

Vermont Child Abuse & Neglect Report: 2006

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Anyone who has reason to suspect that a child may have been abused or neglected may report their suspicions to their local Family Services District Office— at any time. Mandated reporters, however, are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect within 24 hours.

To make a report, call or visit your local Family Services District Office during regular business hours: Monday through Friday, from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. After-hours, on weekends, or on state holidays, you can report by calling our Emergency Services Program at 1-800-649-5285.

What happens next?

- Reports of suspected child abuse or neglect are recorded as “intakes”.
- Supervisors review all *intakes* in a timely manner—almost always the same day they are received.
- If an intake suggests that a child is in immediate danger, the social worker alerts a supervisor right away.
- For each intake, a supervisor determines whether it alleges child abuse or neglect as defined by state law and departmental policy. *If it does, it is accepted for a child abuse investigation under Chapter 49 of the Vermont Statutes.*
- If it does not, the supervisor has the option of opening a family assessment (known as *Chapter 55 Assessments*) to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision.

Opening Family Assessments under Chapter 55

Under Chapter 55, Title 33 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, Family Services is authorized to assess whether a child is “in need of care and supervision” (also known as *CHINS*). A child may be *CHINS* for one of the following reasons:

1. The child has been abandoned or abused by his or her parents.
2. The child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his or her well-being.
3. The child is without or beyond the control of his or her parents, guardian, or other custodian. Or, is habitually and without justification truant from school.

Family assessments are typically opened when there is a pattern of concerns that do not allege child abuse or neglect as defined by statute, but are of significant concern to warrant some type of assessment and possible intervention.

As issues such as substance abuse have become more prevalent in Vermont, the use of Chapter 55 assessments has become more common. It offers opportunities to intervene and support parents and their babies, in circumstances such as prenatal substance exposure.



Intake Contacts

Vermont currently provides intake services in 12 district offices as well as through the Emergency Services Program. During the 2004 to 2006 period, DCF received an average of approximately 13,000 intake contacts per year. From those contacts, an average of about 2,800 was accepted for investigation or assessment.

Year	Intakes	Accepted for Investigation or Assessment	Chapter 49 Child Abuse & Neglect Investigations	Chapter 55 Family Assessments
2004	13,035	2849	2631	218
2005	12,910	2666	2371	295
2006	13,049	2858	2528	330

The following table shows the breakdown by district office.

2006 Intakes, by District			
District Office	# of Intakes	# of Chapter 49 Reports Accepted For Investigation	# of Chapter 55 Reports Accepted For Assessment
Barre	1323	295	33
Bennington	755	161	19
Brattleboro	698	75	23
Burlington	2825	591	67
Hartford	968	165	18
Middlebury	581	102	15
Morrisville	624	161	23
Newport	718	80	9
Rutland	1159	184	3
Springfield	874	143	28
St. Albans	948	317	59
St. Johnsbury	822	214	31

*In addition to the above numbers, our Central Office handled 754 intakes.

Deciding Whether a Child has been Abused or Neglected

Once a report of child abuse or neglect is accepted for investigation, a social worker must interview or observe the child within 72 hours. This can occur without parental permission when necessary; however, it can only take place in the presence of a disinterested third party such as a teacher, school counselor, or other objective adult.

At the conclusion of a child abuse investigation, the supervisor reviews the results of the investigation to determine whether a reasonable person would believe that the child was abused or neglected. If so, the report will be *substantiated*.

In 2006, Family Services substantiated 770 reports of child abuse or neglect concerning 866 unique child victims. By district office, the numbers were as follows:

2006 Substantiated Reports of Child Abuse & Neglect, by District Office			
District Office	Chapter 49 Reports Accepted for Investigation	Reports Substantiated #	Reports Substantiated %
Barre	295	90	30.5%
Bennington	161	75	46.6%
Brattleboro	75	18	24.0%
Burlington	591	158	26.7%
Hartford	165	60	36.4%
Middlebury	102	47	46.1%
Morrisville	161	37	23.0%
Newport	80	30	37.5%
Rutland	184	55	29.9%
Springfield	143	39	27.3%
St. Albans	317	85	26.8%
St. Johnsbury	214	62	29.0%

* In addition, our central office accepted 40 reports for investigation.

The Type of Maltreatment Children Experience

When Family Services substantiates a report of child abuse or neglect, we substantiate specific types as defined by Vermont Statute:

Vermont's child protection law defines an "abused or neglected child" as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person (including another child).

Harm can occur by:

1. Abandonment of the child.
2. Emotional maltreatment, physical injury, or sexual abuse.
3. Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care.

"Child" means an individual under age 18.

"Emotional maltreatment" means a pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

"Physical injury" means death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

"Sexual abuse" consists of any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

"Risk of harm" means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which harm would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment or sexual abuse.

The following chart shows the number of substantiated victims of child abuse/neglect, by type of abuse. These numbers do not equal the total number of unique child victims (866) or the total number of substantiated reports (770) as:

1. A report can involve more than one child; and
2. A child can be counted more than once if he/she experienced more than one type of abuse.

Substantiated Victims of Child Abuse/Neglect, by Type of Abuse						
	2004		2005		2006	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Physical abuse	198	17%	190	19%	171	19%
Sexual abuse	468	41%	383	38%	364	39%
Risk of harm	431	37%	397	39%	324	35%
Neglect	58	5%	38	4%	63	7%

Who Maltreats Children?

The following chart shows the relationship of perpetrators to victims for all types of abuse. Each perpetrator can be substantiated for abuse on more than one victim and for more than one type of abuse.

Perpetrators of Abuse, by Relationship to Victim	All Types #	All Types %
Birthparent	554	53.1%
Neighbor/friend	131	12.5%
Other	99	9.5%
Parent's Partner	65	6.2%
Other relative	52	5.0%
Sibling	45	4.3%
Step parent	43	4.1%
Stranger	17	1.6%
Adoptive parent	13	1.2%
Grandparent	13	1.2%
Babysitter/Child Care	6	0.6%
Foster parent	3	0.3%
Legal guardian	3	0.3%
Foster sibling	2	0.2%
Teacher	2	0.2%

Who Reports Child Maltreatment?

The chart below shows the number of reports accepted for investigation by type of reporter.

2006 Reports Accepted for Chapter 49 Child Abuse/Neglect Investigation, by Type of Reporter		
Type of Reporter	Reports #	Reports %
School Personnel	563	22.3%
Social Workers/Human Services Professionals	510	20.2%
Law Enforcement/Legal Professionals	437	17.3%
Other	238	9.4%
Community Members	232	9.2%
Caretakers	219	8.7%
Medical Professionals	218	8.6%
Childcare Providers	85	3.3%
Victims	17	0.7%
Self-Reporters	9	0.3%
Total	2528	100%

Keeping Children Safe over Time

Most children who are the subject of a child abuse or neglect investigation remain with their families. At the same time, a substantiation decision is not necessary before a child comes into state's custody. A judge may find that a child is in need of care and supervision, even without a substantiation determination. For instance, there may be a pattern of ongoing concerns about parenting, perhaps due to substance abuse.

Only about 17% of substantiated reports result in a child entering state custody.

Our first responsibility is to plan for safety within the child's own family. Only when that is not possible would the department ask the state's attorney to request a court hearing to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision and out-of-home placement.

As part of a child abuse or neglect investigation, a nationally standardized, research-based risk assessment is completed for all families. The risk assessment does not predict whether a child will be re-abused, but it does indicate, based on family challenges, needs, and strengths, whether there is the potential for another incident to occur. If a family is classified as very high or high risk, policy requires that steps be taken to address the ongoing risk. If the case is substantiated, we may open a case for ongoing services. Even if the case is not substantiated, we work with the family and community service providers to address safety and risk issues.

Contacting Your Local Family Services Office

If you have reason to suspect that a child may have been abused or neglected, please report your suspicions immediately to your local Family Services District Office by:

- Calling or visiting your local office during regular business hours: Monday through Friday, from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Calling our Emergency Services Program at 1-800-649-5285 after hours, on weekends, or on state holidays.

BARRE - (802) 479-4260

255 North Main Street, Suite 7
Barre, VT 05641-4189

BENNINGTON - (802) 442-8138

200 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite 14
Bennington, VT 05201-1956

BRATTLEBORO- (802) 257-2888

232 Main Street, 2nd Floor
Brattleboro, VT 05301-2879

BURLINGTON - (802) 863-7370

426 Industrial Ave. Ste. 130
Williston, Vermont 05495

HARTFORD - (802) 295-8840

226 Holiday Drive, Suite 32
White River Junction, VT 05001-2024

MIDDLEBURY - (802) 388-4660

700 Exchange Street, Suite 105
Middlebury, VT 05753-1529

MORRISVILLE - (802) 888-4576

63 Professional Drive, Suite 3
Morrisville, VT 05661-8522

NEWPORT - (802) 334-6723

100 Main Street, Suite 230
Newport, VT 05855-4898

RUTLAND - (802) 786-5817

220 Asa Bloomer Bldg, 88 Merchants Row
Rutland, VT 05701-3449

ST. ALBANS - (802) 527-7741

20 Houghton Street, Suite 211
St. Albans, VT 05478-2247

ST. JOHNSBURY - (802) 748-8374

67 Eastern Avenue, Suite 4
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-5603

SPRINGFIELD - (802) 885-8900

100 Mineral Street, Suite 101
Springfield, VT 05156-3166

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