10.14 Referring to Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services for early intervention

Purpose

This procedure outlines the process to refer a family to Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services as an early intervention strategy to prevent a child becoming in need of protection.

Key steps

1. Roles and functions of Family and Child Connect
2. Roles and functions of intensive family support services
3. Referrals to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service
4. Making a referral to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service

What ifs – responding to specific Family and Child Connect or intensive family support service matters

Standards

1. A referral is made to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service for an eligible family, when it is determined that the family would benefit from help and support to prevent a child becoming a child in need of protection.

Authority

- Child Protection Act 1999, section 7, 13B (relevant person only), 14 and 159M.

Key steps - Referring to Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services

1. Roles and functions of Family and Child Connect
2. Roles and functions of intensive family support services
3. Referrals to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service
4. Making a referral to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service

What ifs - responding to specific Family and Child Connect or intensive family support service matters

1. What if Child Safety refers a family and they do not engage or cannot be contacted?
2. What if a family moves to another area – transferring between Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services?
3. What if Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services reasonably suspect that a child is in need of protection?
4. What if Child Safety request information from Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services?
1. Roles and functions of Family and Child Connect

Family and Child Connect are funded non-government community-based intake and referral services that provide an additional pathway for referring concerns about the wellbeing of children and their families. Family and Child Connect support vulnerable families by assessing their needs and referring them to the most appropriate support service/s.

Family and Child Connect is part of a sustainable support service system providing children and families with secondary services to meet their needs and assist to prevent their escalation into the tertiary child protection system.

The purpose of Family and Child Connect, as the key service response of the community-based intake and referral initiative, is to deliver timely advice and effective referral pathways to services and support for vulnerable families and children. The benefits being sought from this initiative are:

1. More efficient child and family support services, including a reduction in unnecessary reports to Child Safety
2. Improved outcomes for families and children at risk, including an increase in referrals to secondary support services, and increased access to and utilisation of services that meet their needs
3. A reduction in children in need of protection and in out-of-home care

This referral pathway enables Child Safety to focus on the delivery of services to children who require statutory intervention to meet their protective needs.

Anyone, including families and children, can contact Family and Child Connect for information and advice about any child and family wellbeing issue. Family and Child Connect will assess the information provided by the referrer and, considering the family’s circumstances, provide resources, information and advice regarding appropriate support service options. This includes, where a child or family is eligible, accepting the family as a referral for active engagement.

Where the referral criteria for active engagement is met, Family and Child Connect will make direct contact with the family to assess their needs and seek their consent to undertake a supported referral process to services that can meet those needs (also known as ‘warm transfer’). The goal of this intervention is to enable families to receive the right services at the right time, before the issues escalate.

With the family’s consent, anyone can refer a family for active engagement. This includes self-referrals.

Particular prescribed entities (section 159M, Child Protection Act 1999), including Child Safety, can make a referral to Family and Child Connect for active engagement without the family’s consent, in order for support to be offered to the family to prevent a child from becoming in need of protection.

Family and Child Connect can partner with professional referrers to engage with the family. This has two key benefits, firstly to best support the family in engaging with Family and Child Connect through the use of a professional with an existing connection with the family and secondly to
increase the skills and knowledge of the professional referrer in accessing support services for children and their families.

In some circumstances, Family and Child Connect can access brokerage funds to secure a service for the family.

Family and Child Connect do not provide direct service delivery or case management to a family. They are a service which enables assessment of a family’s needs and refers families on to appropriate support services and interventions.

2. Roles and functions of intensive family support services

Intensive family support services are funded services that provide family support delivered under a lead case management model to address multiple and/or complex needs and assist families to build their capacity to care for and protect their children.

Intensive family support services include:

- Intensive Family Support
- Referral for Active Intervention
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Services
- Fostering Families.

The purpose of intensive family support services is to build resilience and independence in highly vulnerable families. The benefits being sought from this initiative are:

1. Highly vulnerable families receive the support they need to become stronger, more capable and resilient
2. Improved life outcomes for vulnerable children, including a reduction in the number of children in need of protection and in out-of-home care and a reduction in risk factors amongst vulnerable children and their families

A more sustainable support service system for families, where government investment proportions shift from tertiary to secondary service delivery; includes a community shift from reporting to Child Safety to referring families to support services.

The intent of intensive family support services is to assist vulnerable families to address multiple and/or complex needs and build their capacity to safely care for and protect their children. Engagement with families must involve the active participation of the family in case planning and in demonstrating their willingness for positive change. The primary focus of the engagement is to strengthen the protective factors within the family to ensure children can safely live at home.

The target group for receipt of intensive family support services are children and young people (unborn up to under 18 years) at risk of entry or re-entry into the statutory child protection system, and their families.

Intensive family support services provide intensive family support including case management, practical in-home support, brokerage and links to specialist services. A mix of practical, personal development, therapeutic and enabling services are utilised as appropriate, including:
• practical services that address a specific need in the family, such as transport to medical appointments, establishing daily routines related to meals or getting to school or respite care

• personal support and development including information and advice, parenting skills courses, budgeting and household skills development

• clinical or therapeutic services include casework, counselling, emotional support, family mediation, anger management, domestic violence intervention programs, development of social supports

• enabling services to link the family to other supports via referral and advocacy (e.g. assist with access to housing, child care, emergency relief payment, rental assistance) and case management to coordinate service delivery.

3. Referrals to Family and Child Connect or intensive family support services

A function of the Chief Executive is to provide, or help provide, preventative and support services to strengthen and support families and to reduce the incidence of harm to children (section 7, Child Protection Act 1999). The purpose of a referral to another agency is to assist children and families access prevention, early intervention and support services.

Where Child Safety is aware of a child or family that meets the referral criteria for Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services, a referral should be made to the appropriate service.

Referral criteria

The referral criteria for both Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services are:

• the referred family has a child unborn to 18 years of age

• the child is not currently in need of protection

• without support the child, young person and family are at risk of entering or re-entering the statutory child protection system

• the family would benefit from access to intensive and specialist support services;
  the family will benefit from the services they are being referred to, either
    o active engagement and referral for support provided by Family and Child Connect or
    o case management and intervention services provided by the intensive family support service

• the family has multiple and/or complex needs;
  there is at least one family member presenting with behaviours or circumstances that are having negative consequences for the family, particularly children. Consider if there is:
    o More than one issue impacting on the child or family’s wellbeing; or
    o There is a complex issue/s impacting on the child or family’s wellbeing. Examples of complex issues include, but are not limited to: family violence, mental illness, substance misuse, learning difficulties, homelessness and poverty.
If after consultation with a Team Leader, it is unable to be ascertained whether the family has multiple and/or complex needs or would benefit from intensive and specialist support services, refer the family to Family and Child Connect for further assessment to be conducted.

**Determining whether to refer to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service**

A referral to Family and Child Connect (for active engagement and referral for support) is most appropriate in circumstances where either;

- the family’s needs have not been able to be sufficiently ascertained, or
- further assessment is required to identify the most appropriate service/s to meet the family’s needs, or
- the family may benefit from another secondary support service and referral can be facilitated by Family and Child Connect

A referral to an intensive family support service is most appropriate when:

- the family’s needs have been sufficiently identified and an intensive, lead case management model is required to meet the family’s needs

In circumstances where Child Safety can engage the family, there is an expectation that departmental staff identify the strengths and needs of the family through this engagement and refer directly to most appropriate service/s, including an intensive family support service.

**Referrals without consent**

The *Child Protection Act 1999* enables particular prescribed entities (159M) to make referrals to Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services without a family’s consent in order to ‘offer help and support to a child or child’s family to stop the child becoming a child in need of protection’ (section 159C (1)(b)(vi)). The exception to this is referrals related to unborn children. A referral cannot be made in relation to a pregnant woman and her unborn child without her consent.

Particular prescribed entities are:

- the chief executive and an authorised officer under the *Child Protection Act 1999*
- the chief executive of department’s with the main responsibility for the following, and their delegate:
  - adult corrective services
  - community services
  - disability services
  - education
  - housing services
  - public health
- the chief executive officer of the Mater Misericordiae Health Services Brisbane Ltd (ACN 096 708 922), or their delegate
• a health service chief executive within the meaning of the Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011, or their delegates
• the police commissioner, or their delegate
• the principal of a school that is accredited, or provisionally accredited, under the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001

Whilst the Child Protection Act 1999 allows referrals to Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services without consent, it is considered best practice to obtain consent wherever possible to share a child or family's information.

4. Making a referral to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service

Where Child Safety is aware of a child or family that meets the referral criteria for Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services, a referral should be made to the appropriate service.

Making a referral without consent

In circumstances where concerns have been reported to Child Safety and:

• it is assessed that the family may benefit from assistance provided by either Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service and the referral criteria are met,
• there has not been departmental contact with the family, and
• the information received is being recorded as a child concern report.

1. If the notifier is a professional working with the family, ask them to refer the family directly to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service.

This is beneficial in circumstances where the notifier has had direct contact with the family and can therefore provide the best information to the service about the family.

Resources to support professionals include:
• the online Queensland Child Protection Guide for professionals
• Protecting children and supporting families. A guide to reporting child protection concerns and referring families to support services.
• the web-enabled Referral Form

2. If the notifier is not a professional working with the family, or does not agree to undertake the referral Child Safety staff must:

   1. discuss the referral with the Team Leader
   2. complete the web-enabled Referral Form
   3. contact the service to discuss the referral
Making a referral with consent

A family’s consent should be sought to enable a referral to Family and Child Connect and an intensive family support service in circumstances where:

- it is assessed that a family may benefit from assistance provided by either Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service and the referral criteria are met
- there has been contact with the family and either:
  - a child concern report has been recorded (family was the notifier)
  - an investigation and assessment has been completed and the child/ren is assessed as not in need of protection
  - where the department has been working with a family as part of an intervention with parental agreement and it has been assessed that the child/ren is no longer in need of protection
  - where a child subject to an order granting their long-term guardianship to a suitable person would benefit from referral service and the child is not currently subject to case work for emergent issues

In these circumstances Child Safety staff must:
1. discuss the referral with the team leader
2. complete the web-enabled Referral Form
3. contact the service to discuss the referral

Note: this chapter refers to making referrals to intensive family support services for early intervention. Some intensive family support services also provide intervention for families who are receiving statutory intervention; for an example of this refer to Chapter 10.16, Referral to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Service.

What ifs - responding to specific Family and Child Connect or intensive family support service matters

1. What if Child Safety refers a family and they do not engage or cannot be contacted?

If Child Safety refers a family to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service and the family does not engage with the service or cannot be contacted, the service must contact the department to advise of such.

Family and Child Connect will also advise Child Safety of the details of their engagement attempts, types and over what period.

In these circumstances and where no new concerns are raised, the receiving departmental officer is to:
- record this information in a case note (if verbal) or as an attachment (if written and the event remains open) in the event where the referral is recorded: and
- advise the Team Leader responsible for this event via email.
If new or additional concerns are reported by the service, this information should be assessed per intake procedures.

2. What if a family moves to another area? Transferring between Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services?

Families can only be transferred between Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services with the family’s consent. If a family is incorrectly referred by a particular prescribed entity (including Child Safety) to a service that does not cover the family’s geographic area, the service will:

- contact the referrer and advise them of such

Family and Child Connect will also send a letter to the family to provide them with information about the service, including the Family and Child Connect brochure and telephone number.

3. What if Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service report to Child Safety?

If Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service, during the course of their engagement with the family, reasonably suspects that a child may be in need of protection they have a responsibility to report the matter to Child Safety through the Regional Intake Service.

The service may utilise the Child Protection Guide to support their decision making as to whether the concerns should be reported to Child Safety and may also consult the Principal Child Protection Practitioner. Where the concerns clearly reach the threshold for a report to Child Safety or an urgent response is considered necessary, the service may report to Child Safety without prior consultation with either the Child Protection Guide or the Principal Child Protection Practitioner. (Note: the service will report information about immediate danger to persons to the Emergency Services)

Where Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service are referred a matter and it is assessed that the concerns reach the threshold for a report to Child Safety, the service will contact the referrer and encourage them to contact the Regional Intake Service directly. This ensures all relevant information is provided and the referrer receives protection as a notifier under the Child Protection Act 1999. The only exception to the service recontacting the referrer is where the service believe this action would adversely affect the safety of a child or young person.

If the referrer is a professional, and agrees to do this, the service will seek an email from the referrer to confirm this has occurred, allowing the referral to be closed. If this advice is not received within a 48 hour period, or the referrer is not a professional, the service should report the matter directly to the Regional Intake Service, including details of the concerns and the identity of the original referrer. The Family and Child Connect or intensive family support service staff member should be recorded as the notifier on ICMS records.

Regardless of Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service reporting the matter to Child Safety, the service will, unless under exceptional circumstances (e.g. concerns regarding the safety of staff), continue to engage with the family. Family and Child Connect or an
intensive family support service will only cease involvement with a family, if they become aware that the family is subject to departmental ongoing intervention (i.e. Intervention with Parental Agreement, Child Protection Order).

4. What if Child Safety makes a pre-notification check to Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service?

The Regional Intake Service may contact the Family and Child Connect or an intensive family support service to conduct a pre-notification check if it has been identified that the service may hold relevant information. As per current departmental procedures, a pre-notification check to a service will only be conducted when child protection concerns are received and further information is needed to assist in the completion of the screening criteria, and to determine if a notification response is required.

If the service is contacted and the family’s records indicate that they were also subject to a case consultation with the Principal Child Protection Practitioner, the service will advise the intake officer that a case consultation occurred. The intake officer may then contact the Principal Child Protection Practitioner to seek further information.

Resources

Forms and templates

- Referral Form

Other

- The Queensland Child Protection Guide
- Bromfield, L, Sutherland, K, Parker R 2012, Families with multiple and complex needs, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne