



WHAT IS

THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Childwelfare.gov defines the child welfare system as “a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families. While the primary responsibility for child welfare services rests with the states, the federal government supports states through program funding and legislative initiatives.”

Children's Bureau is housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families and is primarily responsible for implementing federal child and family legislation. Children's Bureau works with state and local agencies to develop programs that focus on preventing child abuse and neglect by strengthening families, protecting children from further maltreatment, reuniting children safely with their families, and finding permanent families for children who cannot safely return home.

Most families first become involved with the child welfare system because of a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, which is also referred to as "child maltreatment." CAPTA defines child maltreatment as serious harm (e.g., physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect) caused to children by parents or primary caregivers, such as extended family members or babysitters. Child maltreatment also can include harm that a caregiver allows to happen to a child or does not prevent from happening.

Child welfare agencies are responsible for supporting children and their families in many different ways. However, their most frequent methods include coordinating services or supporting existing services to prevent child abuse and neglect, receiving and investigating reports of suspected or witnessed child abuse and neglect, assessing child and family needs, strength, and the resources available to them, and arranging out-of-home care (such as foster care, kinship care, or other planned permanent living arrangements) when children and youth cannot safely remain at home.

Child welfare agencies frequently collaborate with other public and private agencies, community organizations, and other supporting agencies that provide children, youth, and their families with the necessary services and assistance, including supportive childcare, parenting programs, in-home family preservation services, and much more.

A more detailed list of ways the child welfare system supports children and families regularly from childwelfare.gov includes:

- Coordinate or support services to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- Receive and investigate reports of possible child abuse and neglect and assess child and family needs, strengths, and resources.
- Provide services to families who need help protecting and caring for their children.
- Arrange for out-of-home care (foster care, kinship care, or other planned permanent living arrangements) when children and youth cannot remain safely at home.
- Support the well-being of children living with relatives and foster and adoptive families, including ensuring that children's physical health, mental health, and educational needs are addressed.
- Work with children, youth, and families to achieve family reunification, adoption, or other permanent family connections for children and youth leaving out-of-home care.

[How the Child Welfare System Works](#)
[Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

Interested?

This brief was created by iFoster's transition-age foster youth TAY Peer Ambassadors who serve to support other youth aging out of the foster care system to achieve self-sufficiency.

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