



Child Protection and how it works

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Fast facts

- ▲ Hennepin receives approximately 15,000 calls annually to report possible child abuse or neglect. On average, those calls result in about 5,200 investigations which may involve more than one child or allegation.
- ▲ Child Protection investigators conduct a safety-and-risk assessment during the first visit to the family. In cases judged to be of lower risk, an alternative response or family assessment is completed.
- ▲ Child Protection investigators work with police, the juvenile detention center, schools and others to try to ensure that children are diverted from shelter and remain safe in their own home. When necessary, these staff may admit children to shelter.
- State statute governs how child protection works. To learn more about child protection state statutes, log onto the Minnesota Department of Human Services website at www.dhs.state.mn.us and click on “children” and “child protection.”

What is Child Protection?

Hennepin County Child Protection staff receive and investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect and provide ongoing child protection services if needed. Hennepin’s goal is to keep children safe from harm through prevention, early intervention and treatment services and through enhanced public safety.

How many are served and at what cost?

Hennepin receives approximately 15,000 calls annually to report possible child abuse or neglect. On average, these calls result in about 5,200 investigations which may involve more than one child or allegation.

In 2007, about 100 cases were facility investigations, about 1,900 cases were family investigations, and 3,200 cases were family assessments where families are deemed at lower risk of child maltreatment if they can receive help from community-based providers. Approximately 6,750 children were involved in the investigations. About 1,700 children were found to be maltreated, and about 1,000 entered out-of-home placement within 180 days of the child abuse report. The top five reasons for out-of-home placement were parental neglect, physical abuse, parent drug abuse, abandonment and sexual abuse.

In 2007, Hennepin County’s Human Services & Public Health Department’s expenditures for Child Protection was \$44 million which pays for a variety of services, including mental health and chemical dependency services, crisis nurseries, domestic violence prevention programs, and in-home parenting classes. In 2007, about 53 percent of the funds came from the federal and state level; 46 percent came from county property tax dollars; and 1 percent came from other sources.

Outcomes

The majority of children with an open Child Protection case remain in their homes; a small percent may be removed from their homes by the police or courts if the children are determined to be in imminent danger.

When a child is removed from a home, the child is placed with family or kin whenever possible. Child protection staff follow this practice because research shows the child experiences less trauma and depression when they are able to stay with a relative or someone they know.

The majority of children removed from their homes ultimately return to their parent or parents. Ninety percent of those children are still with their family one year after being returned.

When children cannot be reunited with their parent, other permanent arrangements are made such as transfer of legal custody to a relative or kin, termination of parental rights and adoption. (See the “Child Protection: Permanency” fact sheet.)

How does the child protection system work?

Initial reports of child maltreatment typically come from mandated reporters, such as school personnel, physicians, police and hospital social workers, or from family members and neighbors. The calls are received by Hennepin County Child Protection screening staff who determine, based on state statute, whether the allegation merits an investigation.

If the allegation does not meet the criteria set by law, no further action is taken.

If a case is opened

If screening staff decide to open a case for investigation, Child Protection social workers conduct either a traditional investigation or work with community agencies to complete a family assessment.

What is a traditional investigation?

In a traditional investigation, staff coordinates with law enforcement and other professionals, as necessary, to complete interviews and conduct safety-and-risk assessments of the home.

Two decisions are made at the end of an investigation:

- Did maltreatment occur?
- Is there a need for ongoing child protection services?

What is a family assessment?

Following a safety assessment, community agencies, under contract with Hennepin, assess the family's strengths and needs and then offer services. If the family accepts, the community agency creates a service plan for the family and arranges for mutually agreed-upon services to reduce risk for the child.

Next steps

If it is determined that child protection services are not needed, the family may be referred to community agencies for voluntary services such as parenting classes. If it is determined that child protection services are needed, the social worker develops a case plan with the family that:

- Addresses the maltreatment conditions.
- Assesses the strengths of the family.
- Outlines the behaviors that will demonstrate that the maltreatment conditions have been eliminated and the risk has been reduced.

The plan lists services – both county and community-based – that the family needs to reduce the risk of future maltreatment and alleviate the conditions that led to the maltreatment. All cases are reassessed regularly for safety-and-risk issues and also prior to the case closing.

In most cases, children remain in their homes. In some cases children remain in out-of-home placement while the family receives services.

If the maltreatment is severe or if the family is unable to improve the situation that caused the maltreatment, Child Protection must proceed to identify an alternative permanent home for a child, either through a transfer of legal custody or termination of parental rights and adoption.