



# *2017 Report On* **Child Protection** **in Vermont**



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## Links to additional data and reports

- ➡ AHS Community Profiles: [https://humanservices.vermont.gov/ahs\\_community-profiles](https://humanservices.vermont.gov/ahs_community-profiles)
  - ➡ DCF Outcomes Report: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/DCF/budget/DCF-Outcomes.pdf>
  - ➡ DCF Performance Scorecard: <http://dcf.vermont.gov/scorecard>
  - ➡ DCF's Family Services Division - Vermont's Annual Progress & Services Report (2019): <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/FSD/Docs/VT2019-APSR.pdf>
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## Report suspected child abuse & neglect

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call Vermont's Child Protection Line to report it: 1-800-649-5285 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

<http://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting>

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## Online mandated reporter training

Take this training to learn about the dynamics of child abuse and neglect, the responsibility of mandated reporters and the role we all play in keeping children safe.

It takes about two hours to complete. Once you successfully complete the final exam, you'll receive a certificate of completion.

<https://goto.webcasts.com/starthere.jsp?ei=1087433>

## MESSAGE FROM THE DCF COMMISSIONER

The continued impact of the opioid crisis in Vermont is reflected in the ever-increasing number of total cases requiring the ongoing involvement of our Family Services workers.

In 2017, there were:

- 25% more children in DCF custody than in 2013.
- 44% more families getting ongoing services after an investigation or assessment determined there was a high to very high-risk of future maltreatment.
- 100% more children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family, while DCF remained involved to supervise, provide services and ensure children's safety.



We continue to look for opportunities to prevent and address substance abuse in Vermont and change this upward trend. I would like to highlight a few initiatives:

- The State is increasing access to medication-assisted treatment with an emphasis on helping parents with young children.
- With the help of a \$3 million-dollar federal grant, Lund is piloting home-based services for families with young children who are at high risk of child abuse or neglect due to substance use. The pilot will take place in Burlington and Newport in partnership with DCF, the Department of Health, parent child centers, substance use treatment providers and others.
- The state is working to reform CHINS cases (e.g., child abuse/neglect, truancy and children beyond parental control cases), which are overwhelming our entire child protection system — from DCF to law enforcement, attorneys and the courts. The goal is to reduce the need for court intervention using strategies such as regional and mobile models, judicial masters, mediation and other alternative dispute resolution options.

Continuing high caseloads present significant capacity challenges for our staff. I am hopeful that our ongoing efforts and the initiatives being implemented will result in a lower caseload and lead to increased safety and stability for vulnerable children and families in Vermont.

I am proud of and thankful for all of our dedicated Family Services employees who do a difficult job incredibly well and under very challenging circumstances.

A blue ink signature of Ken Schatz, written in a cursive style.

**Ken Schatz, DCF Commissioner**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2017 in Vermont. Here are some highlights:**

- ➔ Reports rose slightly in 2017 with a record 21,201 calls made to the Child Protection Line.
- ➔ At least 68% of the calls were from mandated reporters.
- ➔ Of the 21,201 reports received<sup>1</sup>, we opened 5,527 child safety interventions:<sup>2</sup>
  - 3,054 child abuse investigations
  - 1,351 child abuse assessments
  - 1,122 family assessments
- ➔ Thirty-one (31) interventions that began as child abuse assessments were later changed to investigations, bringing the total investigations conducted in 2017 to 3,085.
- ➔ At the conclusion of the 3,085 child abuse investigations, we substantiated 876 reports. Based on these substantiated reports, there were:
  - 1,098 unique child victims
  - 916 substantiated incidents of abuse:
    - 145 of physical abuse
    - 341 of sexual abuse
    - 62 of risk of sexual abuse
    - 341 of risk of harm<sup>3</sup>
    - 27 of emotional maltreatment/neglect
- ➔ During the last quarter of 2017, there were:
  - 1,252 children in DCF custody
  - 612 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family
  - 573 families getting ongoing services after an investigation or assessment determined there was a high to very high-risk of future maltreatment.

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<sup>1</sup> Each report may include allegations about more than one incident of abuse and more than one child.

<sup>2</sup> If we get five calls about the same child/incident, it counts as five reports but only one intervention.

<sup>3</sup> What is called neglect in other states is captured largely in our risk-of-harm categories.

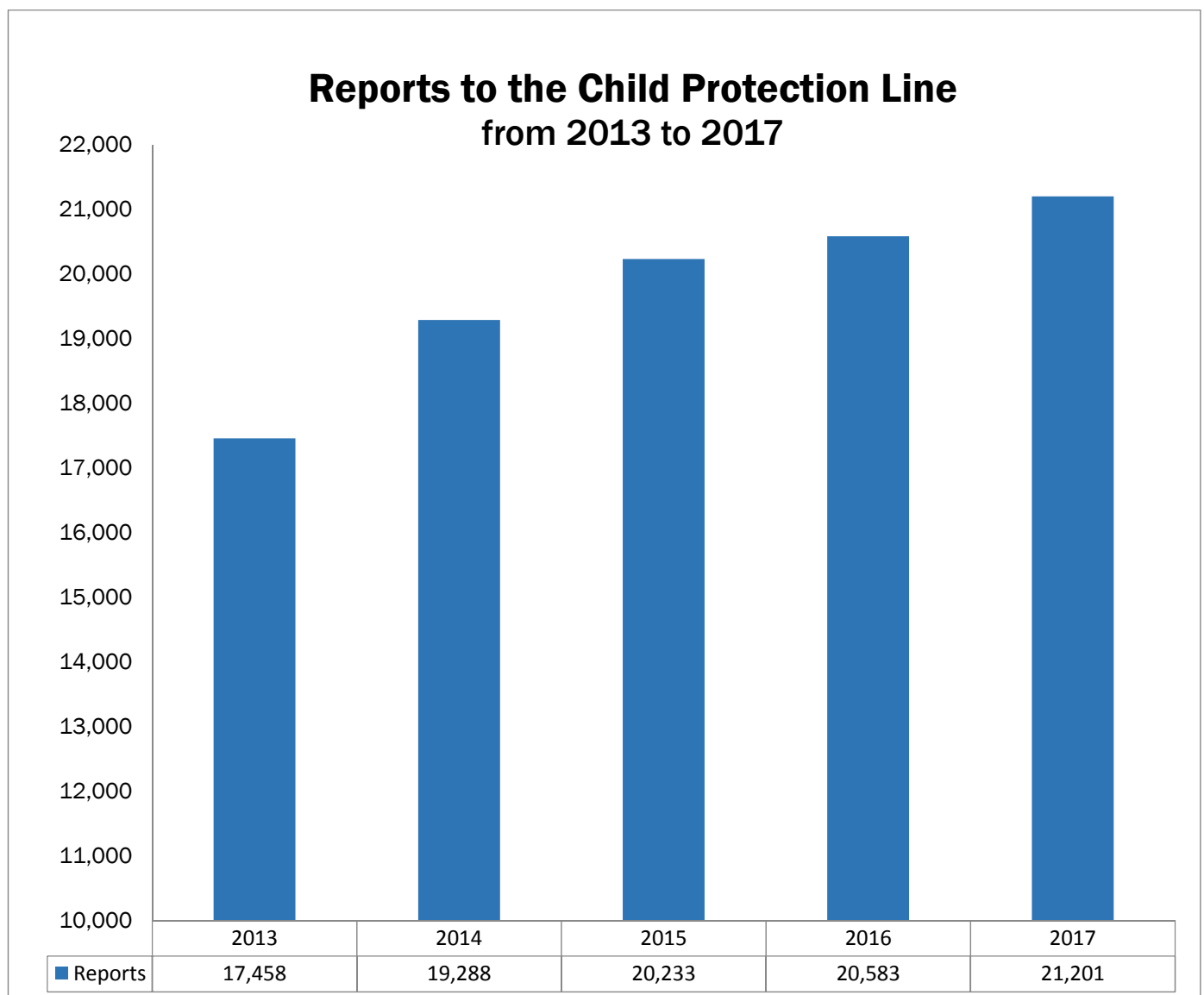
## REPORTS TO VERMONT'S CHILD PROTECTION LINE

Vermonters called the state's Child Protection Line a record 21,201 times in 2017 to report their concerns about children's safety and well-being.

All Vermonters are encouraged to call the Child Protection Line if they have concerns about children's safety – whether they are mandated by law to do so or not.

We count all the calls we get, including:

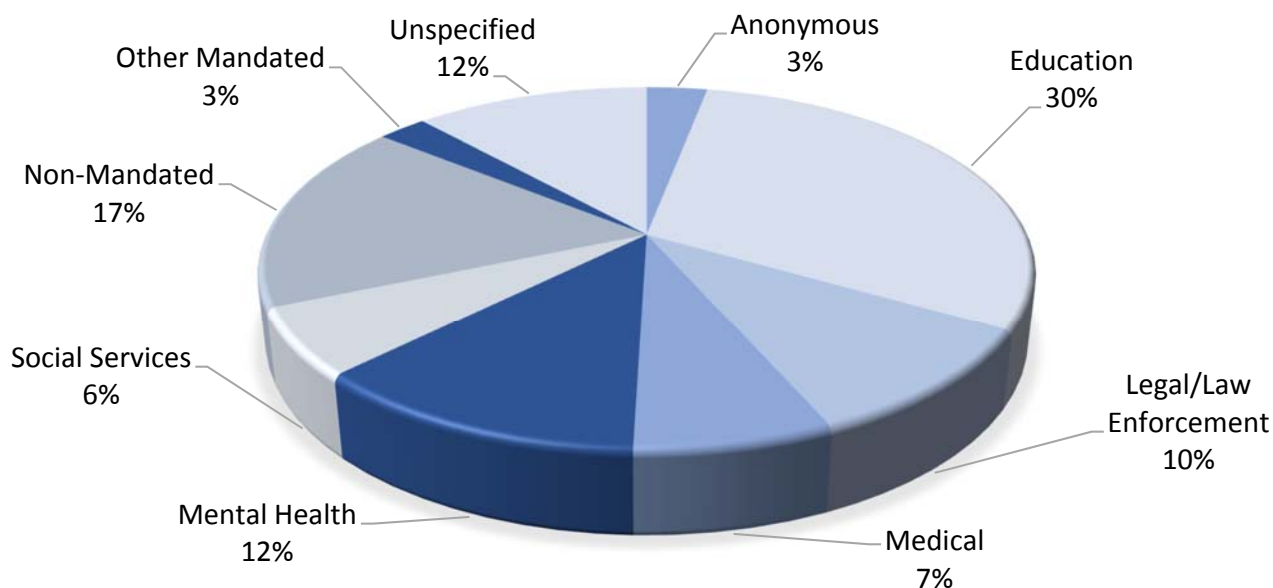
- ➡ Allegations that meet the legal definition of child abuse and neglect.
- ➡ Allegations that don't meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect but raise concerns about youth engaging in risky behaviors and children not receiving proper parental care.
- ➡ Multiple calls about the same child/incident made by different reporters.



## MANDATED REPORTERS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

At least 68% of the calls to the Child Protection Line were from mandated reporters; 17% from non-mandated reporters, 12% from unspecified callers and 3% from anonymous callers.

**Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect  
by reporter type (2017)**



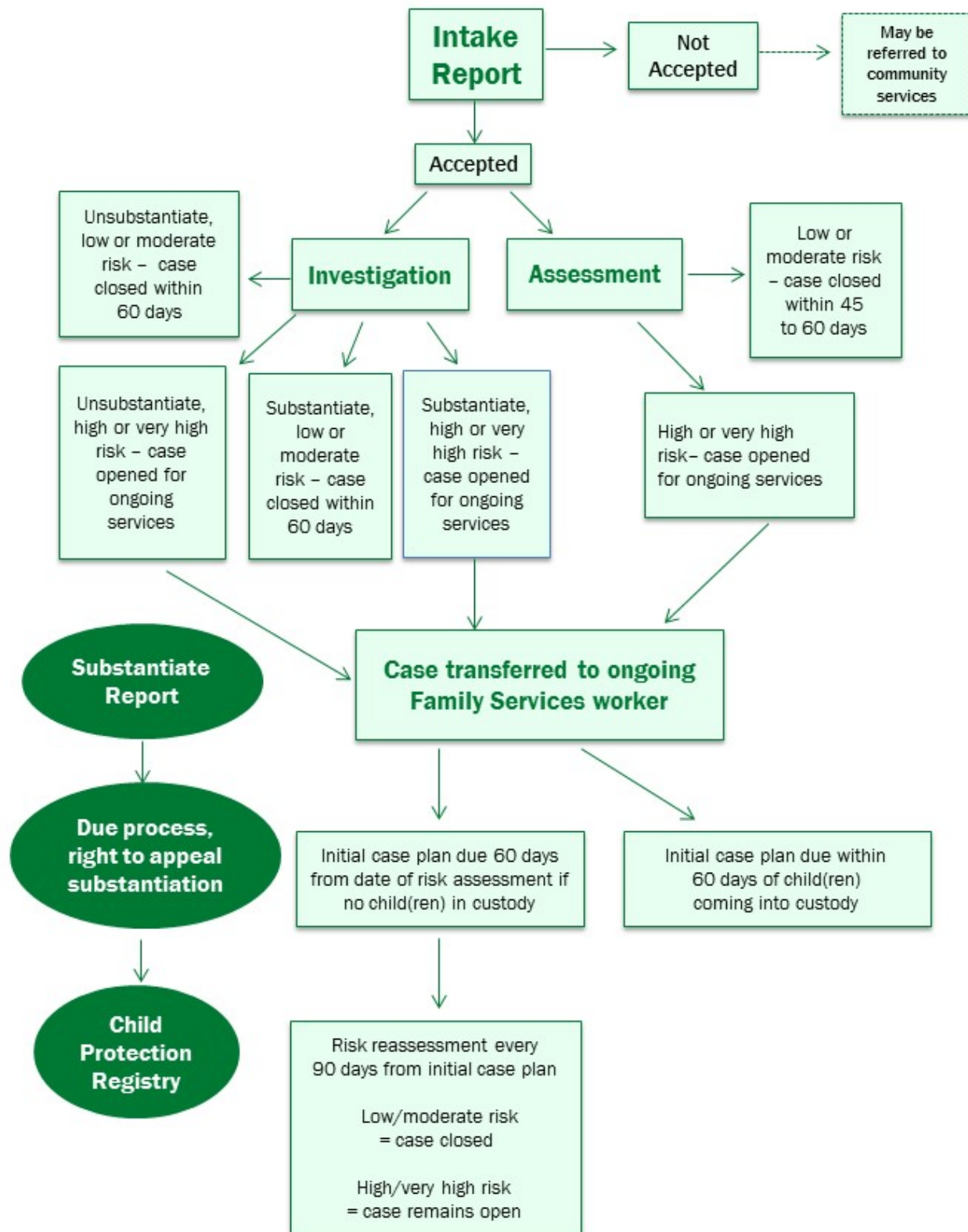
### Mandated Reporters in Vermont

Mandated reporters are legally required (Title 33, Chapter 49) to report their suspicions to Family Services *within 24 hours*. A mandated reporter is any:

- Health care provider, including any chiropractor, dentist, emergency medical personnel, hospital administrator, hospital intern, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, mental health professional, osteopath, pharmacist, physician, physician assistant, psychologist, registered nurse, resident physician, and surgeon
- Individual who is a) employed by a school district or an approved or recognized independent school or b) contracted and paid by a school district or an approved or recognized independent school to provide student services, including any school superintendent, school principal, headmaster of an approved or recognized independent school, school teacher, student teacher, school librarian, and school guidance counselor
- Agency of Human Services employee, contractor, or grantee who has contact with clients
- Camp administrator, counselor, and owner, including any residential and nonresidential camp and recreational program
- Childcare worker, clergy member, police officer, probation officer and social worker

# FLOWCHART

## (what happens to reports)



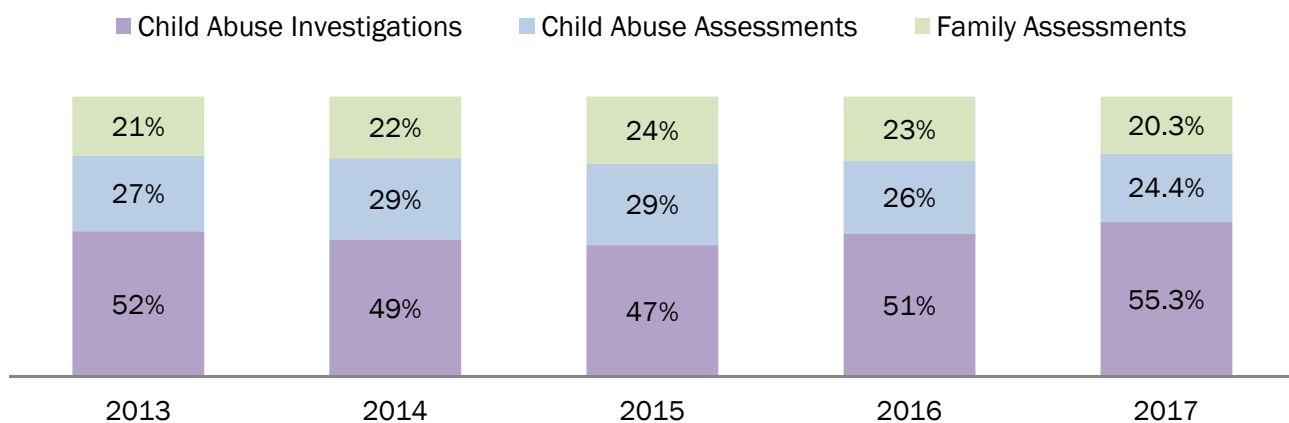
To learn more about what happens to the reports we receive, visit our website at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/protection/reporting/mandated/what-happens>.

## RESPONSE TO REPORTS

In 2017, we opened 5,527 child safety interventions: 3,054 child abuse investigations, 1,351 child abuse assessments and 1,122 family assessments.

CALENDAR YEAR	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total calls to Vermont's Child Protection Line	17,458	19,288	20,233	20,583	21,201
<b>Reports Accepted For:</b>					
- Child Abuse Investigation	2,657	2,877	2,634	2,835	3,054
- Child Abuse Assessment	1,409	1,688	1,618	1,421	1,351
- Family Assessment <sup>1</sup>	1,069	1,281	1,378	1,253	1,122
<b>Total reports accepted for intervention</b>	<b>5,135 (30%)</b>	<b>5,846 (30%)</b>	<b>5,630 (28%)</b>	<b>5,509 (27%)</b>	<b>5,527 (26%)</b>

### Percent of Total Accepted Reports, by type of intervention



<sup>1</sup> Family assessments (authorized by Chapter 51 of Vermont law) may be used for allegations that don't meet the legal definition of child abuse or neglect but do raise concerns about whether children are getting proper parental care necessary for their well-being. This could include allegations that a parent is neglecting a child's education, a pregnant woman has a substantial history with DCF, a newborn has a positive toxicology screen for illegal substances and a mother's substance use during pregnancy.

## REPORTS ACCEPTED BY INTERVENTION

District <sup>1</sup>	Child Abuse Investigations		Child Abuse Assessments		Family Assessments		Reports Accepted for Intervention	
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017
Barre	339	374	153	147	140	95	632	616
Bennington	199	220	117	101	72	88	388	409
Brattleboro	160	167	84	77	144	125	388	369
Burlington	484	547	280	236	187	192	951	975
Hartford	167	193	80	91	76	76	323	360
Middlebury	118	128	52	44	65	46	235	218
Morrisville	110	136	51	50	51	42	212	228
Newport	183	213	90	81	64	66	337	360
Rutland	292	324	160	146	130	103	582	573
Springfield	171	196	103	101	90	61	364	358
St. Albans	381	347	160	177	160	162	701	686
St. Johnsbury	148	158	78	92	71	56	297	306
Out of State	83	51	13	8	3	10	99	69
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>2,835</b>	<b>3,054</b>	<b>1,421</b>	<b>1,351</b>	<b>1,253</b>	<b>1,122</b>	<b>5,509</b>	<b>5,527</b>

<sup>1</sup> District refers to the Agency of Human Services district where the child's caregiver lives.

## OUTCOMES OF INTERVENTIONS

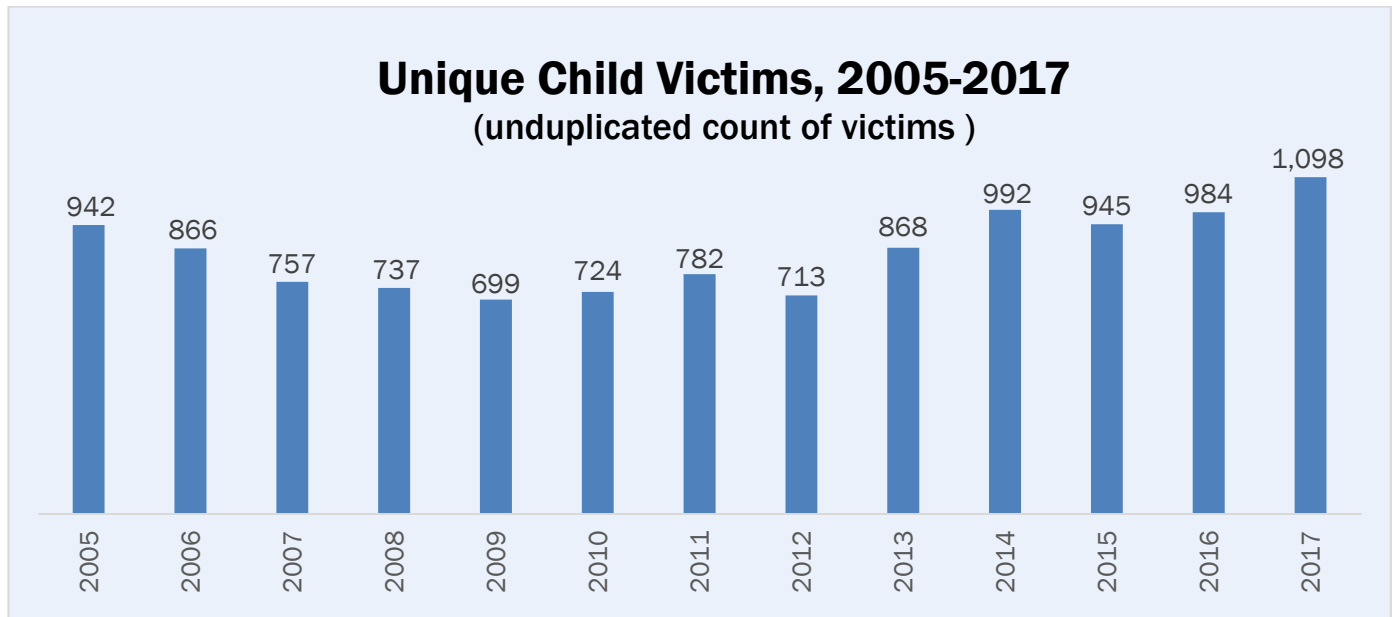
- ➔ **Investigations:** At the end of the 3,085 investigations conducted (3,054 that began as investigations + 31 that began as assessments but were later changed to investigations), 876 of the reports were substantiated<sup>1</sup>.
- ➔ **Investigations & Assessments:** At the end of the 5,527 total interventions, 1,230 cases were opened for ongoing services based on a high or very high risk of future maltreatment.

District	Investigations Substantiated		Cases Opened for Ongoing Services	
	2016	2017	2016	2017
Barre	64	109	122	115
Bennington	67	67	108	148
Brattleboro	59	30	79	68
Burlington	96	145	218	241
Hartford	46	56	42	45
Middlebury	56	55	94	80
Morrisville	32	50	32	48
Newport	37	50	27	38
Rutland	56	65	83	103
Springfield	50	58	83	104
St. Albans	112	120	141	188
St. Johnsbury	42	47	37	47
Out of State	20	24	2	5
<b>Statewide</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>1,068</b>	<b>1,230</b>

<sup>1</sup> Substantiated means the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected.

## DATA FROM SUBSTANTIATED REPORTS

The data in the tables that follow are based on the 876 reports that were substantiated.



<b>Reports Substantiated by Type of Abuse, 2017</b> Since a report can be substantiated for more than one type of abuse, the numbers below reflect a total greater than the 876 reports substantiated in 2017.					
District	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Emotional/ Neglect
Barre	11	28	3	41	5
Bennington	14	20	12	31	3
Brattleboro	8	16	3	12	4
Burlington	28	56	6	53	4
Hartford	3	9	3	5	1
Middlebury	10	29	5	18	0
Morrisville	12	13	0	14	1
Newport	3	23	1	12	2
Rutland	16	15	4	22	1
Springfield	6	15	2	18	1
St. Albans	10	37	14	41	1
St. Johnsbury	5	16	3	14	0
Out of State	19	64	6	60	4
<b>Total Statewide</b>	<b>145 (15.8%)</b>	<b>341 (37.2%)</b>	<b>62 (6.8%)</b>	<b>341 (37.2%)</b>	<b>27 (3.0%)</b>

## REPORTS SUBSTANTIATED BY AGE & GENDER OF VICTIM, 2017

The data below represents the age and gender of the victims of substantiated abuse or neglect.

*Note: a child is represented more than once if he or she suffered more than one type of abuse or was involved in more than one substantiated report during the year.*

Age	Percent	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
< 1	5.6%	9	2	3	48	2
1	6.5%	10	7	7	48	2
2	5.2%	7	1	9	38	4
3	5.5%	4	3	4	50	1
4	5.9%	10	8	4	41	4
5	5.3%	12	6	7	33	2
6	5.1%	7	14	3	31	3
7	5.6%	13	7	5	37	2
8	5.3%	10	8	5	35	2
9	5.7%	9	15	7	33	1
10	4.3%	9	14	3	21	2
11	2.7%	5	7	3	15	1
12	5.0%	11	18	5	22	1
13	6.3%	13	34	3	20	1
14	8.2%	9	61	5	17	1
15	8.8%	12	67	4	13	4
16	5.6%	7	47	4	5	1
17	3.3%	2	29	2	4	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	42.4%	89	62	47	267	17
Female	57.6%	70	286	36	244	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>35</b>

## REPORTS SUBSTANTIATED BY AGE & GENDER OF ABUSER, 2017

The data below represents the age and gender of substantiated abusers. An abuser may be represented more than once if more than one type of abuse was substantiated.

Age	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
<20	4	123	3	9	1
20 - 29	43	71	18	116	6
30 - 39	65	38	19	164	17
40 - 49	27	31	8	48	7
50 - 59	10	25	8	14	1
60+	2	18	1	6	0
Unknown	2	24	0	2	0
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	65	10	10	159	22
Male	86	313	47	200	10
Unspecified	2	7	0	0	0

## REPORTS SUBSTANTIATED BY ABUSER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP, 2017

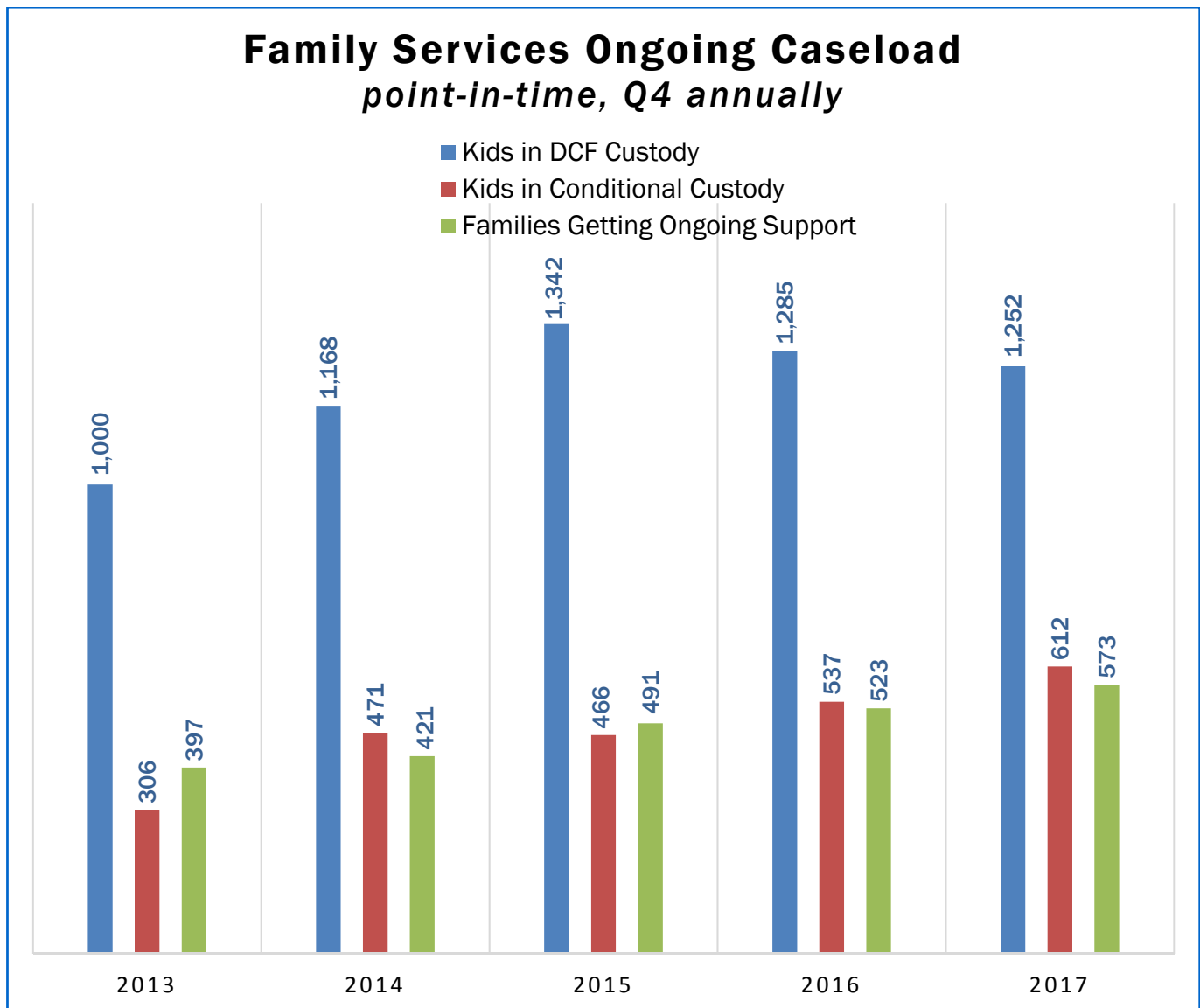
RELATIONSHIP	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
Parent	131	23	49	492	41
Stepparent/ Parent's Partner	26	21	15	93	1
Foster Parent	1	0	1	4	2
Sibling	1	26	3	4	0
Other Relative	6	35	18	15	2
Neighbor/Friend	0	137	17	5	0
Other Known	3	48	2	6	0
Stranger	0	50	1	0	0
Unspecified	13	29 <sup>1</sup>	0	12	1

<sup>1</sup> Includes people found to have possession of online child pornography

## ONGOING FAMILY SERVICES CASELOAD

Our ongoing caseload includes the following types of cases:

- ➡ Kids in DCF custody: when a Family Court judge places a child in the temporary custody of the Department for Children and Families because of concerns about the child's safety and well-being.
- ➡ Kids in conditional custody: when a Family Court judge places a child in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family and orders DCF to remain involved — to supervise, provide services and ensure the child's safety. To keep children with their families, judges are increasingly ordering conditional custody instead of DCF custody.
- ➡ Families getting ongoing support: when an investigation or assessment determines there's a high to very high-risk of future maltreatment, a case is opened for ongoing services and the case is transferred to an ongoing worker.



## Child abuse and neglect definitions

**Vermont law** ([33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912](#)) 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 and a child who has died as a result of abuse or neglect.*

**Harm:** can occur by abandonment, emotional maltreatment, neglect, physical injury or sexual abuse.

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

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

**Neglect:** failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

**Physical Injury:** death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

**Sexual abuse:** any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child, human trafficking, sexual assault, voyeurism, luring a child or obscenity. It 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 as well as the viewing, possessing, or transmitting child pornography, with the exclusion of the exchange of images between mutually consenting minors, including the minor whose image is exchanged.

For detailed definitions, read **Policy 50: Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions** online at <http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/FSD/Policies/50.pdf>.