

Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit



Investigative Process

1. Allegation is reported (Originating from the Statewide Central Registry/Child Abuse Hotline: 1-877-652-2873)

- **Report to the SCR:** The process begins when a report is made to the hotline of suspected child abuse or neglect within an institutional setting, such as schools, day care centers, group homes, residential center, etc., involving a child, up to age 18. Everyone in New Jersey is a mandated reporter. This means anyone can call: concerned citizens, parents, teachers, medical professionals, or even the alleged victim.
- **SCR Assessment:** The SCR assigned screener, assesses the information provided in the report to determine if the information meets the criteria for an investigation. If the report involves alleged child abuse or neglect within the above-mentioned institution/facilities, it is identified as an IAIU investigation.
- **Referral to the IAIU:** The SCR then refers the report to one of the five IAIU regional offices, where the incident occurred. This referral includes all the details gathered during the initial report, ensuring that the IAIU has a comprehensive starting point.

2. Investigation by the IAIU

- **Case Assignment:** The IAIU regional office, where the intake is assigned, will be dispatched to conduct their investigation. The IAIU Investigators have specialized training in handling these types of investigations.
- **Thorough Investigation:** The IAIU Investigator conducts a thorough investigation, which involves, but is not limited to, the following:
 - **Referral for Criminal Investigation:** If the IAIU's investigation reveals any indication of potential criminal activity, the investigation is referred to law enforcement for further investigation and potential prosecution.
 - **Victim Interviews:** Interviewing the alleged victim(s), in a safe and age-appropriate manner. This would include parents/guardians as well. Our IAIU investigators are trained in the Finding Words/Child First modality.
 - **Witness Interviews:** Interviewing any witnesses to the alleged abuse or neglect, including but not limited to, other residents, staff members, students, and teachers.
 - **Staff Interviews:** Interviewing staff members of an institution, teachers at schools, administration, including those directly involved in the alleged incident and those in supervisory positions.



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2. Investigation by the IAIU (cont.)

- **Document Review:** Reviewing relevant documents, such as incident reports, medical records, treatment plans, video footage and any prior history of complaints or violations at said institution/facility/program under IAIU jurisdiction.
- **Site Visits:** Depending on the type of incident and where the investigation leads, the IAIU may conduct additional unannounced or announced site visits to the institution/facility/program to observe the environment, interview additional staff and review pertinent records.
- **Expert Consultation:** Consulting with experts, such as medical professionals, clinicians, or other specialists, including those within DCF, such as the Office of Licensing, Children's System of Care, Child Protection & Permanency, to gain insights into the specific allegations.

3. Findings and Notifications

- **Determination:** After completing the investigation, the IAIU investigator will make a determination as to whether the allegations of abuse or neglect are, **Substantiated or Established** (meaning there is a preponderance of evidence to support the allegations), **Not Established** (meaning there is not enough evidence to support the allegations; however concerns were identified with the identified caregiver or with the facility as a whole), or **Unfounded** (meaning the alleged incident did not occur).
- **Notification:** The IAIU will notify the following parties of its findings (please note that only findings are shared, not the investigation materials):
 - The alleged victim(s) and their parents/legal guardians.
 - The administration of the institution/facility/program where the alleged incident occurred or was involved with.
 - Law Enforcement, if the investigation involved criminal activity.
 - Other relevant agencies, such as NJEA attorneys (if incident involved a teacher), Office of Licensing and Children's System of Care (internal DCF divisions)



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4. Follow-up and Recommendations

- **Corrective Action:** The IAIU houses a Corrective Action Unit. If the allegations have either been confirmed and/or concerns have been found, the IAIU Corrective Action Unit, ensures that the institution takes the appropriate corrective action to address the identified issues to prevent future incidents. This may include:
 - The facility/program/institution implementing new policies and procedures to improve safety and supervision.
 - The facility/program/institution providing additional training to staff on child abuse prevention, reporting, and appropriate interactions with children and youth.
 - Terminating employees who are found to have engaged in abuse or neglect.
 - An increase in monitoring and oversight of the facility/program/institution.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** The IAIU may continue to monitor the institution to ensure that corrective actions are implemented and effective.

Important Considerations

- **Confidentiality:** The IAIU maintains confidentiality throughout the investigative process to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.
- **Timeliness:** The IAIU strives to complete its investigations in a timely manner, while ensuring thoroughness and objectivity. At times this timeliness is impacted when awaiting a criminal matter, receipt of medical records, or unavailability of required interviewees.
- **Collaboration:** The IAIU often collaborates with other agencies such as law enforcement and Department of Education as well as, DCF's Office of Licensing, CP&P and CSOC, to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive response to allegations of child abuse and neglect in out of home settings.

The IAIU's investigative process is designed to protect children and youth in out of home settings from abuse and neglect. By thoroughly investigating allegations and holding institutions accountable, the IAIU plays a vital role in ensuring the safety and health of at-risk children and youth.

