

PRACTICE GUIDE

Offer support to the family

Where an investigation and assessment is finalised with a 'child not in need of protection' outcome, Child Safety needs to decide whether to offer the family help and support, by way of a referral to an appropriate service, to reduce ongoing risk to the child.

An appropriate service may include a secondary family support service or a community service that can help the family to address the issues that place a child at risk, if they are not addressed.

This practice guide provides information about what to consider when deciding to offer a family support following an investigation and assessment.

Be clear about why support is being offered

After a decision is made following an investigation and assessment that a child is 'not in need of protection', ask yourself:

- what is my professional judgement about the ongoing risk to the child? (Refer to the Risk matrix contained in the Assess harm and risk of harm practice guide)
- 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 to address the identified risks?
- has the family been offered support previously, and what was the outcome?
- is the family actively seeking support?

(Note: it is important to consider these questions *after* the investigation and assessment outcome has been decided to ensure they don't contribute to thinking errors and affect the assessment of the child's need for protection).

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

Parental willingness to engage

A parent's engagement with a service, or expression of willingness to engage with a service, does not provide a child with safety or protection. Moreover, engagement with a service should never be the rationale for a decision that a child is not in need of protection. This is because:

- a parent's expression of willingness to seek or receive support does not guarantee they will actually 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.

Thinking that a parent's engagement with a service, or expression of willingness to engage, will provide safety for a child is an error in risk assessment. A family's meaningful engagement with a service is a strength. When parents apply positive changes the service has helped them to make, this is what reduces the ongoing risk to the child and can be considered a protective factor.

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 accepted support from the service
- the family engaged meaningfully with the service
- the support, where accepted by the family, resulted in meaningful and sustained change
- the service was appropriate for helping the family to reduce the identified risks to the child.

If previous referrals have not resulted in a reduction of risk to the child, a further referral, particularly to the same service, is unlikely to have the necessary impact. If a subsequent referral for the family to receive support is assessed as being in the child's best interests, consider strategies that may help to maximise the likelihood of engagement, or services that may be able to provide more targeted support to address the identified risks to the child.

Meaningful engagement

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

- being open and transparent with the family about the reasons support is being offered
- speaking with the family to identify what impacted their engagement previously and how this may be overcome, where relevant
- 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)
- 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

An appropriate service is a service that can help a family address the specific factors that place a child at ongoing risk. In some instances, the support needs of one parent may differ from that of another and separate referrals may need to be considered (for example, a referral for a victim-survivor of domestic and family violence may not be the same as a referral for a perpetrator).

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

- the referral criteria are met
- the service has capacity to support the family (delays in delivering services may impact the likelihood of engagement).

There are services that are funded to help families experiencing vulnerability that come to the attention of Child Safety, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Wellbeing Services and Intensive Family Support services. Referrals to these agencies are made via the portal [Queensland family support referral](#).

There are also a range of community services that may be appropriate for helping a family to reduce risk to a child.

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