

Family Services Assessment 640-01-80-20

Background

While all CPS reports require a comprehensive assessment to assure that children are safe and protected, not all need an assessment determination for the family to receive services. In fact, these determinations may interfere with service provision by creating an atmosphere that feels adversarial for families. To develop the most appropriate, most effective, and least intrusive response to reports of child abuse or neglect, the legislature has authorized a Family Services Assessment response approach to child protection services.

Reports assigned to receive a Family Services Assessment are reports of suspected child abuse and neglect that need to receive the same prompt and active attention as a Child Protection Assessment. These are not low priority cases; rather they can be served more effectively with a supportive, collaborative approach.

North Dakota Century Code Chapter 50-25.1 specifically as identified below addresses Family Services Assessment and provides the legal basis for initiating and conducting these assessments:

NDCC Chapter 50-25.1-02(14)"Family services assessment" means a child protection services response to reports of suspected child abuse or neglect in which the child is determined to be at low risk and safety concerns for the child are not evident according to guidelines developed by the department. 50-25.1-05. Child protection assessment - Alternative response assessment - Family services assessment. (emphasis added)

1. The department or authorized agent, in accordance with rules adopted by the department, immediately shall initiate a child protection assessment, alternative response assessment, or family services assessment or cause an assessment, of any report of child abuse or neglect including, when appropriate, the child protection assessment, alternative response assessment, or family services assessment of the home or the residence of the child, any school or child care facility attended by the child, and the circumstances surrounding the report of abuse or neglect.

2. According to guidelines developed by the department, the department or authorized agent may initiate an alternative response assessment or family services assessment if the department or authorized agent determines initiation is appropriate.

50-25.1-22. Family services assessment - Compliance. If a family services assessment is initiated as a result of a report of child abuse or neglect, a decision that a child is confirmed abused or neglected may not be made if a person responsible for the child's welfare complies with the resulting referred services for the child. The department or authorized agent shall determine whether a person responsible for the child's welfare has complied with the referred services. If the department or authorized agent determines a person responsible for the child's welfare has not complied with the referred services for the child, a child protection assessment of the initial report of child abuse or neglect may be completed.

50-25.1-23. Family services assessment - Services.

1. In response to a family services assessment, the department shall provide appropriate referral services to the person responsible for the child's welfare and the children under the same care as may be necessary for the well-being and safety of the children. 2. The department may discharge the powers and duties provided under this section through an authorized agent.

Assigning a Family Services Assessment 640-01-80-20-01

For reports that have been sent to a CPS Supervisor for assignment, there are a number of factors to consider before a Family Services Assessment is appropriate to be assigned. Any of the following would **rule out** assignment to a Family Services Assessment:

- Open child protection assessment
- Reported Present Danger Threat
- Reports concerning a foster child, or a child placed in relative or kinship care or with an alternate caregiver
- A Human Service Zone has had prior custody of a child living in the home and that case was closed within the last two years
- Reports of suspected sexual abuse, sex trafficking, physical abuse (includes excessive physical discipline), medical neglect
- Reported concerns involve manufacturing or distribution of illegal substances or involve an active drug raid
- Report includes a weapon (gun, knife, or other potentially deadly weapon) and has been used to threaten or harm anyone in the home
- Suspected child victim under age 5
- Any history of fatal abuse or fatal neglect
- Any unexplained / undetermined child fatality
- Suspected child abuse/neglect near death

- Subject of a previous Services Required / Confirmed CPS decision in the last two years (date of decision to date of received report) – exception if the only maltreatment type was educational neglect
 - Subject currently on the Index for physical or sexual abuse
 - Multiple previous reports indicating an escalating pattern of abuse or neglect
 - Subject of a previous Unable to Determine decision
 - Suspected victim has been the confirmed victim in an assessment with a determination of Confirmed with an Unknown Subject
 - A current household member is a registered offender (sexual or/and offender against children)
 - Child(ren) at risk of removal; active safety plans to control danger threats
 - The family has previously refused to participate in services necessary for the safety of the child.
 - The family currently declines to participate in the Family Services Assessment.
 - The family was non-compliant with or did not successfully complete a previous Family Services Assessment within the last two years.
- Any of the following may indicate a report to be considered for a Family Services response:
 - When the reported maltreatment is unlikely to create a state of present or impending danger, for example, reports of **educational neglect**, environmental neglect - home conditions when the child is not vulnerable to the conditions, supervision concerns for children over age 12, etc.
 - All suspected victims in the home are age 5 and older.
 - Food, clothing, and shelter needs are inconsistently met by parents/caregivers (with no rule outs)
 - Services and supports are available to assist the family in managing the problem
 - Parent / caregivers have sufficient protective capacities to assure basic child safety and supervision
 - The family successfully completed a Family Prevention Plan

Family Services Assessment 640-01-80-20-05

When it is determined that a report is appropriate for a Family Services Assessment, the report may be assigned to a CPS Worker to arrange an initial visit with the family. When no present or impending danger is identified by the worker during the initial visit, a Family Services Assessment may be offered to the family at that time or may be postponed for consultation with a

supervisor if the worker has concerns that the family is unwilling or unable to participate. When present or impending danger is identified the Family Services Assessment is no longer appropriate, and a child protection assessment must be completed.

In order to fulfill the CPS role of assuring children are safe and protected, a comprehensive assessment is required for the Family Services Assessment in order to:

- assess and analyze present and impending danger threats to child safety,
- take action, when necessary, to control threats to child safety, and
- engage families in providing protection for their children.

For reports that receive a Family Services Assessment, the worker's role focuses on engaging with a family to help identify supports or services they may need. The reported suspected child abuse and neglect concerns are only used initially to explain why the family has come to the attention of CPS and a beginning point to understand the situation and struggles a family is facing. A Family Services Assessment is a comprehensive assessment of child safety, and parent/caregiver protective capacities resulting in a conclusion of whether a child and family is in need of services that can be provided outside of the child welfare system. The CPS role in the Family Services Assessment is to assess child safety and caregiver protective capacities and to collaborate with parents and formal and informal supports to assure children are safe by enhancing parent/caregiver protective capacities so that children are protected without further CPS intervention.

A thorough assessment is necessary to identify and understand any impending danger threats, child vulnerability, adult functioning and parenting practices that may exacerbate or escalate to the point of maltreatment. Parent/caregiver protective capacities need to be assessed to determine whether the parent/caregiver possesses sufficient physical, emotional, and cognitive capacity to move forward with a plan on their own and benefit from community services.

Once the report is assigned to a CPS Worker for a Family Services Assessment, the worker must:

- Make contact with the reporter.
- Initiate the assessment within 72 hours by making contact with the parent/caregiver/family.
 - Initial contact may be made with the parent/caregiver by phone or a visit if no phone is available (or phone calls are not answered) **to schedule a time** for the worker to meet with the family, to include all the children in the home.

- During the initial contact:
 - Let the family know who you are and why you are contacting them.
 - Ask the parent to set a time to meet with the parent and all members of the household, including all children in the home within the assigned response timeline (14 days unless a shorter time was assigned).
 - Be respectful and collaborative with the family. When possible, allow the family to decide when to meet, as long as it is reasonable and within your assigned timeframes.
 - The meeting should be held in the family home whenever possible but can occur elsewhere at the family's request unless the worker needs to assess the conditions of the home.
 - Try very hard not to have this visit in your office. This is a place that represents your power and authority, and it may be difficult to engage the family using a family-engagement approach.
 - Try to schedule this initial face-to-face contact with the entire family. However, sometimes only part of the family is available to meet with you. You want to be flexible and work with that situation, but make sure you schedule to see all the children within the assigned time period.
 - If it is necessary to see one or more of the children in school, explain to the parent/caregiver that it is necessary that the worker see the children within the assigned time and ask whether the parent/caregiver can offer an alternative time or place to meet with the child.
 - If a visit cannot be arranged within three days, the worker may need to make an unannounced visit to initiate the assessment.
 - Unannounced visits should be rare in the family services response, but when you make an unannounced visit to a home, the goals are the same as for the initial phone call. Introduce yourself and ask to set up an appointment to meet with the family. If they invite you in right then to meet with the family, that is ideal, but this is likely to be an exception, not the rule.
- During this initial visit, the CPS Worker must advise the parent/subject of a report of suspected child abuse and neglect and of the reported concerns. (Required under NDCC 50-25.1-19)
 - Proceed with the visit by:

- Establishing rapport with the family.
 - Discuss the issues that have brought them to the attention of CPS, reported concerns
 - N.D.C.C. 50-25.1-19, "Child protective services duties - Training requirements" applies to the Family Services Assessment.
 - 1. The department or authorized agent, at the initial time of contact with an individual subject to a child abuse or neglect assessment, shall advise the individual of the specific complaints or allegations made against the individual.
 - Provide an opportunity for family members to talk about their family and to ask questions.
 - Observe and assess the family's interactions with each other.
 - Explain the Family Services Assessment in more detail:
 - Give the family the Family Services Assessment Parents Guide
 - Ensure the family wants to participate in the Family Services Assessment and does not prefer the standard child protection assessment
 - Determine how the family likes to communicate (text, email, telephone, face-to-face, etc.) for future correspondence.
 - Discuss collateral contacts. The CPS Worker will need to follow up with referral sources, supports or collaterals (e.g. school, therapist, etc.).
 - Ensure the children are safe. Safety is still the number one goal of CPS involvement.
- Interview and observe (face-to-face contact):
 - All Household members (Parents, children, other adults residing in the home).
 - The initial meeting can begin by meeting with parents first or all family members together.
 - The focus of the Family Services Assessment is to engage the family in a non-adversarial, non-legal, strengths-based partnership in order to identify needed change.
 - On occasion, the CPS Worker may need to meet with a child alone to meet response times or to assure child safety. Explain to the parent why there is a need to speak with the child alone and seek the parent's agreement. If the parent refuses, this may indicate that the parent is not willing or not able to participate in a Family Services Assessment.

- Information must be gathered and analyzed in the following areas:
 - Presenting Suspected Maltreatment
 - Family Strengths and Needs
 - Child Functioning and Vulnerability
 - Adult Functioning (including both enhanced and diminished parent/caregiver protective capacities)
 - Disciplinary Approaches
 - Parenting Practices (including both enhanced and diminished parent/caregiver protective capacities).
 - If present or impending danger is identified, if safety planning must be completed to control danger threats, discontinue the Family Services Assessment and revert to a child protection assessment.

- It is important to remember that the Family Services Assessment is not the fact-finding process used in a Child Protection Assessment to gather information to support or refute reported child abuse or neglect.
 - The CPS role in the Family Services Assessment is still to assess child safety and to assure children are safe.
 - To talk with the family about any concerns identified in the report, by the parents, or by the worker.
 - To provide direction and information, to help articulate needs, and assist the family to access community services and supports that will enhance parent/caregiver protective capacities and support the children's healthy development so that children are protected without further CPS intervention.
 - For each child, the CPS worker should ask about the child's health, mental health, behavior (including any behaviors that are difficult for the parent), and education (how is the child doing in school/preschool/childcare). Use the Child Protection Services Assessment Guide for factor #3, Child Functioning. Note any difficulties mentioned by the caregivers or the child(ren) and observations.
 - For each adult, ask about parenting, discipline, and adult functioning. Use the Parent/Caregiver Protective Capacities Guide to assess Cognitive, Behavioral and Emotional Capacities. Note any areas of possible diminished capacity and discuss with the parent whether these might be areas they would like some help with.
 - Ask whether the family has needs for economic assistance programs
 - Ask about assistance with finding childcare and offer referral to Child Care Aware, ECS Licensing, etc.

- Ask about the need for a referral for behavioral / mental health services or respite services for the children/adults/family. Provide contact information or offer to make a referral.
- If there are school issues with the child, ask whether the parent needs assistance communicating with the school or accessing school resources. Assist with school contact when requested.
- Discuss available resources and ask whether the parent needs assistance to access these services. Offer referral information and make a referral or warm hand off if the parent needs this level of assistance.
 - Parenting assistance is available through the Parent Resource Centers, Nurturing Parenting Program and other local parenting programs.

When service needs are identified, offer information and assistance to the parent in accessing services. Sometimes a call from a CPS Worker is useful in obtaining resources that parents have difficulty articulating and a referral or phone call from the CPS Worker can smooth the way.

When the CPS Worker has observed child behaviors, adult functioning or family interactions that are concerning, or information provided by the family indicates there may be issues out of their conscious awareness, but the family hasn't recognized these dynamics themselves, the CPS Worker must be transparent about sharing their observations with the family. For Example: The caregivers indicate that both of their children are "good kids", but the worker has observed the caregiver making disparaging comments about the younger sibling throughout the visit, the worker needs to share this observation and suggest that the caregiver may want to address this difference in talking about their children and how it might be affecting the child observed to hang his/her head when hearing the caregiver's comments.

- In conjunction with the family, the CPS Worker must make the following decisions and share the information with the parent/caregiver:
 - Whether there are any concerns about family behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions, and/or situations that may escalate to the level of an impending danger, but which are not currently active.
 - How the concerning family behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions, and/or situations are related to the parent/caregiver protective capacities (parent/caregiver role in the behaviors, attitudes, motives, emotions, and/or situations).
 - Offer resources and encourage parent/caregiver to engage in community services to address concerns and prevent escalation of areas of concern.

Family Prevention Plan 640-01-80-20-10

When a family remains eligible and interested in participating in a Family Services Assessment, a family prevention plan may be developed and implemented by the family.

A family prevention plan is an informal document that lists concerns/problems identified by the family, services, and resources available to address the issues, who will contact the resource and when. This can be simply written on plain paper and signed by the family and the CPS Worker. A template of a Family Prevention Plan is located in the Appendix.

For example:

A report of educational neglect is received concerning poor school attendance by the 9-year-old.

In visiting with the family, the 9-year-old is refusing to go to school, kicks and screams. This happens at least once per week. Father travels for work and isn't able to help mother get the child to school. Mother is physically unable to wrestle the child into going to school, so lets him stay home. After mother goes to work, the child plays video games for the rest of the day. Grandmother lives in the basement apartment and checks on the child but has not been successful at getting him away from his video game. Mother and child argue about this daily. Father has lectured and threatened and is fearful of losing his temper out of frustration. Both caregivers know the importance of education and are willing, but at a loss as to what to do. Child states he is miserable in school and hates being there because he is falling behind and doesn't understand the lessons.

Family Prevention Plan Example:

Problem	Activity/Service/resource	What to do	Who will do it	When
Not going to school	Meet with the school counselor and teacher to plan how to catch up on missed schoolwork	Call the school counselor for an appointment	Mom and CPS Worker	Monday morning
Mom unable to get child to go to school	Parenting class recommended for strong-willed child	Call the Parent Resource center	CPS Worker will make a referral. Mom will register	CPS Worker - Monday Morning And will let mom know when the classes are held

			for the class	
Grandma can't get child away from video game	If child refuses school, mom will take the cable and game controllers to work.	Put video cable and controllers in a box every night	Mom and child	Every night starting tonight
Child fights about game controllers	If child fights mom about the game cord and controllers, mom will turn off the wi-fi	Take Wi-fi box to work	Mom	Every time child fights about game controllers
Mom needs dad's support to follow through	Dad will call home each weeknight to support mom	Talk to both mom and child to reinforce the agreed steps	dad	Every weeknight starting tonight
Child plays video games instead of doing homework	Child will do homework before mom comes home from work with the video controllers/Wi-fi router.	If homework is done, video games can be played until bedtime.	child	Every weeknight starting tomorrow
Not enough time to play video games	If child attends school every day without a fuss, he earns extra time on Saturday to play.	Time is agreed from 7:00 pm to 11:00 pm	child	Every Saturday starting this week

Family Services Assessment Follow Up 640-01-80-20-15

Leave the family with resources and set a date and time to reconnect within 10 days. Use the family's preferred form of communication. Let them know you are available for their questions or further information.

If you have committed to making contacts on behalf of the family request that they sign release of information forms. While this is not strictly necessary when conducting a CPS assessment, it is respectful and builds trust and cooperation with a family when using the authority of CPS law is unnecessary. An informal written plan may also be made to provide clarity around expectations. Also let the family know that you will be following up with referral sources and/or family supports to document progress or help overcome barriers.

Contact the family at the agreed date and time. Update the family on any contacts you have made on their behalf. Request an update on how things have gone since your initial visit. Offer any additional resources or information. If the family indicates that they are comfortable with the current plan and are getting their needs addressed, the CPS Worker should offer the family to contact them again, or leave the door open for the family to contact the worker if they encounter barriers in accessing services.

Closing 640-01-80-20-20

If the CPS Worker, CPS Supervisor, and the family agree that the areas of need and concern have been addressed and the family is ready to move forward, the Family Services Assessment can be closed.

- If the family prefers a second contact, set a date, time and method for that contact and allow the assessment to remain open for that next contact.
- If a family requests a third follow up, arrange to meet with the parent/caregiver to discuss the need for more intensive services or whether a full assessment is appropriate.
- If the assessment is going to be closed with CPS, assure that the family knows how to access community resources, if needed.

When it is determined that the Family Service Assessment can be closed, document this determination in the Case Activity Log in FRAME.

- Send the family a closure letter to let them know the Family Services Assessment is closed and thank them for working with you. (Sample FSA Notification Letter is located in the Appendix)

Documentation 640-01-80-20-25

- Use the CPS Family Services Assessment (Tool 3.1) to document the Family Services Assessment
- In the Case Staffing section, document:
 - A description of the reported concerns
 - The caregiver's response to the reported concerns
 - Immediate needs identified during the Family Services Assessment
 - Family Prevention Plan and efforts made to connect the family with community-based resources and services.
- Attach any documentation (SFN 960/CPS Intake form, releases of information, family prevention plan, notification letter, etc.) to the Assessment Tab Documents

- Document the assessment decision by selecting "Family Services Assessment"

Present or Impending Danger 640-01-80-20-30

If present or impending danger is identified at any time during the Family Services Assessment, or there has been a disclosure of child maltreatment, the Family Services Assessment is no longer appropriate and a Child Protection Services Assessment must take place.

- The CPS Worker will need to be honest and transparent in expressing to the caregivers the reason the children aren't safe and the need for a present danger plan or safety plan.
- Use the procedures for the child protection assessment.
- Utilize the What Happens Next brochure to help explain the Child Protection Assessment process
- Before leaving the home, any identified danger must be addressed, a present danger or safety plan must be in place, as appropriate.