

# ACS GUIDANCE FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE WORK WITH DHS SITE STAFF

While this guidance will help us meet the needs of families in shelter, it does not supersede the requirements of shelter staff as mandated reporters. If you need to call a report into the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment, please call **1-800-635-1522**.

## I. ROLE OF CHILD PROTECTIVE SPECIALISTS (CPS)

- CPS are charged with investigating alleged cases of child abuse or maltreatment and determining the level of safety and risk for the child.
- The steps taken during the first 24 hours of a CPS investigation may differ depending upon the allegations contained in the report, the information found in the record review, and the information received from the initial contact(s). The initial contact is the first contact that the CPS has with the family.
- The initial contact(s) must be sufficient to determine whether the child may be in immediate danger of serious harm.

## II. CPS USE OF TECHNOLOGY DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

- CPS are encouraged to utilize alternative technologies when safe to do so.
- There are many ways a CPS, in consultation with their supervisor,

can assess child safety. CPS are always encouraged to utilize a variety of tools which may enable the CPS, when appropriate, to remotely assess the safety and risk posed to a child. These may include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- ✓ Initiating contact by calling the family before going to the home;
- ✓ Use of Skype, Facetime, videoconferencing or other technological means when feasible; or
- ✓ Interviewing subjects, including children, in alternate locations that are not at the home.

## III. HOW CPS WORK WITH FAMILIES IN SHELTER

- If a family resides in a shelter, CPS will contact the shelter program director, manager, or social worker to obtain information about that child's wellbeing to help determine if the telephone and/or video contact is sufficient to assess safety, or if a face to face contact is required. Whenever feasible, and when a family has access to the appropriate technology, CPS will proceed with a video contact.

- We may ask when the child was last seen, if there are any visible marks/bruises on the child, what concerns if any, staff have about the parent, if there are concerns regarding the parent/caretaker interaction with the child, and if there are other people that CPS can talk with to ascertain the child's wellbeing.
- We understand that the mandate to assess a child's safety is not one that DHS Shelter staff are responsible for, but site staff can coordinate with ACS to assist families in maintaining stability during the COVID-19 crisis as outlined below.

## IV. HOW ACS-CONTRACTED PREVENTION PROVIDER AGENCIES ARE WORKING WITH FAMILIES IN SHELTERS THROUGH COVID-19

- If a family residing in a shelter is currently served by an ACS-contracted prevention services agency or if a family is newly referred to a prevention services agency, the agency will seek to engage the family for casework contacts in order to ensure children are safe and the family continues receiving the case planning and/or therapeutic interventions they need.

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- Per ACS guidance, during this time, most casework contacts are being done virtually through video-conferencing or phone calls. CPS will not make face to face contact on all high-risk cases; they will assess all of the information obtained from the DHS resources as well as others to make that decision.
- In high-risk cases in which a face-to-face visit is needed, ACS-contracted staff may seek to meet families outside of the shelter space for a visit, following appropriate pre-screening for COVID-19 symptoms and adhering to advised social distancing. Pre-screening will be conducted by ACS staff who make direct contact with the family.
- See ACS COVID-19 Provider Service Materials <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/acs/about/covid19.page>

## V. HOW DHS SHELTER PROVIDERS CAN HELP

- The goal of reducing stress on families, providing support, and helping them stabilize is even more important given the COVID-19 crisis. For example, ACS may be able to help a family by providing needed supplies, such as clothing vouchers. You can help us by letting us know if you become aware of these sorts of needs.
- For families receiving child protection services, prevention services, or foster care, shelter staff can help by providing private spaces for these contacts and helping ensure families have access to appropriate technology for video or telephonic communication with CPS workers and case planners, when possible. If shelter providers have any concerns, they should reach out to their program administrators, who can then reach out to the corresponding ACS liaison pursuant to the ACS/DHS MOU.

- If DHS shelter providers do not know if a case is active with ACS, they should review CARES first and if further information is needed, review the escalation protocol referenced above. ACS will support you in getting the contact information for the CPS or case planner handling the case.
- You can contact the CPS directly. All CPS have smartphones and can receive emails and phone calls about families.
- You can also utilize the office of Safety First, Call **718-KID-SAFE (718) 543-7233** Monday-Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm.

**This is a trying time for us all and everyday will bring new challenges. However, we have the advantage of the established partnership that we have built over the years working together and our agencies will be stronger after the COVID-19 crisis resulting from our efforts for families and children.**