers and school staff as a trusted resource for advice on their child.

How Child Welfare Services is Organized

CWS is divided into units; this issue focuses on the two units whose efforts are centered on **working with families and children identified as needing help**.

The **Court Services Unit** represents Child Welfare Services in juvenile court proceedings, prepares legal documents when a child requires the protection of the court, and provides services for families and children who enter the court process.

The **Ongoing Unit** provides services to children and their families with the goals of maintaining the family together, reunifying the family or establishing a permanent plan for a child who is unable to return safely home.

Look for more to come on Foster Care Licensing and Services, Adoptions, Concurrent Planning, and the Independent Living Program in upcoming issues.

Ask the Experts

I am a principal at a high school, and I have a concern regarding something that happened recently at my school. A new teacher made a child abuse report by calling the hotline. He followed our internal policy, which is posted in our staff room, and notified me of the report immediately after calling. However, when three days later I asked for a copy of the SCAR form, I found out that he had forgotten to submit the written report, which I know he was required to do right away as well. We immediately corrected the problem by completing and sending in the form, but I am very concerned that we inadvertently hindered the investigation.

You are correct that [the law](#) requires any mandated reporter to report a suspicion of child abuse or neglect both by calling the hotline right away **and** by submitting a [Suspected Child Abuse Report](#) form **within 36 hours** of making the report. The form can be accessed online at the State Department of Justice website. It is important that all Man-

dated Reporters receive regular training on reporting procedures and that internal policies are updated and consistent with the law. It is also vital (and a requirement of the law) that staff report any suspicion immediately for the safety of the child (and possibly other children), so that CWS may take appropriate actions as swiftly as possible. Delays in reporting may impede investigations or allow further endangerment of children. As a mandated reporter, there may be liability involved if further harm is done to a child (or other children) in the time lapsed between the observation and the initial call to report. While this is rare, it is very important to realize that timely (and correct) reporting - in addition to being a requirement of the law - is critical to children's safety. As a supervisor you should make every effort to train new staff as soon as possible and periodically review whether all staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities as mandated reporters.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

Understanding the Child Welfare System in California: A Primer for Service Providers and Policymakers

http://www.ccrwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/final_web_pdf.pdf

The California Evidence-based Clearinghouse

http://www.cebc4cw.org/files/One_page_Information_Guide_12_6_10.pdf

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, CA Penal Code Sections 11164-11174.3

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=pen&group=11001-12000&file=11164-11174.3>

Members Corner



CAPC members and supporters recently attended a training on how to utilize evidence-based interventions to prevent child abuse and neglect. One of the resources presented was the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse below (left). You can find more information on effective prevention, a resource guide and activities for Child Abuse Prevention Month at the site featured below (right).

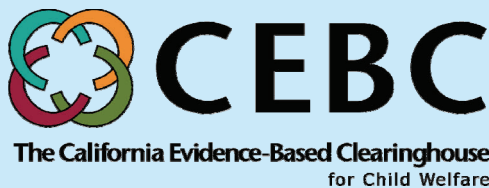
The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse

The CEBC is an online resource for professionals interested in planning for, implementing or simply knowing more about programs and interventions that have proven to be effective in child abuse and neglect prevention, intervention and treatment. A team of experts researches programs in over 27 topic areas, including anxiety and depression treatment, domestic violence, adolescent substance abuse treatment and parenting.

The site rates programs on an evidence-based scale, but also includes extensive resources on how to implement programs according to the research.

While primarily directed at Child Welfare professionals, the site provides a wealth of resources for any professional working in a therapeutic setting with children and adolescents.

You can access the site at <http://www.cebc4cw.org/>.






For more information or to schedule a training on how to utilize the site effectively, e-mail Blake Zimmet, Training Coordinator at the Chadwick Center for Children and Families, at bzimmet@rchsd.org.



April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Consider having an event at your school to commemorate National Child Abuse Prevention Month and draw attention to how all of us can play a role **in preventing child abuse and neglect, strengthening families and building strong communities.** Below are some simple, low-cost suggestions from your CAPC members:

-  Include an announcement in your school newsletter with some parent resources.
-  Ask your PTA or PTO to sponsor a parent resource table for a day.
-  Schedule a Mandated Reporter refresher training for your staff.

For more tips, resources and ideas, contact your local Child Abuse Prevention Council or find handouts, sample materials and resources at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/preventionmonth/>.

Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

If you are a Santa Barbara County mandated reporter and you suspect child abuse or neglect, YOU MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES:

1. Immediately call Child Welfare Services at:
800.367.0166 Santa Barbara County Hotline
805.683.2724 After Hours
 In the case of an emergency, please call 911.
2. Complete and file a Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form #SS8572 (www.CTC-CAPC.org/SCAR)
3. Retain a legible copy of the SCAR Report.
4. YOU are responsible for making this report. DO NOT ALLOW your supervisor/principal to make the report for you or assume because another co-worker has some of the same information that they will make the report.
5. Do not attempt to investigate, conduct interviews or interfere with the information you hold.
6. Remember that you are to report SUSPECTED abuse—you are not required to have witnessed or have complete proof of the incident. You are obligated by law to report what you observe or what you are told that caused suspicion the child is being physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected. When in doubt, call CWS or law enforcement and get their input about the scope of your report.

This info is also available at www.PreventChildAbuseSB.org!

The Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council welcomes your feedback, ideas and requests for training and resources.

Email us at: capc.newsletter@gmail.com

The CAPC meets the third Thursday of every month (except August and December) from 10am-12pm at the Santa Ines Mission. All meetings are open to the public. To receive agendas or more information, call the KIDS Network at 346.8222, or email j.thomas@sbcsocialserv.org.

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