

INVESTIGATION SKILLS IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES **Boilerplate Outline**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES*

Knowledge:

- K1.** The trainee will be able to identify the information to be gathered in a child maltreatment investigation.

- K2.** The trainee will be able to list the elements to be considered in making the decision as to whether or not child maltreatment has occurred consistent with information learned in line worker core modules Child Maltreatment Identification, Parts 1 & 2.

Skills:

- S1.** The trainee will be able to design an investigative plan in response to a child maltreatment referral.

- S2.** Given a child maltreatment scenario, the trainee will be able to identify the correct investigative steps and list the elements to be considered in each step.

Values:

- V1.** The trainee will value conducting culturally sensitive investigations of allegations of child maltreatment in order to make decisions based on accurate information and correct interpretation of information and evidence developed during the investigation.

- V2.** The trainee will value the importance of preparing professional, balanced documentation concerning their observations made during the investigation.

RELATED TITLE IV-E COMPETENCIES

- 1.2.1** Worker is able to develop an ethnically sensitive assessment of a child and child's family and adapt casework plans to that assessment in the provision of child welfare services and demonstrates an understanding of the continuum from traditional to acculturated values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors of major ethnic groups.

- 1.5** Worker is able to maintain collaborative relationships with individuals, Groups, community based organizations and government agencies to advocate for equity and availability of culturally sensitive resources and services.

* Normal font represents primary objectives. *Italicized font represents secondary objectives.*

- 2.4 Worker gathers, evaluates, and presents pertinent information from informants, case records, and other collateral sources to support or refute an abuse or neglect allegation.
- 2.18 Worker understands the dynamics of engaging and working with involuntary clients.
- 3.11 Worker can engage clients, especially non-voluntary and angry clients.
- 3.14 Worker can produce concise, required documentation.
- 6.5 Worker has the ability to prepare written reports for court.

Training Content

1. Introduction

- A. Review of course and learning objectives and agenda

2. Overview/Definitions

A. The trainer will discuss the definition of a child welfare investigation as well as the philosophy of a child welfare investigation. The trainer will also differentiate between what the difference is between an *assessment* and an *investigation* in differential response counties.

B. The trainer will also cover the questions that should be answered in a complete child welfare investigation. Emphasis will also be placed on the trainee becoming familiar with their agencies investigative protocols and the processes by which their agency desires them to gather information and evidence in their child maltreatment investigations.

C. The trainer will also emphasize that the primary question to be answered is “*Was this child (or other children) abused or neglected or is he or she likely to be abused or neglected?*” If the answer to this question is “no”, this correct determination is just as much a success in the investigation as is a finding of abuse if, indeed, abuse or neglect did occur.

3. Child Welfare Investigations and the Law

- A. Confidentiality
- B. Authority to investigate
- C. Mandated reporter
- D. Failure to report
- E. Law enforcement & social work coordination
- F. Interviewing the school

4. Importance of Information Gathering

A. Purpose of Interviewing

The trainer will acquaint the trainees with the critical nature of accurate and complete information gathering. The issues relating to cultural influences in planning child/family contact for the purposes of gathering information related to child maltreatment investigation will be discussed.

B. Pre-Interview Information Gathering

1. Reading and evaluating the referral;
2. Determine what the primary investigative questions are and how best to get them answered and by whom;
3. What information can be gathered from computer and telephone, as well as review of any prior case files and discussions with supervisor or colleagues who have had prior contact with the child or family
4. Determine if there are cultural components which should/could/would influence the manner of contact, receptiveness of the family, whether the child/family consider the actions alleged to be a form of child maltreatment, etc.
5. Assessment of the credibility of the reporter, including SW direct contact with the RP and details to ask for;
6. Worker safety issues;
7. Problems in locating the child and family

5. Preparing To Go Into the Field

The trainer will discuss with the trainees the importance of preparation prior to going into the field to make face to face contacts. This preparation includes making sure the SW has all the equipment and paperwork they will need for the typical investigations.

1. Forms and other paperwork, such as releases, referral and face sheet; supportive literature for service information, etc.;
2. Maps;
3. Camera (if photo documentation is part of the agency's investigative protocol);
4. Measuring devices (refer back to information covered in CMI-1 for assessing accidental versus inflicted injuries);
5. Notebook and writing implement;
6. Child interviewing aides;
7. Cell phone;
8. Child car seat (know how to secure it);

6. Collaboration with other professionals

The trainer will discuss SW partners in conducting investigations. *A primary point of this segment will be to reduce the unnecessary duplication of effort with other professionals, reduce trauma to the child and family by having a coordinated response, and enhance the likelihood of more pertinent information being gathered, more evaluation of the information/evidence during decision-making which generally leads to better decisions.*

These partners include, but are not limited to:

- Law enforcement- cross reporting, multidisciplinary investigations, importance of involving in forensic referral, presence for safety reasons;
- Medical professionals- importance of their contribution to confirming abuse/neglect evidence (refer them back to CMI-1 and 2 discussions on the use of medical evidence and the need to have properly trained child abuse medical specialists;
- Unit supervisor and county counsel- know your agency's policies and standard procedures regarding approval for in-field decision-making;
- Probation/parole- Is anyone involved on p/p? Conduct joint investigation, if possible.
- Other professionals who may have had contact with the child and family;
- Collateral witnesses and contacts

7. Initial Contacts

A. With child:

- Interview children in a neutral setting when possible
- Interview all of the children residing in the household
- Interview children separately and privately
- Observe any injuries, document as per county policy
- On infants and toddlers, check covered areas of the body for injuries or signs of neglect as per county policy
- Ask children about their interactions with all other household members/caretakers
- Ask about all family activities closely tied to child abuse and neglect behaviors (CMI-1 "triggering behaviors" and CMI-2 "sexually abusive activities occurring under the guise of play or parenting behaviors")

B. With non-offending parent/s:

- Contact parent as soon as possible after the child interview-the child should never be the one to tell the parent about being interviewed, face-to-face meeting much better than telephone;
- Allow ventilation time for anticipated parental reactions, as discussed above;
- Use neutral, non-judgmental language, don't assume the parent knew all about it;
- Realize that the information you share with this person will probably be told directly to the suspected perpetrator (for differing reasons);
- Be professional and use your authority on as necessary;
- Try to end interview reminding parent you both have the same goal: to figure out what, if anything, happened to their child and the desire to keep the child safe. Point out the issues of safety, risk, and protective capacity will be covered in great detail in that training.

- C. With the person suspected of committing the child maltreatment:
- Law enforcement usually takes the lead-what is the county protocol on this?
 - This interview should be done last after all other evidence has been collected and interviews conducted;
 - Expect denial, be open to listening and exploring reasonable alternative hypotheses to abuse/neglect;
 - To overcome denial, express belief in the information the child has provided;
 - Try to end the interview on a positive note-ask them if there is anyone they would like for you to talk to who might provide some pertinent information;
 - Document as precisely as possible.

8. Documentation

A. What

B. How

9. Building a Case: Putting the Pieces Together

The trainer will lead a discussion on examining the totality of the information gathered, observations made, quality of the evidence, credibility of the sources of information, determining if all the important questions have been asked and answered, safety of the child/ren, penal code and/or W&I violations, and results of consultations with supervisor and other relevant professionals.

10. Decision-Making

The trainer will cover the definitions of the decisional options SW's have and the implications of the terms *substantiated*, *inconclusive*, and *unfounded*.

11. Conclusion and Evaluations