

About the Five Mandates

Throughout the history of the United States, the child welfare system has evolved according to changing beliefs and attitudes about what role government should play in the protection and care of abused and neglected children. The great debate and dilemma for child protection is the right of parents versus the best interest of the child. During the last half of the twentieth century, federal and state laws have evolved dramatically within the context of a changing society highlighted by the establishment of five major child protection mandates among many other less significant—but equally compelling—expectations of the system.



Mission Statement:

SCCS is committed to the safety, permanency and well-being of all children served, in partnership with families and the community.

Vision Statement:

- Because we believe in family preservation and that all children deserve a safe, stable and permanent home, we will:
- Intervene only where necessary and only to the proper degree;
- Assess the community's concerns of abuse and neglect focusing on safety, risk and family strengths;
- Serve as partners with families and in teamwork with partner agencies in the community;
- Actively engage families, and their extended families and supports, in the decision-making process;
- Diligently work toward reunification when a child must be removed from home;
- Seek permanent homes for all children who cannot safely return to their parent or guardian;
- Remain mission-focused in our everyday work;
- Recruit and maintain diverse staff committed to serving all children and families;
- Approach our work with integrity, ethics and compassion;
- Be fiscally responsible.

Our Values:

We believe:

- All children have a right to a safe and stable home.
- All children should be in a permanent home, i.e. their own home, a relative's home or an adoptive home.
- The well-being of all children is vital to us, the child, the family and our community.
- All families deserve our best efforts to partner with them and to treat them with respect and honesty.
- We have an ongoing responsibility to increase our knowledge and improve our services by learning all we can about the diversity of our families and community.
- We have a duty to remain objective and consistent in all of our interactions with families and children.
- We must be creative and innovative in the delivery of services so as to heighten the efficiency and effectiveness of our work with families.
- We have a responsibility to be able stewards of taxpayer resources.



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The 5 Mandates



Cornerstones of Today's Child Welfare System

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The Five Mandates of Child Welfare

Investigation

Ohio law (R.C. 5154.16(1)) mandates the public children services agency in each county to “(m)ake an investigation concerning any child alleged to be an abused, neglected or dependent child.” Federal and state laws also detail how such investigations are to be done.

A child protection investigation is the investigation of allegations into the neglect, abuse or dependency of a child or children. It is an administrative investigation and not a criminal investigation, and is done for the purpose of determining whether intervention is necessary to protect a child and to determine what services should be provided to a family. The investigation process begins with a report of child abuse and/or neglect of a child living with their birth family or other placement. Reports are screened to determine if the reported information constitutes a report of child abuse and/or neglect in accordance with federal law. In Ohio, an investigation can result in one of three findings: substantiated, indicated or unsubstantiated. The investigator is also responsible for assessing the risk of further harm or injury to a child.

The report must concern an alleged child victim under the age of 18, a parent or caregiver as the alleged perpetrator, or an unknown perpetrator, and an allegation that the condition of the child presents a substantial risk of harm to his health or welfare.

Child protection investigations are separate and serve an altogether different purpose than police investigations into allegations of child abuse.

During the 1970s, as the number of children entering care significantly increase, so, too, did their length of stay. Lawmakers became increasingly concerned that many children were being removed from their home unnecessarily, and that, once they entered foster care, inadequate efforts were made to either reunify them with their biological families or place them with adoptive families. By 1980, more than 550,000 children were placed in temporary foster care homes across the nation. In that same year, Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-272) was passed to establish a ‘reunification mandate.

Reunification

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 was passed to correct or alleviate problems in the foster care system. A major goal of the act was to encourage social workers

to work toward reunification of the family by making ‘reasonable efforts’ to avoid long-term foster care for the children if possible. If the child could not be returned to the family, another plan was to be sought: adoption, long-term foster care or another permanency plan.

Another law, The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) made the most significant changes to the child welfare law since they had established in their current form in 1980. This law principally addressed three general perceptions about the current child welfare system:

- Children continued to remain too long in foster care;
- The child welfare system was biased toward family reunification and preservation at the expense of the safety and well-being of children; and
- Inadequate attention and resources were devoted to adoption as a permanent placement option for abused and neglected children.

As a result, three major mandates were added to the child protection system, i.e. —child safety, permanency and well-being.

Child Safety

Child safety is of the utmost important as it reflects the root purpose of the child protection system. As a result, much closer monitoring of child maltreatment in a child’s own home,

foster home, pre-adoptive home or other placement is occurring. One of the major tools available to improve the safety of children in the system is face-to-face contact with each child and their family on a regular and frequent basis.

Permanency

Permanency means a permanent, legally secure, safe and nurturing home for every child leaving the child protection system. It includes reunification with birth family, placement with a relative or foster family who have legal custody of the child, court approved long-term planned foster care, adoption and independent living programs. Permanency is a critically important goal of the system which establishes the expectation that no child should leave the system without a permanent family and home.

Child Well-Being

The child protection system today goes well beyond the traditional role of safety and permanency, and recognizes the need to address the whole child and all of his/her needs. Thus, we are increasingly addressing child well-being indicators such as the child’s mental and physical health, including access to health care, cognitive functioning, social and emotional health and a wide range of variables including education, economic security, food and housing as well as family/neighborhood environments.

