



December 22, 2020

## Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal No. 2020-10

**To:** County Departments of Family and Children Services  
DFCS District Directors  
DFCS Regional Directors  
State Office Staff

**From:** Tom C. Rawlings, Division Director   
Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

**Re:** Child Welfare Policy Manual: Notification of Investigation Outcome; Administrative Reviews; Contact with Reporters; Child Death Near Fatality Serious Injury Reports

### Purpose

The purpose of this Child Welfare Services Manual Transmittal (CWSMT) is to announce updates to the Child Welfare Policy Manual, which includes:

1. Changes to the process for notification of substantiated findings to substantiated maltreaters and Child Protective Services Administrative Reviews resulting from the repeal of Child Protective Services Information System (CPSIS), also known as the child abuse registry.

**NOTE:** This update discontinues the Child Welfare Services County letter (CWSCL) 2020-01: Repeal of Child Protective Services Information System (CPSIS) (2020 Legislative Update).

2. Updates the provision for contact with the reporter during the Initial Safety Assessment (ISA), Investigation (INV), Special Investigation (SI) and Family Support Services (FSS) based on the need for clarification or additional information.
3. Eliminates the provision for completing the Child Death Near Fatality Serious Injury Report on screen-out and screen-out and refer intake reports.
4. Changes to the agencies notified for cases involving sex trafficking/sexual servitude.

### Discussion

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency, and wellbeing of children served. DFCS recognizes that sound policies, guided by federal and state laws and rooted in best practice, support the framework for providing effective child welfare services. To that end, DFCS continually reviews and makes responsive changes to the Child Welfare Policy Manual to assure continued alignment with federal and state laws, organizational changes, and shifts in

best practice and socio-cultural factors affecting children and families served. The following highlights the policy changes:

### **Chapter 3: Intake**

#### **3.2 Making an Intake Decision**

1. Removes the Practice Guidance section “Screen-Out Refer” as the information is included in policy section 3.26 Intake: Screen-out Refer Process.
2. Removes from Forms and Tools the “Maltreatment Allegations Track Assignment and Quick Reference Guide.”

#### **3.9 Intakes Involving Sex Trafficking/Sexual Servitude**

1. Removes the requirement to notify the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) of intake reports of known or suspected victims of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
2. Changes the requirement from notifying Georgia Cares to notifying Children’s Advocacy Centers of Georgia (CACGA) for intake reports of known or suspected victims of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
3. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

#### **3.17 Intakes Involving Child Death, Near Fatality, or Serious Injury (CD/NF/SI)**

1. Adds a requirement for Child Protection Services (CPS) Intake Communication Center (CICC) to notify the Knowledge Management CD/NF/SI Review Team of screen-out or screen-out and refer Intake Assessments involving CD/NF/SI.
2. Enhances the requirement to conduct a second level review on screen-out Intake Assessments involving CD/NF/SI within 24 hours.
3. Adds procedures and Practice Guidance for classifying a screen-out as a Special Circumstance: CD/NF/SI-no maltreatment in Georgia SHINES.
4. Updates procedures for screen-out and refer CD/NF/SI Intake Assessments, including when to provide a referral.
5. Adds procedures for the Social Services Administrator’s oversight of the second level screen-out review and approval process.

#### **3.26 Screen-Out Refer Process**

1. Changes the title of the policy from “Second Level Screen-Out Review and Approval process” to “Screen-Out Refer Process.”
2. Changes the focus of the policy to the screen-out and refer process. Removed information related to second level screen-out review as it is applicable only to CD/NF/SI and the information is now captured in policy 3.17 Intake: Intakes Involving Child Death, Near Fatality, or Serious Injury (CD/NF/SI).
3. Requires assigning screen-out and refer Intake Assessments to the County Department to initiate a referral to early intervention or prevention services.
4. Emphasizes collaborating with the family to identify resources and prioritizing telephone communication.
5. Adds Practice Guidance for Prevention Services and Early Intervention Services.

### 3.27 Administrative Opening

1. Removes a note referencing the second level screen-out and review and approval process.

## **Chapter 4: Initial Safety Assessment**

### **4.0 Introduction to Initial Safety Assessment**

1. Adds to Codes/References
  - a. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records
  - b. Final Notice of Statewide Data Indicators and National Standards for Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)
  - c. National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Agency File and Child Codebooks
2. Adds the definition for “initiation” as making or attempting to make contact with the family or contact with another person (including the reporter) who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.  
**EXCEPTION:** CICC contacting the reporter during the intake assessment process or contacting a person to determine the location of the alleged maltreated child or the family does not constitute initiation of the assessment.
3. Adds the definition of “response time” as the date and time from the receipt of an intake report to the time of making face-to-face contact with the alleged victim child(ren). Receipt of an intake report means the date and time a report alleging child abuse is received by DFCS from a reporter.
4. Adds the definition of “parent” to denote that the term used throughout the policy refers to person(s) legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child including his/her parent, guardian, or legal custodian.

### **4.1 Preparing for the Initial Safety Assessment**

1. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
2. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
3. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
4. Removes Practice Guidance for Military Installations and Family Advocacy Programs and refers to policy section 3.25 Intake: Sharing Intake Reports with Law Enforcement, District Attorney or Military for guidance.
5. Adds Practice Guidance on:
  - a. Child Abuse Protocol
  - b. Joint Investigations with Law Enforcement
  - c. Requests by Law Enforcement to Refrain or Delay Interviewing Alleged Maltreaters
6. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

## 4.2 Conducting the Initial Safety Assessment

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol.

## Chapter 5: Investigations

### 5.0 Introduction to Investigations

1. Adds to Codes/References
  - a. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records
  - b. Final Notice of Statewide Data Indicators and National Standards for Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)
  - c. National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) Agency File and Child Codebooks
2. Adds the definition for “initiation” as making or attempting to make contact with the family or contact with another person (including the reporter) who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.  
**EXCEPTION:** CICC contacting the reporter during the intake assessment process or contacting a person to determine the location of the alleged maltreated child or the family does not constitute initiation of the assessment.
3. Adds the definition of “parent” to denote that the term used throughout the policy refers to person(s) legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child including his/her parent, guardian, or legal custodian.

### 5.1 Conducting an Investigation

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
5. Removes Practice Guidance concerning Military Installations and Family Advocacy Programs and refers to policy section 3.25 Intake: Sharing Intake Reports with Law Enforcement, District Attorney or Military for additional guidance.
8. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
9. Adds a requirement to engage any child in the legal custody of the parent(s) in a face-to-face purposeful contact who do not reside in the home concerning child safety and family functioning.
10. Adds Practice Guidance on Requests by Law Enforcement to Refrain or Delay Interviewing Alleged Maltreaters.
11. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### 5.3 Making an Investigation Determination

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes from Forms and Tools the “Child Abuse Registry Handout: Road Map to Substantiated Abuse”.

### 5.4 Notifications in Investigations

1. Changes the title of the policy from “Notification of Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation Outcome” to “Notifications in Investigations”.
2. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
3. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
4. Adds a requirement for written notification of the investigation outcome to the substantiated maltreater to be completed by the State Office Investigation Outcome Notification System (IONS).  
**EXCEPTION:** The County Department will continue to send the notification of investigation outcome to minors named as the alleged or substantiated maltreater.
5. Updates requirements for notification of investigation outcomes for minor’s named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater to specify that:
  - a. The parent of a minor named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater should not receive the notification of investigation outcome when the alleged victim child is the minor’s biological child.
  - b. The parent of a minor named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater should receive the notification of investigation outcome when the alleged victim child is not the minor’s biological child.
6. Updates the Forms and Tools, revises “Notification of CPS Investigation Outcome to a Minor.”

### 5.5 Child Protective Services Administrative Reviews

1. Provides the Requestor the option to have a face-to-face 1<sup>st</sup> level administrative review. The review must be completed within 60 business days of the receipt of the request.
2. Updates the three-tiered administrative review process:
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> level – conducted by the Regional Director (RD)/Designee
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> level - conducted by the State Office Administrative Review Team (ART)
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup> level - conducted by the DFCS Division Director or Designee
4. Provides the Requestor 45 calendar days from the receipt of the Notice of Child Protective Services Investigation Substantiation to request an administrative review.
5. Modifies the administrative review process to automatically initiate a 3<sup>rd</sup> level review by the Division Director upon the completion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level review by the ART.

6. Modifies timeframes for the Division Director to complete the 3<sup>rd</sup> level review from 30 business days to 45 business days of receipt of the 3<sup>rd</sup> level review notification from the ART.
6. Modifies the reasons for denying a request for an administrative review.
7. Adds procedures for acknowledging the receipt of the request for an administrative review with the Requestor.
9. Updates the individuals/entities that receive a copy of the administrative review correspondence with the Requestor.
10. Updates Practice Guidance on:
  - a. The administrative review process;
  - b. Review Options When no Case Record is Available
  - c. Instructions for a Requestor seeking a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Level administrative review; and
  - d. The definition for a “desk review” and “face-to-face review”.
11. Updates Forms and Tools:
  - a. Revises Child Protective Services (CPS) Administrative Review Decision Letter
  - b. Revises Guide to Child Protective Services (CPS) Administrative Review
  - c. Revises Request for 1<sup>st</sup> Level Child Protective Services (CPS) Administrative Review
  - d. Revises Request for 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Child Protective Services (CPS) Administrative Review

## **Chapter 6: Special Investigation**

### **6.0 Introduction to Special Investigations**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Adds the definition for “initiation” as making or attempting to make contact with the family or contact with another person (including the reporter) who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.  
**EXCEPTION:** CICC contacting the reporter during the intake assessment process or contacting a person to determine the location of the alleged maltreated child or the family does not constitute initiation of the assessment.
3. Adds the definition of “response time” as the date and time from the receipt of an intake report to the time of making face-to-face contact with the alleged victim child(ren). Receipt of an intake report means the date and time a report alleging child abuse is received by DFCS from a reporter.
4. Adds the definition of “parent” to denote that the term used throughout the policy refers to person(s) legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child including his/her parent, guardian, or legal custodian.
5. Adds the definition of “caregiver” to denote that the term used throughout the policy refers to:
  - a. Any person providing a residence for a child
  - b. Any person legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child
  - c. Other adults that continually or at regular intervals live in the home
  - d. A foster parent
  - e. A foster care kinship caregiver



- f. An employee of a public or private residential facility, childcare institution, daycare/childcare facility; or school personnel.

### **6.1 Preparing for Special Investigations**

1. Removes Practice Guidance concerning Military Installations and Family Advocacy Programs and refers to policy section 3.25 Intake: Sharing Intake Reports with Law Enforcement, District Attorney or Military for additional guidance.
2. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **6.3 Conducting Special Investigations on DFCS or Child Placing Agency Foster or Adoptive Homes**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
5. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
6. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **6.4 Conducting Special Investigations on Kinship Foster Care Placements**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
5. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
6. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **6.5 Conducting Special Investigations on Residential or Non-Residential Facilities**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.

5. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
6. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **6.6 Conducting Special Investigations on Public or Private Non-Residential Schools**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.
5. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
6. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **6.7 Conducting Special Investigations of Child Death, Near Fatality, or Serious Injury (CD/NF/SI)**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Changes the requirements from completing the Child Death Near Fatality Serious Injury Report on every case that is reported to DFCS involving a CD/NF/SI to completing the report for special investigations involving a CD/NF/SI.
3. Adds Practice Guidance on How to Determine a Near Fatality.

### **6.8 Making a Special Investigation Determination**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes from Forms and Tools the “Child Abuse Registry Handout: Road Map to Substantiated Abuse”.

### **6.9 Notifications in Special Investigations**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Removes requirements and procedures related to the CPSIS, also known as the child abuse registry.
3. Adds a requirement for the written notification of the investigation outcome to the substantiated maltreater to be completed by IONS.  
**EXCEPTION:** The County Department will continue to send the notification of investigation outcome to minors named as the alleged or substantiated maltreater.
4. Updates requirements for notification of investigation outcomes for minor’s named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater to specify that:
  - a. The parent of a minor named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater should



- not receive the notification of investigation outcome when the alleged victim child is the minor's biological child.
- b. The parent of a minor named as an alleged or substantiated maltreater should receive the notification of investigation outcome when the alleged victim child is not the minor's biological child.
5. Updates the Forms and Tools, revises "Notification of CPS Investigation Outcome to a Minor."

### **6.10 Reporting of a Child Death, Near Fatality, or Serious Injury (CDNFSI)**

1. Removes the requirement to complete the Child Death Near Fatality or Serious Injury Report on screen-out and screen-out and refer CD/NF/SI Intake Reports.
2. Adds a requirement for CICC to notify the Knowledge Management CD/NF/SI Review Team of screen-out or screen-out and refer Intake Assessments involving CD/NF/SI.
3. Adds Practice Guidance on How to Determine a Near Fatality.

## **Chapter 7: Family Support Services**

### **7.0 Introduction to Family Support Services**

1. Adds to Codes/References:
  - a. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records
  - b. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-41 Persons and Agencies Permitted to Access Records
  - c. O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-12 Definitions, and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)
2. Adds the definition for "initiation" as making or attempting to make contact with the family or contact with another person (including the reporter) who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.  
**EXCEPTION:** CICC contacting the reporter during the intake assessment process or contacting a person to determine the location of the alleged maltreated child or the family does not constitute initiation of the assessment.
3. Adds the definition of "parent" to denote that the term used throughout the policy refers to person(s) legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child including his/her parent, guardian, or legal custodian.

### **7.1 Conducting Family Support Services Assessments**

1. Adds to Codes/References
  - a. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records
  - b. O.C.G.A. § 49-5-41 Persons and Agencies Permitted to Access Records
2. Removes the requirement to contact the reporter.
3. Adds a procedure to contact the reporter, if known, when clarification or additional information related to child safety and/or allegations of maltreatment is needed.
4. Changes the requirement from notifying the GBI to notifying law enforcement when a child is known or suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude.

5. Adds a requirement to engage any child in the legal custody of the parent(s) in a face-to-face purposeful contact who do not reside in the home concerning child safety and family functioning.
6. Removes Practice Guidance concerning Military Installations and Family Advocacy Programs and refers to policy section 3.25 Intake: Sharing Intake Reports with Law Enforcement, District Attorney or Military for additional guidance.
7. Incorporates requirements and procedures from the discontinued policy section 7.5 Family Support Services: Case Closure regarding:
  - a. Stage progressing the FSS case to INV in Georgia SHINES when present or impending danger is identified.
  - b. Providing written notifications of FSS outcome and supervisor oversight.
8. Updates Forms and Tools:
  - a. Revises and renames the “Notification of Child Protection Services (CPS) Family Support Services Outcome” to “Notification of Family Support Services Assessment Closure”.
  - b. Revises the Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol.

### **7.3 Making a Family Support Services Determination**

1. Adds to Codes/References O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40 Definitions; Confidentiality of Records; Restricted Access to Records.
2. Incorporates requirements and procedures from policy section 7.5 Family Support Services: Case Closure regarding progressing the FSS case to INV in Georgia SHINES when present or impending danger is identified.
3. Adds Practice Guidance on Resolving Discrepancies or Conflicting Information.

### **7.4 Agreement Strategy**

1. Clarifies requirements to reflect that the agreement strategy is developed with the family to address developmental challenges that impacts family functioning and/or well-being.
2. Add procedures for supervisor oversight of the development and monitoring of the Agreement Strategy.

### **7.5 Family Support Services Case Closure**

1. This section is being discontinued. Requirements and procedures were incorporated into policy sections 7.1 Family Support Services: Conducting Family Support Services Assessments and 7.3 Family Support Services: Making a Family Support Services Determination.

## **Chapter 19: Case Management**

### **19.22 Missing Children**

1. Removes procedure that previously directed staff to contact the GBI if a previously missing child is believed to have been a victim of sex trafficking/sexual servitude. Law enforcement should still be contacted on these cases. Refers to the Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol for additional guidance.
2. Adds the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Georgia to the list of resources in Practice Guidance.

3. Updates Forms and Tools, revises the “Human Trafficking Case Management Statewide Protocol”.

### **Policy Maintenance Updates**

#### **12.3 Adoption Assistance - Specialized Rate**

1. Updates terminology from Placement Resource Operations Unit to Care Coordination Treatment Unit (CCTU).

#### **12.12 Adoption Assistance Medicaid**

1. Updates form name from Annual Medicaid Redetermination/Information Update to Adoption Assistance Annual Information Update.

#### **22.8 Financial and Non-Financial Supports for Children in Foster Care or Who Have Achieved Permanency**

1. Updates Practice Guidance for Clothing Allowance to clarify that children in foster care are eligible to receive clothing initial or annual clothing allowance as outlined in the COSTAR Manual.

### **Implementation**

This policy update is effective upon the release of this manual transmittal and is available on the Online Directives Information System (ODIS) at <http://odis.dhs.ga.gov/>.

Regional and County Leadership shall provide opportunities for staff to review and discuss the updated policy to ensure implementation. Please refer to policy [1.3 Administration Access, Distribution and Review of Child Welfare Policies](#) for the applicable requirements and procedures for policy review.

Please direct questions regarding this policy release to the Field Program Specialist in your region. Regional staff shall submit questions to the Policy and Regulations Unit at [PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:PPPDUnit@dhs.ga.gov).