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|  Department of Children & Family Services <i>Building a Stronger Louisiana</i> | Division/Section | Child Welfare |
| | Chapter No./Name | 4 – Child Protective Services (CPS) |
| | Part No./Name | 5 – Conducting Investigations of Reports of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Families |
| | Section No./Name | Conducting Investigations of Reports of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Families |
| | Document No./Name | 4-522 Preliminary Investigation |
| | Effective Date | December 15, 2022 |

I. STATEMENT OF POLICY

It is the policy of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to complete preliminary investigations of reports of child abuse/neglect as per [Children's Code Article 612](#). The purpose is to determine the following:

- Whether or not any child(ren) has been abused and/or neglected;
- The nature, extent and cause of the abuse and/or neglect;
- Whether the child(ren) are safe, or unsafe and a safety plan must be implemented; and,
- Identification of the person responsible for the abuse and/or neglect.

II. PROCEDURES


A. REQUIRED PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ACTIVITIES

A preliminary investigation is the diligent attempt by the worker to determine the nature, extent, and cause of the alleged abuse and/or neglect, the child is safe or unsafe, and the identity of the person or persons responsible for the abuse/neglect. An investigation of a Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 allegation may be concluded after a preliminary investigation has been conducted under certain circumstances.

At a minimum, the preliminary investigation shall include the following contacts and activities:

1. Contacts

- An in-person individual interview with each alleged child victim within the time limit for the response priority. If the child is under the age of twenty-four (24) months or without the verbal skills for an interview, he shall be observed (this includes observing the child while awake and unwrapping a swaddled infant to observe for any signs of abuse/neglect);
- An in-person individual interview or observation of children who are not alleged victims, but normally reside in the household, regularly visit the household or were visiting at the time of the alleged abuse/neglect. These contacts are to be completed within the frame for subject contacts. Refer to CW Policy [4-520](#) Investigation Levels, and CW [4-525](#) Investigation Time Frames;
- An interview with the parent/caretaker. In a two parent household, only one parent must be interviewed unless the allegation or other information learned, * or lack of information, or clarity needed in information ** during


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the course of the preliminary investigation reasonably indicates the need for both to be interviewed;

- A contact with any known or alleged eyewitnesses to an abuse/neglect incident or an injury to the child; and,
- A contact with the reporter, if his identity and a way to contact him is known.

2. Activities

- A review all previous history of the family in ACESS and TIPS prior to making contact with the family. If prior history is not read prior to initiating the investigation, the review of the record shall occur as soon as possible after the initiation of the investigation. The review of the record must be completed prior to the completion of the safety assessment, unless there is an immediate need for a safety plan. In those cases, the record shall be reviewed as soon as possible, but prior to the validity determination and the Structured Decision Making (SDM) initial assessment of risk.
- Completion of local office notifications as per CPS Section [4-500](#).
- Screening for sex trafficking of each juvenile as per CPS Sections [4-510](#) and [4-512](#) with completion of the CW Form [CPS-45](#), CPS Screening Tool for Child Sex Trafficking, with the information obtained during the screening.
- When a child is an identified or at high risk for human trafficking, the completed screening tool shall be forwarded as per the Form 45 Instructions.
- A home visit shall be made to determine validity or to complete the safety and risk assessments.
- An immediate assessment of any existing visitation or custody order or agreement involving the alleged perpetrator and the child (pursuant to [Children's Code Article 612](#)).

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- The Safety Assessment shall be completed when sufficient information is gathered, and within the time frame as specified in Section [4-516](#), Safety Assessment. The assessment shall be documented in the ACCESS investigation case; and
- An assessment of risk using the Structured Decision Making Initial Risk Assessment in the ACCESS investigation case.

An investigation shall not be terminated as invalid after a preliminary investigation when any of the following circumstances exist:


- It is necessary to obtain a medical examination of an alleged child victim that has not been completed;
- A Safety Plan was necessary;
- A child in the home is an identified victim of human trafficking;
- New information is provided during the investigation or an additional report is received that should be further assessed.

A full investigation shall be completed with any of those circumstances.

B. REQUIRED PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION AND ACTIVITIES INVOLVING SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

The Worker and Supervisor shall include the following as part of the investigation:

- Contact with and verification of the medical status of the child to include contact with the child's primary care physician and any other specialized health providers (i.e. home health, personal care attendants, Early Steps).
- Contact with and verification of school information as it relates to attendance, Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and any other special accommodations.
- Contact with daycare providers if the child is enrolled in a daycare setting.
- Any other policy requirements as it relates to completing a thorough assessment of the child and family.

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If the child is non-verbal or has special needs, detailed observations which include the physical condition of the child, appearance of the child, marks or bruises on the child with the location of the mark or bruise, and hygiene shall be described in detail. Should a child have special needs, documentation must confirm that the child has everything that is needed per their doctor's recommendations (i.e. wheelchair, breathing machines, etc.)

C. REQUESTING SUPERVISORY AUTHORIZATION TO TERMINATE AN INVESTIGATION AFTER A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

The CPS worker may request supervisory authorization to terminate the investigation after preliminary investigation activities have been completed. The worker and supervisor will determine the following:

1. Preliminary Investigation Findings
 - Whether the facts obtained during the preliminary investigation rule out both abuse and neglect.
 - If there is no reason to believe that abuse or neglect has occurred, no child is in danger of substantial harm from abuse/neglect as determined by the safety assessment, the investigation may be terminated with a final finding of invalid for all the allegations; or
 - The worker and supervisor determine that the facts obtained during the preliminary investigation indicate there is reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected; or, that the child is in danger of substantial harm, a full investigation shall be completed in accordance with policy for the investigation level and the allegation finding requirements.
2. SDM Consideration When Invalid Investigation Finding
 - When the SDM initial assessment of risk level is high or very high and the investigation will be terminated, the family may be considered for a referral to FS in accordance with CW Policy [4-560](#), Case Closure with Invalid, Unable to Locate and Client Non-Cooperation Final Findings.

The supervisory conference and decision reached that a full investigation will be completed is documented on the ACCESS Staffing Page, when there is a staffing to determine the decision to conduct a full investigation.

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D. DOCUMENTATION OF PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS

The worker shall record or compile all findings of the preliminary investigation, as well as an account of all of the investigative activities and assessments in the ACESS investigation case as follows:

- The ACESS investigation case documentation is completed with all investigation contacts, activities and a description of the condition of each child, their functioning (including information about Human Trafficking screening) and vulnerability; description of the overall condition of the home; the attitude, response of the parent/caretaker to the child and their ability/willingness to protect the child; and, their ability to provide for the child;
- The finding decision of invalid, the reason for the invalid finding, and the incident date for each invalid allegation/child/perpetrator combination is documented on the Allegations/Findings Page; and
- The validity staffing and any case recommendations are documented in the ACESS investigation case.

E. NOTIFICATIONS

The parent/legal custodian and any “other caretaker perpetrator” shall be advised of the finding for the investigation in accordance with CW Policy [4-555](#), A.2, Invalid Final Finding.

F. TERMINATION OF THE INVESTIGATION

Upon receipt of supervisory authorization to end the investigation, the ACESS investigation case is submitted to the supervisor for review, approval of the invalid findings and case closure. The supervisor approves the termination of the investigation and selects a closure reason of Completed Preliminary Investigation to close the ACESS investigation case.

III. FORMS AND INSTRUCTIONS

[CW CPS-45](#) / [Instructions](#) CPS Screening Tool for Child Sex Trafficking

IV. REFERENCES

[P.L.113-183](#)

Louisiana Children’s Code, [Article 612](#)