



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT  
OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual

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Issuance:	700	<b>Field Response Times</b>	

### Overview

**5-20-2013**

The DCF After-Hours Response System was established, by policy and State statute (N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.12), to respond in the "same manner" as the daytime DCF/CP&P work force upon receipt of allegations of child abuse or neglect, or risk of child abuse/neglect. See [CP&P-II-C-2-300](#), Timeframes for Initial Response.

However, since services are provided after hours, when the majority of private and public agencies within the state are inaccessible, SPRU may need to perform additional child welfare and/or child protective services functions on new case situations as well as on cases in active status. Other situations may be held for day staff intervention, based on the nature of the report or referral, degree of risk, field response time criteria, the type and urgency of the request for services, and various other criteria. See [CP&P-II-D-1-600](#), SPRU: Philosophy of Intervention.

Whenever a local SPRU Worker has a question regarding the need for, or the timing or nature of, a field response, he or she consults the SPRU Supervisor.

The SPRU Supervisor can contact the SCR Call Floor Supervisor to discuss or challenge a field response time frame assigned to a SPRU Worker under his or her supervision.

The SPRU Worker or, if necessary, the SPRU Supervisor, makes concerted efforts to contact day staff, for non-routine case handling decisions on cases in active or open status or matters currently under investigation.

At times a field response may not be required from SPRU. Intervention by telephone may be sufficient to stabilize the immediate crisis, gather additional or clarifying information, or address the service need until the start of the next business day.

All reports or referrals received at SCR which fit the criteria for an Immediate Response, per CP&P policy, [CP&P-II-C-2-300](#), Determining the Need for an "Immediate" Response, must be assigned to SPRU for investigation/intervention, to secure the immediate safety of the child.

See [CP&P-II-C-1-100](#), Case Assignment to Field Office vs. SPRU, for a comprehensive discussion of when 24-hour responses and 72-hour responses are assigned to SPRU vs. when they are held for/assigned to day staff. When a report/referral is to be assigned to SPRU in accordance with [CP&P-II-C-1-100](#), SCR makes the assignment to the SPRU Worker who is currently serving on call for that county. SCR will not "hold" an assignment to SPRU based on the time of day/night. The SPRU Worker consults his or her SPRU Supervisor if he or she questions when a response should be made, and who should make the response, based on the current circumstances. See [CP&P-II-D-2-300](#), Decency of the Hour.

SPRU handles institutional abuse/neglect reports during non-business hours. Upon receipt of an IAIU report, the SPRU Worker may need to initiate action to ensure the safety of other children in the facility, resource home, other out-of-home placement, or registered family day care home as well. Before initiating any action, the SPRU Worker contacts the IAIU After-Hours Supervisor for instructions on case-handling.

## **Factors to Consider, After-Hours Response**

**1-28-2013**

The method and timing of an after-hours field response is based on an evaluation of various key factors, including, but not limited to:

- The nature of the allegation/emergency/risk to the child;
- Child safety;
- Risk to family stability;
- Risk of loss of information or physical evidence;
- Protection of confidentiality of family members;
- Need to plan the investigation/assessment;
- Actions mandated by State law and/or CP&P policy in certain situations (e.g., child protective services investigations, "Hospital Hold" procedures, Safe Haven infant procedures, removal procedures);
- The history of the case;
- The availability of community services, family supports, and/or resources to address the presenting need;
- The amount and type of information known about the presenting situation, compared to the quality of information needed to appropriately assess the presenting situation/danger/risk (i.e., "when in doubt, go out");

- The day of the week the report or referral is received (i.e., how many hours/days until the start of the next work day?);
- The hour of the day the referral is received, i.e., the "decency of the hour" (see [CP&P-VIII-F-1-600](#) Decency of Hour Policy);
- The age and vulnerability of the child(ren), with particular attention to young children (under age 1);
- The volume of reports and referrals being handled by the SPRU Worker during that shift of duty;
- The availability of back-up SPRU staff;
- The status of CP&P intervention (i.e., whether an active or closed case, or a new investigation based upon receipt of this report/referral);
- Special Instructions from CP&P staff;
- Whether the police or other law enforcement authority is proceeding with an investigation.

### **Immediate and Within 24-Hour Field Response by SPRU**

**1-28-2013**

All reports and referrals received at SCR which fit the criteria for an Immediate Response, per CP&P policy, must be assigned to SPRU for investigation/intervention, to secure the immediate safety of the child. Upon receipt of the assignment, the SPRU Worker promptly proceeds with the investigation/response. Upon receipt of an assignment from SCR coded for response within 24-hours, the SPRU Worker promptly proceeds with the investigation/response. The SPRU Worker must contact the SPRU Supervisor to delay any response. See [CP&P-VIII-F-1-600](#).

If assigned more than one report/referral while serving on call, the SPRU Worker prioritizes his or her work, based on child safety and risk. A report/referral assigned an Immediate Response will generally take precedence over an assignment coded for response within 24-hours. The SPRU Worker consults the SPRU Supervisor if he or she questions which assignment merits prompt attention, and which can wait.

SPRU handles institutional abuse/neglect reports during non-business hours. Upon receipt of an IAIU report, the SPRU Worker may need to initiate action to ensure the safety of other children in the institution, resource family home, out-of-home placement or registered family day care home as well. Before initiating any action, the SPRU Worker contacts the on-call IAIU After-Hours Supervisor for instructions on case-handling/after-hours intervention.

### **Sexual Abuse Reports - After Hours Intervention**

**1-28-2013**

Allegations of child sexual abuse, explained at:

- [CP&P-II-E-1-1600](#) Sexually Transmitted Diseases;

- [CP&P-II-E-1-1700](#), Sexual Penetration;
- [CP&P-II-E-1-1800](#) ,Sexual Exploitation; and
- [CP&P-II-E-1-1900](#),Sexual Molestation, OR
- Child-on-child sexual abuse or child-on-child sexual activity, explained at: [CP&P-II-B-1-550](#), Reports and Referrals Regarding Child-on-Child Sexual Abuse and Child-on-Child Sexual Activity are only referred to SPRU for immediate investigation if:

The immediate response criteria (see [CP&P-II-C-2-300](#)) is evident;

- Law enforcement is commencing/proceeding with its criminal investigation; or
- Law enforcement asks for CP&P assistance with a sexual assault investigation.

Otherwise, an investigation/intervention should be held for CP&P day staff, to enable it to be carefully planned and coordinated with medical services and law enforcement, and to ensure that the child victim is interviewed once, in a neutral setting.

A child, jarred from sleep late at night, forced to talk to a stranger about highly personal matters, may be more traumatized by the middle-of- the-night investigation than by the alleged abuse. The child may be less likely to talk.

The SPRU Supervisor is available to conference the sexual abuse report with the SPRU Worker and/or SCR. The SPRU Worker consults the SPRU Supervisor before proceeding in any manner. The Supervisor may advise the SPRU Worker to:

- Contact/consult with law enforcement;
- Recontact the reporter (referral source), when possible, to screen the CPS report or CWS referral in depth and/or seek answers to specific questions;
- Contact collateral resources; or
- Provide telephone outreach, support, information and referral, or direction to the family and the child victim, when appropriate.
- The SPRU Worker documents all conferencing activities in his or her SPRU investigation narrative. The SPRU Supervisor documents the conference in a SPRU Supervisor Log (Template), CP&P Form [9-24](#).

SPRU Workers are not to disturb children and families from sleep unless the allegations clearly indicate a need for an immediate response to assure the safety of a child.

If the SPRU Worker does not make personal contact with the child and family due to the lateness of the hour, a personal contact is attempted by SPRU as soon as possible the next day, before regular work hours, if necessary/as appropriate.

Thus, a field response initiated by SPRU takes into account the decency of the hour of the day/night. A child, jarred from sleep late at night, forced to talk to a stranger, then physically examined or asked to be undressed, may be more traumatized by the middle-of-the-night investigation than by the alleged abuse. A visit to a client home at an unreasonably late hour of the night could be viewed by the family or community as an act of harassment by CP&P, a State agency, rather than a protective service to a child or family.

A SPRU Worker's intent to postpone field contact on any assignment from SCR based on the concept of decency-of-the-hour must be conferenced promptly with the SPRU Supervisor. The SPRU Supervisor has the authority to:

- Grant the request, whereby the SPRU Worker is instructed to respond the next day. The SPRU Supervisor can prescribe an approximate time for the field response to occur. The SPRU Supervisor is empowered to authorize the SPRU Worker to respond to the assignment beyond the close of his or her on-call shift, and, thereby, be paid for active hours served upon responding (with no additional shift-pay compensation). See [CP&P-II-D-2-300](#), Field Work Beyond End of SPRU Duty;
- Grant the request, and authorize SCR to re-assign the report/referral to a SPRU Worker serving on call the next shift/day. The SPRU Supervisor is required to make the call promptly to SCR to authorize the re-assignment; or
- Deny the request to postpone the response, and instruct the SPRU Worker to initiate a field response promptly.

For CP&P field response times, see [CP&P-II-C-2-300](#), Timeframes for Initial Response.