



Child protection investigation and assessment

When a report is assessed by the Child Protection Helpline that further action is required, it will be forwarded to a Community Service Centre (CSC) or a Joint Investigation Response Team (JIRT) for possible further investigation and assessment, which may include a field response.

Community Services Centre

The majority of reports are transferred to a CSC. To inform allocation, additional information may be obtained to assist in determining the most appropriate response. Obtaining such information is undertaken prior to contact with the family, for the explicit purpose of informing the decision about whether or not assessment and investigation is required. This part of the assessment process is referred to as secondary assessment stage one (SAS 1).

Inquiries may include contacting the reporter, school, child care centre, medical service or other organisations. Requests for further information may be initiated by phone or in writing, pursuant to [information exchange](#) provisions under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998*.

A report may be closed following the receipt of further information. This can be due to additional information indicating that sufficient arrangements exist for the care and protection of the child or young person, and the circumstances that led to the report have been or are being adequately dealt with.

Those reports allocated for a secondary assessment stage two (SAS2) involve the direct interviewing of the parties subject to the report. This includes the child or young person, their parents or caregivers, other household and family members and service providers or interagency partners, where appropriate.

A secondary assessment is not simply about establishing the veracity of the reported concerns. In addition to gathering and assessing information outlined in the report, caseworkers assess for environmental, familial and individual characteristics (parent or child/young person) that may affect the child or young person's current and future safety.

Prior to initiating contact with the child, young person or family the caseworker and their manager will together plan the 'who', 'what', 'where' and 'how' of interviews and information gathering. The process will vary depending on the unique circumstances of each report.

Evidence informed practice guides Community Services caseworkers in being particularly alert to the effects of the following parent, carer, child or young person's characteristics:

- domestic and family violence – specifically its nature, severity and frequency; parent's attitude to it (for example denial, minimising) and any stressors/triggers and how these are managed
- alcohol and/or drug use – for example, by exploring patterns of use, type of drugs and frequency of use or poly-drug use and most importantly, the effect of the drug use on the parent or carer's cognitive abilities and capacity to parent
- mental illness – exploring how symptoms or behaviours could be harmful to the child or young person, and the other parent's capacity to provide care and protection to the child or young person
- past history of harm to a child or young person – analysing the pattern and frequency, considering the child's experience of the effects of repeated harm and the demonstrated ability and willingness of the parent or carer to provide care and protection.

Joint Investigation and Response Teams

JIRT is responsible for the investigation and assessment of risk of significant harm (ROSH) reports involving serious child abuse which may constitute a criminal offence.

The JIRT Referral Unit (JRU) is the single entry point into the JIRT program in NSW. Reports to the Child Protection Helpline that meet the JIRT criteria for referral are transferred directly to the JRU for assessment. The JRU will apply current JIRT criteria and determine whether the referral is accepted for a JIRT response by reviewing, analysing, sharing known interagency information and, where necessary, gathering additional information relevant to the current report to inform the decision.

The JIRT process is comprised of three equal partners all focussed on providing services to children: NSW Health, NSW Police and Community Services. A combined response from the three government agencies allows for a tailored approach in service delivery for the child, young person, non offending family members and alleged perpetrators. This reduces the trauma to a child by not having to continue to repeat their story to gain access to services.

A JIRT investigation concludes when:

- JIRT Community Services have completed their investigation and finalised a secondary assessment report. This includes cases where JIRT Police are still involved in the matter and are proceeding with criminal investigations.
- A care application is filed by JIRT and the Children's Court has established that a child or young person is in need of care and protection.

At the conclusion of a JIRT investigation and assessment case management responsibility is transferred to a CSC for ongoing casework and further action, if required.

After-Hours Crisis Response Team

Cases which require a response outside of regular business hours are the responsibility of the Child Protection Helpline.

The Child Protection Helpline After-Hours Crisis Response Team (CRT) is responsible for undertaking call-outs in metropolitan Sydney and handles all after-hours work related to locating services and placing children at risk of significant and immediate harm.

The CRT also initiates and coordinates all after-hours responses to urgent ROSH reports in regional and rural NSW, working with local Community Services staff and other support services.

Following after-hours intervention, the local CSC will resume case responsibility on the next business day. At this time, the CRT will finalise their case involvement unless they are required to submit documentation to the Children's Court regarding the action they undertake during a call-out.

What's new?

Development of the safety assessment, risk assessment and risk re-assessment tools (SARA)

Following recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW and as outlined in *Keep Them Safe*, Community Services is in the process of implementing SARA tools, in conjunction with the US-based not for profit Children's Research Centre. The purpose of the SARA tools is to assist caseworkers in assessing safety and risk issues for the children, young people and families they visit. There are three components to the SARA tool that caseworkers complete at specific periods in time for a family: a safety assessment, risk assessment and risk re-assessment.

Triage & assessment

Community Services is trialling a new triage & assessment process to manage the allocation of ROSH and certain non-ROSH events within CSCs. The aim of the process is to support the effective utilisation of resources by targeting intervention to children and young people who are at the highest risk of significant harm and to manage certain non-ROSH events that Community Services is either legislated or required by external bodies to respond to.

For further information:

- Visit Community Services website: www.community.nsw.gov.au
- Visit *Keep Them Safe* website: www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au
- Call the Child Protection Helpline: 132 111 or 133 627 (mandatory reporters)

