



Offer support to the family

PRACTICE GUIDE

In circumstances where concerns do not result in a statutory response or intervention, a family may be referred to a secondary family support service or a community service that can help them to address the issues that place a child at risk.

This practice guide provides information about what to consider when deciding to offer support to a family. This can be either when:

- a decision is made to record a child concern report
- a family needs assessment has been completed as part of a standard response
- a priority assessment results in a 'child in need of support' outcome.

Be clear about why support is being offered

It is important to consider the below questions *after* an intake response or assessment outcome is decided. This will ensure that they don't contribute to thinking errors and affect the assessment.

Before referring a family for support, ask yourself:

- What is my professional judgement about family's needs and the ongoing risk to the child, if they are not addressed?
- What specific risk factors are present that may place a child at risk of harm?
- What service or services may be appropriate to help the family address the identified risks?
- Has the family been offered support previously, and what was the outcome?
- Is the family actively seeking support?
- For an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, might a referral for support help to prevent further child protection involvement (the *prevention* principle)?

The answers to these questions will help to establish whether to offer a family help and support, and they type of support to offer.

Parent's willingness to engage

A parent's engagement with a service, or expression of willingness to engage with a service is a strength, but it does not provide a child with safety or protection. It should never be the rationale for a decision not to record a notification, or that a child is not in need of protection following a priority assessment. This is because:

- A parent's expression of willingness to seek or receive support does not guarantee they will take-up the services.
- A parent's take-up of services does not necessarily result in a reduction in the ongoing risk to a child.

If the purpose or rationale for offering support to a family is to provide the child with protection, revise the assessment with a particular focus on whether the child has a parent able and willing to protect them from harm.



Subsequent offers of support

If one or more referrals for support have been made for the family in the past, carefully consider whether a further referral is going to be effective in reducing ongoing risk to the child. To help determine this, consider whether:

- The family have had the benefit of discussing support options and the concerns that Child Safety have received about their child.
- The family have previously accepted support from the service they were referred.
- The support that the family accepted resulted in meaningful and sustained change.
- The service was appropriate for helping the family reduce the identified risks to the child.

Meaningful engagement

The family's meaningful engagement with a service may be facilitated by:

- Contacting a parent to discuss concerns received by Child Safety, and options for support (such as an active support response).
- Being open and transparent with the family about the reasons support is being offered.
- Offering the family choice about the service they work with (for example, there may be two or three local services that can assist with addressing the particular risk factors identified). For an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family, offering choice supports their right to self-determination.
- Facilitating a warm handover, which is the preferred way of linking a family with a service, to maximise the likelihood of engagement.

Identifying an appropriate service

Before discussing service options with a family, or completing a referral, ensure that:

- The service can help the family address the specific risk factors that place a child at risk.
- The referral criteria for the service have been met.
- The service has capacity to support the family (delays in delivering services may impact the likelihood of engagement).

Other factors to consider when identifying an appropriate service may include:

- Whether separate referrals are necessary to help parents with different support needs. For example, a referral for a victim-survivor of domestic and family violence may not be the same as a referral for a perpetrator.
- Whether service is culturally safe and responsive. For example, consider referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations for First Nations families.

The following services are funded to help families experiencing vulnerability who come to the attention of Child Safety:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services
- Intensive Family Support Services
- Family and Child Connect.

There are also a range of community service that may be appropriate for helping and supporting families to reduce risk to a child.

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