



# Collaborative Quality Improvement

Division of Child Protection & Permanency

## 2024 BRIEF #1: QUALITY OF CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATIONS

### Overview

The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P) is New Jersey's child protection and child welfare agency within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF's vision is to assist all New Jersey residents to be safe, healthy, and connected. DCP&P is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranging for the child's protection and connecting families to appropriate services and supports.

DCF's State Central Registry (SCR) receives and processes child protective service (CPS) and child welfare service (CWS) referrals from the public, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.<sup>i</sup> CWS referrals consist of specific concerns for a child's welfare when there is no specific concern regarding abuse or neglect. While these referrals generate a field response for assessment and service provision, they do not result in an investigation. CPS reports, on the other hand, include specific allegations of child abuse or neglect, which result in an investigation that results in a formal finding. This investigation review focuses on CPS reports.

<sup>i</sup>**Safety Assessments** are decision making tools used to determine whether a child is likely to be in immediate or imminent danger of serious harm that requires immediate safety intervention. They are also used to determine what safety intervention needs to be implemented or maintained to provide appropriate protection if needed. Safety assessments are completed at the first face-to-face contact following a report of child abuse/neglect, before closing a case, and under circumstances where new information changes the threats to safety or safety decision [see: [CPP-III-B-6-600.pdf](#)].

Each referral of child abuse or neglect is assigned to highly trained DCP&P intake staff to conduct a rigorous investigation, which includes safety and risk assessments to determine if a child has been abused and/or neglected or is at risk of abuse or neglect.<sup>1</sup> Upon conclusion of the investigation, intake staff determine whether to open or close the DCP&P case for the family based upon safety and levels of risk to the child(ren) and/or the service needs of the family.<sup>ii, iii, iv</sup>

The investigation review is conducted biennially, and findings in this brief aim to build on the findings from the 2022 review. For a more detailed description of the CP&P investigation process and practice indicators, please see the [2023 Investigations Brief](#).

**Risk Assessments** are decision making tools that determine the likelihood of future maltreatment within the next 18-24 months. The assessment is required to be completed for all families for which a child abuse or neglect investigation has been initiated. The risk assessment guides the decision of whether to close a case after investigation or transfer a case to ongoing intervention based on the family's assessed risk level; it also guides minimum monthly visitation requirements (MVR) with caregivers and children receiving ongoing services. Risk re-assessments are completed three months after transfer to ongoing services, every three months thereafter, and within 30 days prior to case closure [see: [CPP-III-B-6-600.pdf](#)].

### KEY FINDINGS

This review found that **investigation practice was strong in 81% of cases.**

This represents an average rating of various aspects of the process, including caseworker/supervisor conferencing, response timeliness, interviewing, assessment, collection and integration of collateral information, and investigation timeliness.

- **Areas of Strength:** [Investigation Response Time, Interviewing Practice, and Quality of Safety Assessments](#)
- **Areas for Improvement:** [Quality of Pre- and Post-Investigation Conferences, Quality of Risk Assessments, and Use of Collaterals](#)

## Areas of Strength

Key areas of strength in the current review are consistent with the strengths observed in the 2022 review.

### RESPONSE TIMES AND INTERVIEWS:

Response timeliness was met in 93% of cases. This indicator decreased slightly by 4-points from 2022, but this area of practice remains strong overall. Among applicable investigations, all mothers (98%), fathers (83%), and caregivers (85%) were interviewed; these results were relatively unchanged from 2022. Additionally, in 93% of cases, all child victims were contacted within the assigned response time, and in 91% of cases, all child victims were interviewed apart from the alleged perpetrator.

### SAFETY ASSESSMENT:

Investigations were completed within 60 days in 86% of cases, and investigations were completed with an extension in 89% of cases. An investigation may be extended for reasons like needing information from a county prosecutor, law enforcement, or court; requiring collateral information such as a diagnosis or medical report; waiting for an autopsy report; or other extremely unusual circumstances, such as ongoing searches for a missing family in accordance with policy.<sup>v</sup> This indicator decreased slightly by 3-points from 2022, but this area of practice remains strong overall.

### INVESTIGATION COMPLETION:

Safety assessments were consistent with the information in the case record in 91% of cases; this score is similar to 2022.





# Areas of Focus

This review found that past challenges observed in the 2022 review still remain, but positive progress was made in most areas.

## QUALITY OF SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES:

While worker-supervisor conferences are held and documented, the quality of the pre and post investigation conferences remain areas of focus. In 77% of cases, there was evidence in documentation that pre-investigation conferences were of high quality, and in 73% of cases, there was documentation of high quality post-investigation conferences. Documentation relevant to this measure includes documentation that supervisors and workers discussed directions, guidance, or tasks that were case-specific to support the overall investigation. While these remain areas for focus, there was a **1-point** improvement in pre-investigation conference quality and a **7-point** improvement in post-investigation conference quality compared to the 2022 review.

## QUALITY OF RISK ASSESSMENTS:

Risk Assessments were consistent with the information in the case record and included all risk factors present in the family situation in 66% of cases. While this practice remains a focus going forward, 66% represents a **7-point** improvement from 2022.

## COLLATERAL INFORMATION SECURED:

In 60% of investigations, the necessary and relevant collateral information was gathered and documented in the record. This represents a **3-point** improvement from 2022. There was a slight decline in performance in the integration of collateral information. When collateral information was gathered, it was integrated in 78% of cases, a **2-point decline** from the prior year.



# SUMMARY

This review found considerable strengths in the areas of response timeliness, family interviews, and the quality of safety assessments. Over 80% of cases had strong investigative practice present in these areas, and they remained strong from last year. This review also found some areas for focus. While these challenges were also identified in the prior year, there was improvement in the quality of worker-supervisor conferencing, and the quality of risk assessments.

## Investigation Review Activities

DCF conducts a review of a statistically significant (95% confidence) and representative random sample of investigation practice during a two-week period of time, biennially. The review for 2024 was completed the week of February 26, 2024, during which a total of **353** investigations were reviewed. The sample included 15% of the 2,321 investigations received between 2/1/2023 and 2/14/2023. Information about the total number of investigation referrals and findings is available via the Child Welfare Data Hub.<sup>vi</sup>

The assessment of the overall quality of investigations included a review of the response timeliness, quality of responses related to the allegations, pre- and post-supervisory conference completion and quality, and documentation and assessment supporting the overall investigation findings. This biennial review provides DCF the opportunity to identify and analyze strengths, areas for improvement, and to inform DCF's ongoing Collaborative Quality Improvement (CoQI) efforts.

**Please note:** the scores in this brief represent a frequency of the practice among the cases reviewed and not a quality score. For example, safety assessments were consistent with the information gathered in 320 or 91% of reviewed cases. The overall quality of investigations score (81%) represents an average of scores across the key practice indicators mentioned above.



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## REFERENCES

- i. [https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/\\_CPP-II-A-1-100.pdf](https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/_CPP-II-A-1-100.pdf)
- ii. [https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/\\_CPP-III-C-5-400.pdf](https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/_CPP-III-C-5-400.pdf)
- iii. [https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/\\_CPP-II-C-2-300.pdf](https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/_CPP-II-C-2-300.pdf)
- iv. [https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/\\_CPP-II-C-6-400.pdf](https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/_CPP-II-C-6-400.pdf)
- v. [https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/\\_CPP-II-C-5-125.pdf](https://dcfpolicy.nj.gov/api/policy/download/_CPP-II-C-5-125.pdf)
- vi. <https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal/all-cps-cws-referrals>

### *Images:*

Photo by Thirdman from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-in-black-suit-jacket-sitting-beside-table-with-macbook-pro-5060979/>

Photo by Christina Morillo from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/women-colleagues-gathered-inside-conference-room-1181622/>

Photo by Leeloo The First: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/magnifying-glass-on-clipboard-5561909/>



# Next Steps

Considering these results, CP&P has developed targeted strategies aimed at investigative supervisory conferences, the quality of risk assessments, and the collection of collateral information:

## STRENGTHENING SUPERVISORY CONFERENCES:

Throughout the 2024-25 CoQI cycle, CP&P local offices have developed strategies to enhance supervisory practice based on their office's unique needs. Some offices have developed **monthly scheduling plans** to promote preparedness. Other offices have created **revised conferencing guides**, which list the expectations to discuss safety and risk assessments, evidence collection during the investigation, and service planning. CP&P local offices aim to focus on documentation around conferencing by **protecting time** to ensure staff can focus on entering conference notes without interruption.

Some offices have also created a process for higher level supervisors to **review conferencing documentation** on a regular basis to ensure that guidance is followed. These supervisors will regularly provide feedback for staff to improve quality and consistency. Additionally, CP&P is **exploring technological solutions** to assist all staff in compiling comprehensive family histories to support effective conferencing. This approach aims to create a more efficient way for supervisory staff to review case history and integrate it into investigative work and case planning.

## ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF RISK ASSESSMENT:

In April 2025, CP&P conducted a **supplemental case record review**, which provided additional information and context about issues impacting the quality of assessments, specifically. This additional review found that family characteristics, information about the current investigation, and prior history with CP&P were being captured inaccurately, at times. The review also found that staff were not consistent in their assessments of secondary households and households with multiple caregivers.

CP&P is developing a **webinar** for all CP&P intake workers and supervisors to address common issues and areas of confusion. CP&P will use the supplemental record review findings to develop additional tasks for all local offices that include strategies to focus on practice related to the quality of risk assessments and supervisory oversight of these assessments. Once finalized, the tasks will be included in local offices' CoQI improvement plans.

## IMPROVING THE COLLECTION OF COLLATERAL INFORMATION:

To reduce inconsistencies in the collection and documentation of collateral information, CP&P is developing an **investigative template** for staff. This template will require staff to collect and document detailed information from required collateral sources, such as medical and educational providers, as well as other sources, if applicable, like law enforcement. This template aims to provide a consistent, structured format that aligns with best practice and policy.

Additionally, CP&P will develop a **guidance document** for supervisors describing how caseworkers should document collateral contacts in the case record, including summaries of the information gathered, how it was discussed with the family, and how it was considered in decision-making. Supervisors will allocate time to review collateral information and assess its implications on child safety and family functioning during conferences.



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