



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT DCFS INVESTIGATIONS INTO CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Receiving a call from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) can be concerning. However, every child deserves to grow up in a loving family environment. The role of DCFS is to investigate reports of potential abuse or neglect and connect families to resources.

How Does DCFS Decide What to Investigate?

When DCFS receives a call on our Child Protection Hotline, we determine if the report meets the requirements of an investigation according to the law. If it does, a thorough investigation will be conducted to assess child safety and ensure the well-being of every child in the family. Depending on the allegation, investigations can also be conducted with law enforcement. No two reports are handled the same way and all investigations are unique based on the circumstances.

What Happens During an Investigation?

An Emergency Response Social Worker will visit your home within five days and determine if your child is safe. If DCFS determines your child is not safe at home, we will either remove the child or you may make temporary arrangements for your child to stay with a relative or family friend while the investigation continues.

Over the next 30 days, the social worker will continue to investigate your child's situation to determine whether or not a case should be opened. During this time, they will:

1. Review your family's history with DCFS;
2. Contact the reporter to discuss the initial concern;
3. Conduct home visits; and
4. Interview all parties involved, including the parents, children, siblings, other adults in the home, neighbors, teachers and other contacts to determine child safety.

What if the Investigation is Unfounded?

If no credible evidence of mistreatment or neglect is found, the investigation will be closed. You and your family can choose to participate in voluntary preventative services with community organizations that are designed to help your family overcome struggles and maintain stability. The investigation will then be closed.



What if the Investigation Finds Evidence of Mistreatment?

If there is evidence of mistreatment or neglect, a case will be opened with DCFS and a Children's Social Worker will be assigned to your family. Depending on the severity of the situation, a petition may be filed with the Los Angeles County Juvenile Dependency Court, or DCFS may open a voluntary case without court involvement.

At this point, the court will hold hearings to determine if the allegations on the petition are true or not true before making a decision of whether your child will be under its jurisdiction and become a dependent of the court. You still maintain parental rights, even while the case is open.

Your case will fall into one of two categories:

1. Family Maintenance: Your child will remain at home with one or both parents, however you may be court-mandated to complete required trainings or services. DCFS will work with you to develop a case plan and connect you with support services.
2. Family Reunification: Your child will be temporarily placed out-of-home from one or both parents, either with a relative caregiver or in foster care. DCFS will then connect you with services and work with you to develop a reunification plan.

It is important to remember that if you have an open case with DCFS, you have the right to talk with the social worker assigned to your case, your attorney, or a Parent Partner at any time. Navigating this process can be stressful and confusing so they can be a useful resource.

To learn more about the investigation process and your rights as a parent please visit www.dcfslacounty.gov.