

EMERGENCY GUIDELINES

Identifying Caregivers for Children Unaccompanied and/or Unsupervised Due to the Hospitalization of their Primary Caregiver

During the current public health emergency, if hospital social work staff identify that a child or children are unaccompanied and unsupervised because of the hospitalization of an adult caregiver, immediate steps should be taken to identify potential caregivers for the children. In this circumstance, hospital social work staff should only initiate a call to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (the SCR) after all reasonable efforts to identify appropriate temporary caregivers are completed. The SCR must be called if there is reasonable cause to suspect a child has been abused or maltreated. If you must call the SCR because you are unable to identify an appropriate caregiver for a child, please refer to column three.

The following guidance applies to social work staff working with patients admitted or about to be admitted to the hospital in either of the following circumstances:

- A patient has children with them in the hospital (in waiting room or elsewhere); and/or
- A patient reports that a child is or will be unattended at home and their safety may be at risk if they remain unsupervised due to their age, developmental stage or other known or suspected risk factors.

Parents and children should be asked for the names and contact information of other parents, relatives and other known adults (including but not limited to grandparents, uncles/aunts, neighbors and/or family friends) who may be available to temporarily care for the children, and whether or not such plans have already been discussed with the identified adult(s).

- If the parent is unable to contact the person(s) themselves, the hospital social worker should reach out on the parent's behalf to request the person's assistance, sharing details about the location of the children. If the children are exhibiting symptoms consistent with COVID-19, or have been diagnosed with COVID-19, the person should also be asked about their ability to quarantine or isolate the children in their home.

If the parent and children are unable to provide the names or contact information for anyone able to provide temporary care and supervision of the child(ren), hospital social workers should contact the following:

- If the family resides in a New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS)-operated family shelter, the hospital social worker should ask the parent for contact information for the shelter director or social worker, and contact them to inquire about emergency contacts or contact information for other family members. If the family resides in a DHS-operated family shelter but does not know the contact information for their shelter director, the hospital social worker can contact the Hospital Hotline at **(212) 361-5590** or April Samuel, **(212) 607-5143**.

If one or more of the children is a New York City public schools student, contact Sara Shumway, Executive Director of Student Information Systems for the NYC Department of Education at (347) 459-2646. If the hospital identifies a willing adult caregiver to provide temporary care and supervision to the child(ren), the hospital may ask the parent to sign a Designation of Person in Parental Relationship attestation (form OCFS-4940).¹

Contacting the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR)

Making a report to the SCR about children whose caregivers are hospitalized due to COVID-19 should be the last resort, after reasonable efforts to identify an alternative option have been unsuccessful. If the hospital social worker has not been able to identify an adult able to care for the child(ren), the social worker should:

- Contact the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) at **(800) 635-1522** to report reasonable suspicion that a child is at risk of abuse or maltreatment due to lack of supervision, given the parent's current circumstances. If for some reason the SCR staff person hesitates or declines to take the report, ask to speak to a supervisor and fully explain the situation. Following such a report, a Child Protective Specialist (CPS) from the ACS Division of Child Protection will contact the social worker to discuss the family's circumstances.

Hospital social workers may be asked to provide the responding CPS with the details of any medical tests conducted if children were with their caregiver at the hospital, particularly as such details can help expedite an appropriate and safe placement.

¹ Available at the following link: <https://ocfs.ny.gov/main/documents/docs.asp?doc=4940>