

## Safeguarding Rights

State law gives DSS the authority to protect and aid children. Safeguards for both parents and children are built into the law.

- *Only law enforcement officials or family court judges, not DSS workers, have the authority to remove a child from the home.*
- *Law enforcement officials may remove a child from the home only if there is a likelihood of substantial and imminent danger to a child's life, health or physical safety.*
- *Parents whose children have been removed by law enforcement officials have the right to a court hearing within 72 hours and the right to receive services to promote timely reunification with their child.*

## You Can Make a Difference

South Carolina's children and families need your help. DSS is committed to working with the community to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect. It's a big job, and one that DSS can't do alone. You can make a difference by:

- *Helping a friend, neighbor or relative to cope with the problems that may lead to child abuse or neglect.*
- *Volunteering your time with your local prevention program.*
- *Making a donation to support services for families and children.*
- *Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. Parents who abuse or neglect their children need help, but many are afraid to seek it. If you know of a family that might need assistance, contact your local DSS office. It's there to help see that families and children get the care and assistance they need, today and in the future.*

*For further information, contact:*

## South Carolina Department of Social Services

P.O. Box 1520  
Columbia, SC 29202  
803/898-7318 *or*  
[www.state.sc.us/dss/cps](http://www.state.sc.us/dss/cps)

To report suspected child abuse or neglect, contact the DSS office or law enforcement in the county where the child lives.

*For your local county telephone numbers, visit:*  
[www.state.sc.us/dss/counties.html](http://www.state.sc.us/dss/counties.html)

*South Carolina  
Department of  
Social Services*

*Caring  
for Children...*

*Caring  
for Families...*

*Caring  
for the Future*

In South Carolina, thousands of children are reported to be abused or neglected each year. Department of Social Services (DSS) local offices, working with law enforcement officials and community organizations, are dedicated to helping these children and their families.

- ✱ *DSS, working together with law enforcement officials, ensures the safety of children by responding to reports of abuse and neglect made by family members, professionals, friends, neighbors and other concerned individuals.*
- ✱ *DSS provides services to families to prevent abuse and neglect.*
- ✱ *DSS makes every reasonable effort to keep families together when this can be done without putting children in danger. If children must be removed from their homes to ensure their safety, DSS makes every effort to maintain their family ties and to reunite them with their families when it is safe to do so.*

## What is Abuse and Neglect?

Suspected abuse or neglect of a child can trigger the involvement of DSS with a family.

- ✱ *Physical abuse of a child includes nonaccidental injuries, burns, bruises, broken bones or cuts, as well as excessive corporal punishment.*
- ✱ *Sexual abuse of a child includes adults engaging in sexual acts with children or involving children in pornography or prostitution.*
- ✱ *Neglect of a child includes not providing the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, education, health care or supervision appropriate to the child's age and development.*
- ✱ *Mental injury of a child means an injury to the child's intellectual or psychological capacity as evidenced by a discernible and substantial impairment to the child's ability to function.*



DSS also can make referrals to other services to help families at risk of abusing or neglecting their children, acting to prevent problems before they occur.

## Reporting Abuse or Neglect

In South Carolina, the following individuals are required to report when in the person's professional capacity, he or she has reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect: any physician, nurse, dentist, optometrist, medical examiner, coroner, employee of a county medical examiner's or coroner's office; a professional in medicine, emergency medical services, mental health or allied health fields; Christian Science practitioner; religious healer; school teacher; counselor; principal; assistant principal; social or public assistance worker; substance abuse treatment staff; child care worker in any day care center or foster care facility; police or law enforcement officer; judge; undertaker; funeral home director; employee of a funeral home; film processors; and computer technicians. A person mandated by state law to report cannot delegate that responsibility to anyone else. The individual who suspects that a child is being abused must make the report.

While these persons are mandated reporters, other persons, such as neighbors, relatives or friends may report when they suspect that a child is being abused or

neglected. Children often tell a person to whom they are close or with whom they feel comfortable about things happening in their home. **Suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported to DSS or to local law enforcement in the county where the child lives.**

## Responding to Abuse or Neglect

When a report of abuse or neglect is made, DSS must decide if the incident meets South Carolina's definition of child abuse or neglect. A DSS worker will talk with the child and with others, such as teachers, friends, neighbors and family members.

- ✱ *DSS has the primary responsibility to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect and to assess risk to the child and other children in the family.*
- ✱ *Law enforcement agencies have the primary responsibility to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect which involve possible criminal charges. These are usually joint investigations between DSS and law enforcement. In South Carolina, only law enforcement and family court are authorized to remove children from the custody of their parents with DSS responsible for the child's placement.*

Once the information is gathered, the DSS worker and a supervisor review it. They assess the validity of the report, the level of risk to the child and determine what actions are needed to ensure the child's safety, including what services might be provided to the family to reduce risk of future harm to the child.

- ✱ *If the information gathered shows that the abuse or neglect likely did not occur, the report will be unfounded, and DSS involvement will be ended unless the family requests further assistance.*
- ✱ *If the information supports that child abuse or neglect most likely did occur, the report will be indicated. DSS will open a case and may refer the family for services in their community.*

## Helping Families

DSS's goal in working with families is to ensure children's safety while helping their families solve the problems that put the children at risk of harm. Usually, children can stay with their families while DSS and the family develop a plan to address the identified concerns. The plan may involve the referral of the family to other

agencies that provide:

- ✱ *assistance in getting food, housing, clothing and medical care;*
- ✱ *individual or family counseling;*
- ✱ *child day care and parent aide services;*
- ✱ *parenting skills training;*
- ✱ *counseling; and*
- ✱ *alcohol or other drug treatment.*

## Protecting Children

Sometimes, the risk of harm to children is so great that they can't remain with their families while the investigation continues or assistance is provided. They may be removed from their homes on an emergency basis and placed by a court in the custody of DSS. If the child must remain in the agency's care for more than a day or two, DSS workers meet with the family to develop a plan for treatment of the child and family, opportunities for the child and family to maintain contact and the return of the child to the family when it is safe to do so. DSS works in partnership with law enforcement, medical, mental health, educational and other professionals to provide appropriate services and, if necessary, placement.

- ✱ *Children removed from their homes may be placed with members of their extended families. The agency assesses these families and signs an agreement with them that sets out the terms of the placement.*
- ✱ *When care by relatives is not possible, children removed from their homes may be placed with foster families or in other settings, such as a residential treatment center. Foster families and other placements for children are approved by the state and supervised by an agency worker. Those caring for children receive special training on the needs of the children and on working with families to help the children return home safely.*