



## Integrated Casework Practice Model

### A New Approach to Working with Families

The Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF), is the state agency responsible for protecting children from abuse and neglect. DCF assesses families' strengths and needs, and works to obtain appropriate services and resources for their needs.

Driven by new research on best practices in child welfare, and in response to sweeping new state and federal legislative mandates, DCF is currently in the process of implementing a new, strength-based approach to working with families: the "Integrated Casework Practice Model."

The Integrated Casework Practice Model is designed to:

- Stabilize families so that children can safely remain at home;
- Reduce repeat maltreatment of children; and
- Effectively target DCF resources to meet the needs of families requiring DCF services.

### What is DCF's Integrated Casework Practice Model?

The DCF Integrated Casework Practice Model (ICPM) establishes the framework, structures and processes, expected outcomes, and underlying core values for DCF's involvement with children and families. Through the ICPM, DCF's involvement with children and families focuses on families' strengths, and seeks to build parenting capacities that will support safe, secure, and permanent homes. The new approach also ensures consistency in casework practice and provides opportunities for children, families and their support systems to be actively engaged and empowered in decision-making.

Key features of the casework practice model include:

- **Extended timeframes for screening and investigations** to allow greater opportunity to gather information about a family's circumstances and determine how best to target DCF resources;
- **Differential Response** to enable DCF to respond to allegations of child abuse and/or neglect based on the unique circumstances of a case and the individual needs/strengths of a family. *This includes two tracks: Investigation or Assessment*, depending on the severity of the allegation.
- Use of new **research based assessment and planning tools** to support consistent clinical practice in assessing danger, safety and risk; and to focus on what families need to keep children safe; and
- Connections to **supports and resources within the child and family's own community** first.

### What does the ICPM mean for Mandated Reporters?

No change has been made to the requirements for mandated reporters. Mandated reporters continue to be required to contact and work with DCF when they have concerns that a child has been abused or neglected. Through the new model, DCF expects that the safety of children will be improved as the Department, families, mandated reporters and the community work in collaboration to protect children and to strengthen families. DCF continues to be committed to ensuring timely and ongoing communication with collaterals, including mandated reporters. For more information on reporting child abuse and/or neglect, please visit: [www.mass.gov/dcf](http://www.mass.gov/dcf).

#### DCF Core Values

- Child-Driven
- Family Centered
- Strength-Based
- Community Connected
- Committed to Cultural competence and Diversity
- Committed to Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement

#### DCF Priorities

- Safely stabilizing and preserving families
- Safely reunifying families;
- Safely creating new families

“DCF’s new approach involves engaging families in an equitable and family-friendly manner. The nature of this practice improves the relationship between families and DCF because it is what we both want and what needs to happen.”

Lori Fortin, Former  
Consumer and  
Current Member, DCF  
Family Advisory  
Committee

For more information  
or to report a suspected  
case of Abuse and/or  
Neglect, visit:  
[www.mass.gov/dcf](http://www.mass.gov/dcf)  
for general information  
or to find a DCF Area  
Office

**Child-At-Risk-Hotline:**  
1-800-792-5200

**DCF OMBUDSMAN:**  
617-748-2444,  
9 am – 5 pm, weekdays  
for inquiries about  
agency programs,  
policies or service  
delivery.

## What Happens When DCF Receives a Report of Child Abuse and/or Neglect?

DCF may receive a report of abuse and/or neglect, called a “51A report,” from a “mandated reporter” or another concerned citizen involved in the child/family’s life. Under DCF’s new model, a report of abuse and/or neglect may be handled in one of several ways, depending on the allegations and other case-specific circumstances.

### Here are the steps in the process:

**1. The report is screened.** The purpose of screening is to determine if the allegation meets DCF’s criteria for suspected abuse and/or neglect, if there is immediate danger to the child and whether DCF involvement is necessary. During screening, which begins immediately, DCF obtains information from the person filing the report and also contacts professionals involved with the family (e.g., doctors, teachers). DCF may also contact the family if appropriate. A report may be “screened-out” if it does not meet the criteria for a reportable concern or the definition of a caretaker. Families may also be referred for appropriate community services as needed.

### 2. If the report is “screened-in,” it is assigned either for a Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation or Assessment Response:

- **CPS Investigation Response:** Generally, cases of sexual or serious physical abuse, or severe neglect will be assigned to the CPS Investigation Response. The severity of the situation will dictate whether it requires an emergency or non-emergency investigation. The primary purpose of the Investigation Response is to determine the safety of the reported child, the validity of an allegation and person(s) responsible, whether continued DCF intervention is necessary and to assess risk to the child.
- **CPS Assessment Response (Initial Assessment):** Generally, moderate or lower risk allegations, are assigned to the CPS Assessment Response. The primary purpose of the Assessment Response is to determine if DCF involvement is necessary and to engage and support families. This response involves a review of the reported allegations, assessing safety and risk of the child, identifying family strengths and determining what, if any, supports and services are needed.

**3. A determination is made** as to whether the child can safely remain at home and whether the family would benefit from continued DCF involvement. If DCF involvement continues, a Comprehensive Assessment and Service Plan are developed with the family.

Some families come to the attention of the Department outside the 51A process. These cases are generally referred directly for a Comprehensive Assessment and include: Child in Need of Services (CHINS) cases referred by the Juvenile Court, cases referred by the Probate Court, babies surrendered under the Safe Haven Act, and voluntary requests for services by a parent/family.

## Does DCF have the same legal authority and responsibility under the new Model?

No change has been made to DCF’s legal authority. DCF continues to have the same authority, provided through Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 119, Section 51B, to gather information from collaterals, mandated reporters and others whether a case has been assigned for an Investigation or Assessment Response. For more information, please visit: [www.mass.gov/dcf](http://www.mass.gov/dcf) and click on ‘Regulations and Policies.’

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“We are following well established state and national trends in moving away from a one size fits all approach to child welfare. Our new model allows us to focus on the unique needs and strengths of each family, while targeting our resources in the most effective way to keep kids safe and families together.”

Angelo McClain, Commissioner

