

FAMILY PRESERVATION AND STABILIZATION

Programs

1. Aboriginal Family Protective Services
2. Victoria Child Protection Services
3. Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands Integration Services

Description of Services

The Child Protection and Family Development Program works in close coordination with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The program consists of several services which are described individually below.

After the Ministry's social workers conduct an investigation into a possible child protection concern, they may ask CAFCA counsellors to do a wide range of activities to support families and caregivers to reduce risk to children/youth to the extent that the Ministry is no longer concerned with the welfare of the children/youth in the context of their care environment. These activities may include connecting the family or members of the family to other community resources, like alcohol and drug programs, parenting programs, mentoring, and supportive counselling.

CAFCA counsellors often work directly with the family by providing guidance on better parenting approaches and/or ensuring the physical environment is modified for the safety of the child or youth. In cases where children have been removed from the family environment for protection concerns, CAFCA counsellors offer court-ordered supervised access services that often includes transportation assistance.

CAFCA counsellors do whatever is required, within reason, to assist the Ministry's social worker to feel confident that the family is no longer in need of protection. We value our capacity to offer flexible services at times and locations convenient to the families we serve. We also are committed to advocating for families or supporting families to advocate for themselves as they face difficult challenges in their lives.

As with all of CAFCA's programs, the Ministry provides referrals and establishes the number of service hours and duration of service. CAFCA counsellors assist Ministry representatives to make appropriate service decisions by communicating the family's service needs and potential to benefit from CAFCA service. The *Provision of Service Policy* provides more detailed information regarding referrals and eligibility criteria.

The Ministry typically refers a family to CAFCA service when the Ministry:

- is conducting an investigation and requires assistance in assessing the needs of family.
- is considering whether additional resources, when made available to the family home, will be sufficient to ensure the child's or youth's safety;
- has removed the child from the home and is now considering which resources, when made available to the family, will be sufficient to allow the child to safely return home, and

- has decided that the child or youth must be permanently removed from his or her family to ensure that they are safe.

As noted above there are sub-pillars within the Family Preservation and Stabilization program as follows:

The **Family Development Response program** is a 'differential response' for acting on child protection reports when the assessment indicates the risk of harm can be managed through the provision of intensive, time-limited support services. At the heart of FDR is a shift away from a high reliance on investigation and removal of children from their families as the primary response to ensuring a child's safety. Investigations will continue to be conducted in cases when children are at high risk. However, children assessed at low to moderate risk, whose families are willing to work at addressing identified concerns, receive Family Development Response Services. FDR workers work in co-operation with existing community facilities and agencies such as neighbourhood houses, provide direct casework services and facilitate referrals to available support services based on a comprehensive assessment of strengths and needs within the family, the extended family and the community.

The **Protective Family Services program** is utilized when an investigation determines that a child is in need of protection. A plan is developed by the social worker to ensure the child's safety and well-being. This is currently done by using appropriate tools to assess and document the risk and resilience factors attributed to the child and family, followed by the associated actions to be taken in order to reduce the level of risk and enhance family capacity. The most effective plans are those in which the family is actively involved in the decision making and actively participates in the development of strategies, solutions and services that work toward meeting the objective of ensuring the child's safety and well-being. The plan is based on a culturally appropriate assessment of identified strengths and risks of the child, the family, the extended family and community, and strives to engage the family and others involved in a trusting, cooperative working relationship.

Youth Services Where the subject of a child protection report is a youth (a child aged 16 – 18 years), a child protection investigation is often not the most appropriate response. The *Child, Family & Community Service Act* provides for a 'differential response' to youth in need of assistance which involves screening, assessment, short term planning and utilization of youth support services such as family-youth mediation, mentorship, safe housing and outreach services. The youth service response may also provide more comprehensive longer-term service planning for youth receiving services under the terms of a Youth Agreement or receiving services for mental health issues. Youth services are described in more detail in the section titled *Youth Services*.

Intake and Assessment The receipt of a child protection report, a request for voluntary family services, or a request for youth services sets in motion an intake and assessment process to determine the most appropriate response. Responses will vary according to the unique circumstances of each intake, but the safety and well-being of the child has precedence over all other considerations in deciding what action is to be taken. If the report or request for service involves an Aboriginal child, the intake social worker will work in partnership with the Aboriginal community and the identified delegated agency in the assessment, planning, and delivery of services. If information indicates that a child may be at immediate risk of harm, intake social workers must take the required steps and document the plan to ensure the immediate health and safety of the child.

Addressing the immediate safety issues provides an opportunity for more thoughtful and thorough information gathering to determine the appropriate ongoing response. A decision with respect to an ongoing response should be made within five calendar days of receiving the report. This decision is based on the perceived level of risk to the child.

Appropriate responses may include:

- Taking no further action
- Referring the family to informal/formal support services
- Providing a family development response
- Providing a youth service response if the child is a youth
- Conducting a child protection investigation.

Child Protection Investigation An investigation is a process of responding in a timely way to serious child protection concerns where a thorough assessment indicates risks to a child cannot be managed through any other response. The focus of an investigation is on thoroughly gathering and assessing the information about the alleged incident and risks of future harm. Direct interviews with the child and family are essential to the investigation process, and where required, are coordinated with police and other involved agencies and persons.

Each investigation includes, at minimum:

- seeing the child and all other vulnerable children in the home
- interviewing the child and all other vulnerable children in the home, where developmentally appropriate and with supports if necessary
- directly observing the child's living situation
- seeing and interviewing the parent(s)
- reviewing all relevant and necessary information related to the report, including existing case records and files, and
- obtaining information from people who may have relevant knowledge of the family and/or child.

The purpose of a child protection investigation is to determine if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the child needs protection. The information gathered informs decisions about what further actions are needed to ensure the child's ongoing safety and well-being, including court actions. The investigation concludes when sufficient information is gathered to make a plan to keep the child safe. When information is obtained during an investigation that indicates that the child does not need protection, the investigation may be ended, and an alternative response may be chosen when required. The results of the investigation are shared with others who need the information to support and reinforce their roles and responsibilities in protecting and caring for the child. This information includes assessments, decisions made, and actions taken and planned.

Guardianship Services are provided when the government assumes the legal rights and responsibilities for children who are no longer able to reside in the family home. Guardianship services for children in the temporary custody of the Director are provided by social workers delegated with the necessary authority. Guardianship services for children in the temporary custody of the Director are provided to children and youth who are in residential care via programs such as short-term respite care, voluntary care agreements, special needs agreements and/or court-ordered Temporary Custody Order.