

Child, Youth and Family Services is a government agency that works with whanau/families to protect children and young people under 17; manage young offenders; provide care for children and young people; and oversee adoptions.

CYFS have a 24 hour, 7 day a week crisis service - ring them anytime on 0508

FAMILY

If you think a child is being abused or mistreated should you get involved?

The most important thing is children's safety. You are doing the right thing if you are trying to keep a child safe. The person making the report cannot get into trouble with the law. You are not to blame if your concerns turn out to be unfounded. It's better to be safe than sorry.

You can make reports without giving your name, but it's better if the social worker is able to get hold of you later to ask for more details. Your name will not be given to the family being investigated, however, sometimes they may be able to guess who it was. You have the right to be told the outcome of the investigation and what action was taken. If the matter is taken to Court, you may be called as a witness. Your report may only be a small part of the evidence.

What happens when someone makes a report about child abuse?

When a report is made, CYFS will consider investigating the report.

A social worker or the Police will investigate the case. When sexual abuse is suspected, the child may need to be interviewed.

If a child or young person is at immediate risk of harm, they can be removed from their home. A social worker or the Police can enter your home. They will usually have a warrant to uplift the child, however, if the Police believe the child is in immediate danger, they don't need a warrant to come and get the child.

Often children or young people go to stay with other whanau/family members, or they may go to foster care. Within 5 days of removing the children, CYFS must apply to the Family Court for a custody order. You can apply straight away to the Court to have access or have your child returned. The Court will then decide who has custody.

Whether a child is removed or not, a social worker will continue to work with the whanau/family to sort out how the child will be protected and cared for.

If the case is dealt with by the Family Court, a Family Group Conference should be held within 60 days where family and others involved will get to tell their stories. The Court can also order counselling, or some kind of support or services for the family.

What are my rights when CYFS become involved with my whanau/family?

- As the mother, you are still the child's guardian, even if they have been removed from your custody. You still have a right to be informed about any important decisions affecting your child.
- You can get an advocate to go with you if your children have been referred to CYFS.
- You can get a lawyer to help you. If you want to challenge any Court decisions about custody and access, you will need a lawyer.
- If your child is removed, you can go to CYFS or the Court to request that the child is returned to you, or that you are able to see the child.
- You should be allowed to tell your side of the story at a Family Group Conference.
- You can ask the social worker to come to your house for any meeting, you don't have to go to their office.
- You can ask for another social worker if you have any concerns about the one who is working with you.
- You have a right to speak to the social worker's supervisor.
- You can ask for your files under the Official Information Act (write it in a letter). When you are given your files, there may be some blanked out details, where other people are mentioned.

- If you can't find out what's going on, ask to speak to the supervisor, or ask a Women's Refuge advocate to help you.
- You can make a complaint about a social worker, either in writing or on the phone. The complaint will go to their supervisor. You should get written confirmation that the complaint has been received, and then they should get back to you with an outcome within 21 days.
- If you are still not happy, you can complain to the General Manager, the Chief Executive, or the Commissioner for Children.

For more information contact CYF on 0508 FAMILY or go to <http://www.cyf.govt.nz>