

The Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) is the state agency responsible for protecting children and strengthening families.

Our Family Services Division (FSD) works with families and others to help make sure children and youth:

- Are safe from abuse
- Have their basic needs met (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, and health care)
- Have the parental care, support, and supervision they need to ensure their well-being and education

Why did FSD contact my family?

We most likely got a call from someone who was worried about your child's safety and well-being.

That call could have come from a family member, friend, neighbor, or someone else who knows your child.

Anyone can call to voice their concerns about a child. Some people, like doctors, teachers, and child care providers, are legally required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect.

We refer to these calls as *reports*.

What happened to the report you received about my family?

A supervisor:

1. Reviewed the report.
2. Considered things such as your child's age and the nature of the concerns raised.
3. Decided that a response (*intervention*) was called for — based on Vermont law and FSD policy.

4. Chose the appropriate intervention: assessment or investigation.

In some cases, the law requires us to conduct an investigation. This includes any time there's an accusation that a child was sexually abused by an adult.

5. Assigned a worker to your case.
The chosen intervention typically begins within 72 hours. That's likely when you'll learn that we are involved with your family.

The worker cannot reveal the reporter's identity to you. Their identity may be revealed if the report leads to a court or human services board proceeding.

How does an intervention begin?

In an investigation:

1. A worker will interview or observe the child in the report.
The law allows us to do this without your knowledge or permission if it's warranted.
2. A neutral party such as a teacher or school nurse will be present during the interview.
3. We'll tell you about the interview and report as soon as possible afterwards.

In an assessment:

1. A worker will contact you to discuss the concerns reported.
2. They may ask for your permission to talk to or observe the child in the report.
3. If you say no, we may still decide to conduct an investigation if there are safety concerns.

We need to stay in touch!

Be sure to let us know:

- **The best way to contact you (e.g., email address).**
- **If your living situation or mailing address changes.**

What happens in an intervention?

The following steps may happen for both investigations and assessments.

Step 1: Assess child safety

The worker will use the *SDM® Safety Assessment Tool* to:

- a. Assess your child's immediate safety.
- b. Decide if your child is *safe, safe with a plan, or unsafe*.

Step 2: Assess family risk

The worker will use the *SDM® Risk Assessment Tool* to:

- a. Assess the risk of future harm with no intervention.
- b. Determine the level of risk: *low, moderate, high, or very high*.

Step 3: Determine outcomes

If the risk is *high* or *very high*, we may open a case for ongoing services that will help make your family stronger.

If we did an investigation, we'll determine whether the reported abuse or neglect happened. If YES:

- The report is substantiated.
- The substantiated person's name may be added to the Child Protection Registry.

What happens next?

If we opened a case for ongoing services, we'll help you to develop a plan to make your home safe, keep your child home, and strengthen your family.

This includes:

1. Evaluating your child's condition (e.g., physical and mental health).
2. Identifying your family's strengths and challenges. This includes the issues you need to address and what is causing them.
3. Building a network of family and friends who can help.
4. Identifying services and supports that will help your family. This could include, for example, counseling, parenting classes, job training, and substance abuse treatment and recovery.

Will you take my child away?

The answer is almost always NO.

If we believe your child is not safe however, we may ask the court to review the situation. The judge would then make a determination.

Where can I learn more?

Visit dcf.vermont.gov/fsd to:

- ➔ Learn about the laws, policies, and rules that govern our work with children, youth, and families.
- ➔ Get a copy of the *Parent's Guide To DCF's Family Services Division*.
- ➔ Get copies of other publications.

Where can I find additional help?

Your worker can connect you to programs that can help your family.

You can also find help on your own. A good place to start is on DCF's website. Go to dcf.vermont.gov to find programs that could help you to:

- ➔ Meet your family's basic needs (e.g., child care, energy, food, fuel, and water).
- ➔ Ensure your children's healthy development and well-being.
- ➔ Reach goals that will help you to take care of your family financially.

You can also learn about other available resources by dialing 2-1-1 from anywhere in Vermont.

DISTRICT OFFICES

Barre: (802) 479-4260

Bennington: (802) 442-8138

Brattleboro: (802) 257-2888

Burlington: (802) 863-7370

Hartford: (802) 295-8840

Middlebury: (802) 388-4660

Morrisville: (802) 888-4576

Newport: (802) 334-6723

Rutland: (802) 786-5817

Springfield: (802) 289-0648

St. Albans: (802) 527-7741

St. Johnsbury: (802) 748-8374

LET YOUR WORKER KNOW:

- The language you are most comfortable speaking & reading.
- If you'd like free interpretation services to make sure that you understand our communications.
- If you need a reasonable accommodation because you or your child has a disability.



Parent's Guide To Child Safety Interventions

