

Questions and Answers

DSS 1402 Intake Report

1. Can we make formatting changes to the report form?

Yes. If there are formatting changes that make the report form more user-friendly, your county agency may make those organizational changes. The important thing here is that all counties are asking, at a minimum, the questions on the report form. If there is other information you feel will be helpful for your agency to include (a place to indicate what services the family is receiving in your county) you may add this information.

2. Where do we note the telephone number of the reporter?

All reporter information is documented in Section #19. Reporter Information on the DSS 1402, Structured Intake Report.

3. How is the form provided to the county?

The form is available on-line with other DSS forms.

4. Where does a supervisor sign?

A supervisor signature is required for a screened-out report. Refer to Intake Report #22. Report Not Accepted, Decisions not to investigate a report were given a two-level review by: (Include name, position, and date). A supervisor signature is not required on a screened in report, however, joint screening is required. It is best practice to have the supervisor's signature on the report form. Your county agency may add a blank for that signature.

5. Children's other relatives, are these interviews optional?

If the reporter shares information with the county DSS that these relatives have knowledge about the abuse/neglect/dependency, your county must interview these relatives or document why contacts were not made.

6. Why are we asking about the family's culture?

Strengths-Based, Structured Intake is one of the seven strategies of the Multiple Response System (MRS) and with the implementation of MRS, we are moving into an entirely different direction in child welfare. Recognizing strengths and partnering with families from initial contact is an important aspect of this new approach. Obtaining information regarding culture allows you to provide family centered services and gives you valuable information about the family. We have a rapidly growing Asian and Hispanic population in North Carolina and being able to respond in a culturally respectful manner is important.

Screening Decisions

1. How do we deal with differing individual perspectives and how we interpret meanings and definitions while screening?

Strengths-based Structured Intake provides more specificity than has ever been provided. This policy does not address every situation, that would be impossible. This policy is meant to aid in your decision-making at screening. Screening is a two-level decision and is guided by your statutes, administrative code and policy; this has not changed. Professional judgement is required throughout the spectrum of child welfare services and policy is provided to inform your decision-making.

2. It seems that information from the Central Registry is critical in order to make a screening decision. Why can't we use Central Registry at Intake?

The Central Registry was designed for the following purposes: the tracking of children who may have suffered as a result of abuse, neglect, and/or dependency. Departments of Social Services are required to conduct a Central Registry check as a part of a thorough investigative assessment of reports alleging abuse, neglect, or dependency, the tracking of information regarding child fatalities, the gathering of data to enable research to be done on the nature and extent of child abuse, neglect, and dependency and for other appropriate disclosure, and the gathering of data to enable the system to produce statistics and management reports for county Departments of Social Services, and for use in making program decisions about protective services in the State. The use of Central Registry to make a screening decision is not appropriate. You are able to use agency history at screening. The North Carolina Administrative Code only allows access to the Central Registry once a report has been accepted.

3. Can we call other counties for CPS history?

Your county agency does not have the legal authority to contact other counties for CPS history in order to make a screening decision. This additional contact initiates an investigative assessment.

4. How will this impact after-hours work?

Child Protective Services are mandated services 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Reports received and initiated outside of normal business hours are treated in the same manner as reports received during normal business hours.

5. How do we deal with reports in group and foster homes?

The county agency follows the Structured Intake policy for reports on foster homes, child care centers, residential facilities licensed by the Division of Social Services and Division of Facility Services. Structured Intake policy does not change the manner in which you conduct an investigative assessment.

6. One county screens a report in and then finds out the family is actually a resident of another county and transfers the investigation to the county. The

receiving county says they wouldn't screen the report in, what is the decision process for that situation?

When the investigative assessment has begun, the receiving county shall conduct a prompt and thorough investigative assessment. With the implementation of Structured Intake, this inconsistency regarding screening should be minimized.

7. How do you handle a report when the only information you have is that a child is afraid to go home?

It is important to talk with the reporter and obtain as much information as possible. A child being afraid to go home because they have not done well in school and are expecting to be disciplined is not enough information to accept a report.

General Policy Questions

1. What can be done about false reporting?

DSS is responsible for screening all reports of abuse/neglect/dependency. If an agency refuses to respond to allegations based on their belief that the reporter is deliberately misleading the agency, the agency is put in an extremely vulnerable position and needs to carefully document the basis for believing the report was fraudulent.

In a situation where a person is frequently making reports which are unsubstantiated, it is disruptive for families to undergo multiple investigations and depletes agency resources. If the agency is able to identify the reporter, it may be advisable to review the situation with the agency attorney and ask that a letter be written to the reporter advising of the consequences of reports not made in good faith.

Sexual Abuse Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. Why is it sex abuse if a child is having sex without the parent's knowledge?

It is not considered sex abuse, the county DSS would screen reports (neglect) of children under age 16 having sex without parental knowledge as improper supervision reports. Age 16 is the age of consent, therefore reports of 16 and 17 year olds having sex with someone of a similar age do not meet the neglect definitions. Refer to page 30 of Structured Intake policy, "Reports alleging sexual activity between children under age 16 may provide cause to examine the supervision provided by their parent/caretakers. If you are able to ascertain at Intake that the parent/caretaker responded in a protective manner, keeping the health and well-being needs of the child at the forefront, an investigation is not required." Refer to example on page 31 of the policy, "12 year old having sex with a 15 year old without parental knowledge requires an investigative assessment based on improper supervision." It is reasonable to expect that parents provide stricter supervision to children under age 16. In an attempt to achieve consistency across the state, policy indicates the county accepts reports in this situation when parent had no knowledge of the activity – which means they have not had an opportunity to respond in a protective manner and should have been providing supervision to their child.

2. What about situations where the reporter says the kids are having sex at school, why would we screen these reports in?

It is true that if the sexual act took place at school, school personnel had the responsibility at that time, however, supervising and providing care for the child is the parent/caretaker's responsibility at all times. A child under the age of 16 having sex at school is concerning and warrants an examination of the parent's ongoing supervision plan.

3. You receive a report of sexual abuse with Dad as alleged perpetrator that states that Dad is abusive when Mom is not there. It is 2:00 a.m. and Mom, Dad and child are all home and are sleeping. Does this situation require an immediate response?

Sex abuse reports require immediate response. If the decision is made to initiate the report later than immediately, documentation needs to indicate your ability to adequately protect the child.

4. You receive a report that a sex offender is living in the home with children. Should this report be screened in?

We are seeking an informal opinion from the Attorney General's office regarding the issue of a sex offender/substantiated sexual abuser living in a home with children. At this time if the only information you have is that a sexual offender is living in the home and the reporter is not making abuse/neglect allegations regarding those children the county would not accept this report for investigation.

Screen-Out Tool

1. Lack of immunizations are screened out; what about child well-being?

Parents have a right to make informed decisions regarding immunizations of their children. If the reporter is making allegations that the child is currently experiencing health risks as a result of the absence of immunizations, you would screen this report in for investigative assessment.

Improper Discipline Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. What is the rationale for requiring response within 24 hours to all bruises? Who decided a bruise is an injury and why?

Refer to your prioritization for response on the former Intake Report form, discipline resulting in injury required a response within 24 hours. A child receiving improper discipline not resulting in injury required a response within 72 hours. The distinction is that a bruise is defined as an injury. The Children's Services Committee discussed this and agreed that all bruises would be responded to within 24 hours. The decision was made to define a bruise as an injury based on information obtained from the American Academy of Pediatrics who define significant trauma as "any injury beyond temporary redness of the skin."

2. If bruising is there and it is less than 24 hours, can it be screened in?

Yes.

3. If a teen is physically aggressive and the parent is defending themselves and leaves a bruise on the teen, what is the protocol?

Refer to page 45 of the Structured Intake Policy. Situations where a child is injured as a result of a parent's defensive action when the child is attacking them are problematic and require an investigative assessment regarding family violence.

4. On page 45, what is meant by, "A reporter's knowledge that this was the parent's first time inflicting such an injury or that the injury is just a small bruise does not impact screening."

You would screen a report in when a child has a non-accidental inflicted injury, regardless if it's the first time the parent disciplined inappropriately, or if it's just a small bruise. These issues are relevant when you make your case decision.

Improper Supervision Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. In regards to supervision and juvenile delinquents, how many times would you keep investigating?

Refer to page 42 of the Structured Intake Policy. In instances where the juvenile is participating in a delinquent activity without the encouragement, direction or approval of the caregivers, inappropriate supervision may be a concern. If you are able to determine at Intake that the parent/caretakers responded in a protective manner, you would not accept this as a report. If you are not able to determine at Intake that the parents responded in a protective manner, your screening decision should be based on whether the parent had reason to believe the child needed a more stringent supervision plan. You would continue to investigate reports when you have knowledge that the child is participating in delinquent activities, the parent is aware of the behavior and does nothing to try to change the child's behavior. The fact that the parent has "given up" is in fact problematic, as parents have the responsibility for their child's care until that child reaches age 18.

2. What is a "protective response" for an undisciplined juvenile?

In situations where a child is participating in juvenile delinquent activities, responding in a protective manner would mean that the parent talked with the child regarding what behaviors are acceptable, disciplined the child appropriately, cooperated with law enforcement, adjusted their supervision plan based on the child's behavior. There is no blanket protective response for any situation, the parental response is based on the child and the specific incident.

Substance Abuse Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. Is substance abuse enough to screen in?

The parent's use/behaviors and the impact on the child are relevant. Refer to page 57, Is the parent/caretaker using money for basic necessities to buy alcohol/drugs without making arrangements to provide basic necessities? Is the parent/caretaker's use of alcohol/drugs impairing their ability to care for the child in the absence of an alternative child care arrangement? Has the parent's alcohol/drug use resulted in a positive screening at the child's birth? If the answer to any of these questions is yes; screen the report in and begin an investigative assessment.

2. Is it a report when the parents have/use drugs in the child's presence?

The parent's use/behaviors and the impact on the child are relevant. Simply using drugs or having a drink in the child's presence does not meet the neglect definition. If the parent's use impacts their caretaking ability in such a manner that they are not providing proper supervision and care, then the county agency would screen in those reports.

3. Is it a report when parents pick up their children at school/day care and the reporter says the parent "smelled of alcohol"?

Simply smelling of alcohol is not enough to screen in a report, what is the reporter saying about how the parent's use of alcohol impacts their ability to provide proper care and supervision? If the parent is obviously impaired – stumbling, and unable to drive safely, this would be enough information to screen in a report.

Domestic Violence Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. If there are adults in the home who are children of the parent and domestic violence is going on, is that an issue if smaller children are in the home?

When there is domestic violence in the home, regardless if it's between the parents, or other adult relatives, and the children are being exposed to that violence, you would screen this in as a report and begin an investigative assessment.

Abandonment Maltreatment Screening Tool

1. Does an abandonment report require an immediate response when the child is with the grandparents and grandparents are willing to provide care?

Abandonment reports require an immediate response. In situations where the child is being cared for by relatives and there is no immediate risk, you may document why an immediate response was not warranted and how you were able to ensure the child's immediate safety.

Neglect Response Priority Decision Tree

1. What is the response time for children at school with welts from a spanking?

This report would be screened in as improper discipline as it is an inflicted injury beyond temporary redness of the skin. The response time would be within 24 hours, refer to page 66, Has the child received discipline resulting in injury? Discipline that results in injury requires a 24-hour response; all other inappropriate discipline reports require response within 72 hours.

Emotional Abuse Response Priority Decision Tree

1. What is the response time for emotional abuse?

The Emotional Abuse Response Priority Decision Tree was inadvertently omitted from the policy. It is now available on the web and a copy is enclosed in this document.

Moral Turpitude Response Priority Decision Tree

1. What is the response time for moral turpitude?

The Moral Turpitude Response Priority Decision Tree was inadvertently omitted from the policy. It is now available on the web and a copy is enclosed in this document.

Investigative Assessment Questions

1. What is the correct procedure for notifying law enforcement and district attorney, is it upon receipt of report or when evidence is found?

The statute reads, "If the director finds evidence that a juvenile may have been abused as defined by G.S. 7B-101, the director shall make an immediate oral and subsequent written report of the findings to the district attorney or the district attorney's designee and the appropriate law enforcement agency within 48 hours after receipt of the report." Within 48 hours after receipt of report affords you the opportunity to report initial findings of the investigative assessment, as you would have responded immediately or within 24 hours. Many counties inform DA and LEA upon receipt of the report and that is acceptable. It is important to note that the statute mandates immediate notification when the director receives information that a juvenile may have been physically harmed in violation of any criminal statute by any person other than the juvenile's parent, guardian or custodian.

2. In situations where a child has been abandoned by the parents, and grandparents have been providing care and are saying they are willing and able to continue caring for the child, how do we ensure a legal, permanent placement?

If there are no child protection issues you can refer the grandparents to community resources for obtaining legal custody. If the only issue is that the grandparents are having difficulties enrolling the child in school, refer to **N.C.G.S. 115C-366 Assignment of student to a particular school**. This statute outlines the procedure for enrolling the child in school in situations where the parent has abandoned the child. Ensuring a legal, permanent placement moves far beyond a discussion of Intake.

3. Our county codes bruises as physical abuse versus neglect based on location of injury instead of severity. Should it be based on severity?

If this question is in relation to making a finding (substantiation) of abuse or neglect, there are many factors which your decision should be based on including: child's age, severity of injury, location of injury. Determining whether a child is abused, neglected, or dependent requires careful assessment of all the information obtained during the investigative process. In making a case decision it is important to assess not only that maltreatment has occurred, but what are the current safety issues, and is there future risk of harm and the need for protection. The following questions should provide the structure for making a case decision:

1. Has the maltreatment occurred with frequency and/or is the maltreatment severe?
2. Are there current safety issues? Would the child be unsafe in the home where the abuse, neglect or dependency occurred?
3. Is the child at risk of future harm?
4. Is the child in need of protection?

If this question is more in relation to whether you accept a report as abuse or neglect, you do not focus solely on location of injury. The county agency completes the physical injury maltreatment screening tool if the reporter was making allegations of physical abuse, Is the parent/caretaker causing serious non-accidental physical injury which creates a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or impairment? North Carolina General Statutes are clear that physical abuse is considered life-threatening injury. The screening decision as to whether a report is abuse or neglect should not be based solely on location of injury.