

Allegations AND FOSTER HOME Investigations



DUTY TO REPORT

Anyone having reasonable suspicion that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been, or may be, impacted by abuse or neglect has a legal duty to report such information immediately to a local Ministry of Social Services Child Protection Office, First Nations Child and Family Services Agency, or police. The Duty to Report overrides professional confidentiality codes when there is reason to believe that a child may be abused or neglected. After the report is made, a Child Protection worker and/or police officer will decide what steps to take to assess and respond to the allegations. Other professionals play a critical role in assisting with the investigation, supporting the child during and after the investigation, and providing follow up services.

ASSESSING A REPORTED CONCERN

Procedure:

When a report is received, the Child Protection Worker obtains as much information as possible from the referent. This information is taken to the PRAT Supervisor who determines the next steps. The next course of action may be a face-to-face discussion with the Foster Parents and/or the children to obtain more information regarding the report. The initial report and the additional information may provide clarity that no action is required, or that the concerns may meet the threshold for Quality of Care, or for an Investigation.

Where it is assessed that the report is false or malicious:

The Child and Caregiver Support Worker will inform the Foster Parents that there has been a reported concern. The worker will discuss the nature of the concern with the Foster Parents and advise that the Ministry is not proceeding with any further action. The matter shall be documented on the Foster Family file in Incidents.

Where it is assessed that the report is based on the quality of care provided:

The Child and Caregiver Support Worker will meet with the Foster Parents to complete the Quality of Care: Professional Development Agreement (PDA) the day of the report or the following day. The completed PDA is provided to the Supervisor within 5 days, with notification provided to the PRAT Supervisor. Foster Parents will be presented with a Notification of Formal Review letter advising a formal review will be completed along with the reasons for review.

INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Where it is assessed that a child may have been abused or neglected:

The Child and Caregiver Support Worker provides the Foster Home with a letter of notification advising the Foster Parents of the complaint, that an investigation is proceeding and that they may contact the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) for support during the investigation process. The Foster Family may choose not to have the SFFA involved in the investigation. Police will be notified when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an offence has been committed.

Definitions:

QUALITY OF CARE:

Reports that clearly do not indicate abuse or neglect but do raise concerns about the quality-of-care in a Foster Home. This may include inappropriate discipline or reports with concern to the child's hygiene, eating habits or general wellbeing. Quality of Care concerns can also be regarding a Foster Parent not supporting the case plan in regard to family visits or medical appointments.

ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

Reports that indicate concerns of abuse and neglect that warrant screening for a formal investigation to determine child safety and the validity of the allegation.

PROVINCIAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT TEAM (PRAT):

A dedicated provincial unit that seeks to enhance practices and support relationships with Foster Parents while responding to reported concerns regarding care of children in Ministry Foster Homes. PRAT is responsible for leading a consistent approach in assessing reports of abuse and neglect in a timely manner.

ROLES OF THE ASSESSOR

The PRAT Assessor conducting the investigation immediately assesses risk to the child(ren) by:

- interviewing the child(ren); and
- interviewing the Foster Parents

Based on the assessment of risk, the PRAT Assessor in consultation with the PRAT team, determines whether the child(ren) should remain in the home or be removed pending the outcome of the investigation.

During the investigation, the PRAT assessor will determine:

- the allegation findings;
- who was involved;
- circumstances surrounding the incident;
- seriousness of the situation;
- possible contributing factors

The PRAT Assessor will include all persons who may have information which will assist in the completion of a thorough, conclusive and impartial investigation. This may include:

- Foster children in the home,
- Foster children who were previously in the home
- workers who have placed children in the home,
- the foster home worker,
- any collateral agencies that have knowledge of the family.

FOLLOWING THE INVESTIGATION

Following the investigation, an information sharing meeting will occur to review the findings of the investigation. When concluded, Foster Parents must receive a written statement of the findings and any actions being considered, regarding children who have been placed in their care, directly related to the findings of the investigation. Following an investigation, the Formal Review Process will begin.

If the recommendation is the closure of the Foster Home, Foster Parents have 30 days after receiving the findings letter to appeal the decision.

If you have any questions or are in need of support, please contact Saskatchewan Foster Families Association for support.

Phone: (306) 975-1580

Email: sffa@sffa.sk.ca

Web: www.saskfosterfamilies.ca



UNIQUENESS OF BEING A FOSTER PARENT

Due to the nature of foster care, Foster Parents may be at a greater risk of an allegation than other families. Within the context of this unique parenting position, workers must continue to follow best practices and ensure decisions are based on the child's best interests.

In assessing the actions of a Foster Family, possible contributing factors should be considered such as:

- high numbers of children placed,
- children with high needs,
- placement mismatches,
- gaps in information available to the Foster Family,
- gaps in planning for a child,
- gaps in training,
- gaps in support.

In determining the protection needs of the child, the quality and strength of the relationship between the Foster Family and the child must be assessed from the child's perspective. Where a child is assessed to have a close attachment to the Foster Family, such attachment must be respected.

A decision to remove a child from a Foster Home during an investigation must be based on the assessment of safety incorporating three basic criteria: immediacy, seriousness, and protection. Even where a child has only been in a Foster Home for a short period of time, removal will be disruptive.



Foster Families must be afforded fairness and due course, no matter what threshold the concern meets. This will include a clear statement of concerns by the ministry, an opportunity to respond to the concerns, objective consideration of the responses, and access to conflict resolution or appeal in the case of a decision to close the home."

