

Role of the Community in Child Protection

The Community at Large

- Private citizens have a responsibility, often under law, to report any suspected cases of child maltreatment. This is critical to effective child protection.
- Private citizens must understand the responsibility of the child protection agency and support the agency's mission and goals. The community may also provide fiscal supports through a local tax levy.

Child Protection Agency

- Receives referrals of maltreatment and investigates complaints;
- Conducts thorough case assessment, case planning, case management;
- Provides supportive and treatment services, resource linkage, direct counseling, and substitute care.

Juvenile Court

- Assures that rights of parents and children are not violated;
- Grants legal sanction to the child protection agency to intervene on behalf of maltreated children;
- Terminates or limits parental rights, and assigns responsibility for custody and care of the children to the child protection agency;
- Routinely reviews case plans and activities for children in agency custody;
- May appoint attorneys or guardians ad litem to represent the parties.

Mental Health

- Identifies situations in which children are potentially being abused or neglected, and initiates a referral to the child protection agency;
- Develops and provides mental health and counseling services;
- Assumes responsibility for placement of emotionally disturbed and mentally ill children and adults;
- Participates in collaborative decision making in jointly served cases;
- Develops and provides specialized expertise to treat family and child problems contributing to or resulting from maltreatment.

Public Education

- Identifies situations in which children are potentially being abused or neglected, and initiates a referral to the child protection agency;
- Monitors children and reports suspected maltreatment on an ongoing basis;
- Collaborates with child protection agency to plan and provide remedial and supportive services to children in school.

Law Enforcement

- Investigates and intervenes when perpetrators are believed to have broken the law;
- Files criminal charges when appropriate;
- Supports and protects child welfare agency staff from the harmful acts of clients;
- Conducts arrests, files restraining orders, protects family members;
- Helps caseworkers remove a child from a family in an emergency, or in the absence of a court order.

Prosecutor, Agency Attorney

- Represents the agency in juvenile court proceedings;
- Provides technical assistance to the agency in preparation of cases for court and in other legal activities.

Health Care System

- Recognizes and identifies children who are potentially maltreated; conducts thorough medical examination and refers to agency for assessment;
- Gathers medical and other evidence to substantiate presence of abuse or neglect in court proceedings;
- Provides emergency and ongoing medical treatment to abused and neglected children;
- Provides specialized services to families, begins to engage families into the service process.

Specialized Agencies and Service Systems

- Collaborates with the child welfare agency in case planning and service delivery for children with multiple service needs.