10.15 The role of the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre

Purpose

This procedure outlines the role and function of the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre (CSAHSC) and the interface with CSSCs or RISs.

Key steps

1. Interface between the CSAHSC and CSSC or RISs
2. Make an after hours referral

What ifs - responding to specific CSAHSC matters

Standards

1. A referral to the CSAHSC is made when additional after hours support is required to ensure practice standards are met and a child's safety cannot be ensured outside normal business hours.
2. Additional services, provided by CSAHSC, are only considered when all other viable options have been exhausted.

Authority

- Child Protection Act 1999
- Policy No. 391: Critical incident reporting
Key steps - The role of the CSAHSC

1. Interface between the CSAHSC and CSSCs or RISs
   1.1 Manage child protection matters
   1.2 Children subject to ongoing intervention
   1.3 Liaison with CSSC 'on-call' staff
   1.4 Recording by CSAHSC

2. Make an after hours referral
   2.1 Make an after hours referral
   2.2 Additional services

What ifs - responding to specific CSAHSC matters

1. What if conflict arises between the CSAHSC and a CSSC or RIS?
1. Interface between the CSAHSC and CSSCs or RISs

The CSAHSC is a 24 hour departmental service that provides statutory after hours frontline service delivery and responses across the state, to departmental clients, the community, other government departments and community agencies, in response to child protection and youth justice matters.

The CSAHSC is situated in a secure and confidential location in the Brisbane CBD and provides a statutory statewide after hours service including to remote and rural areas. Whilst the majority of work occurs by telephone, there is a very limited capacity to respond to critical and urgent matters, including notifications in the Brisbane metropolitan area, however, this is subject to negotiation between the CSAHSC and the individual CSSC or RIS. There is no public walk-in access to the CSAHSC.

The CSAHSC primarily provides a statutory response to critical and immediate child protection issues, and the role of the CSO-AHS is to secure a child’s safety and address the presenting issues. In this respect, the role of the CSO-AHS differs significantly from that of a CSO who, for example, may provide intensive intervention with parental agreement and/or services to children on child protection orders. It is not the responsibility of a CSO-AHS to undertake specific case-related, therapeutic or assessment roles.

Understanding the nature of the after hours role assists CSSC and RIS staff when deciding whether referrals to the CSAHSC are appropriate - for further information, refer to the practice resource CSAHSC - profile and crisis intervention model.

1.1 Manage child protection matters

The CSAHSC provides a statewide after hours intake function. Child protection matters are received, recorded and managed by the CSAHSC, including:

- intake enquiries
- child concern reports
- notifications
- additional concerns
- unborn child high-risk alerts and assessing child protection concerns following the birth of a child.

Refer to Chapter 1 Intake and the practice resource Regional intake services workflow for further information.

When a notification with a 24 hour response timeframe is received after hours, the CSAHSC will take action to ensure the investigation and assessment is commenced within the required timeframe. To do this, the CSAHSC works closely with the QPS, particularly the Child Protection Investigation Units (CPIU) across the state, to sight children and facilitate the development of safety plans. Other government agencies, including Queensland Health, are often involved in the after hours management of presenting child protection matters.

Where a significant decision about an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is made after hours by the CSAHSC, and consultation with the recognised entity is not possible at the time of
the decision, the relevant CSSC or RIS is responsible for consulting with their local recognised entity on the next business day.

Considerable negotiation and work occurs around these cases to ensure the immediate safety of children, and CSOs-AHS work in close collaboration with the QPS when joint investigation and assessments are required. The CSAHSC will take more intrusive action when a child’s safety cannot be achieved, including:

- negotiating care agreements
- initiating TAO applications
- initiating TCO applications
- undertaking placement action, when necessary.

Following action by the CSAHSC, all recorded matters are referred to the relevant CSSC or RIS.

1.2 Children subject to ongoing intervention

A significant component of after hours work relates to the management of children subject to child protection orders or ongoing intervention, where an immediate response is required. This includes responding to children and their carers when:

- a critical incident has occurred
- significant difficulties are experienced with a child's behaviour and an immediate plan is required to address the child's safety or the carer household or placement service
- a child has expressed suicidal ideation and an immediate management plan is required
- carers or parents experience serious or significant after hours issues associated with family contact
- a child has absconded from their placement and there are significant concerns for their safety
- an emergency placement is required
- a placement ends due to behavioural or other presenting issues
- urgent medical treatment and authority is required.

In addition, the CSAHSC regularly locates, negotiates and secures emergency, short-term placements for children and provides after hours support to foster and kinship carers and foster and kinship care services. In most circumstances, a referral for support will be initially made to the ‘Foster and kinship care support line’ (1300 729 309), which is also managed by the CSAHSC.

The support line provides task-focused, problem-solving support to carers who access the service after hours, including:

- information provision in relation to current departmental policies, procedures and existing resources
- positive behavioural support for carers facing complex issues, such as children with special needs significant behavioural issues
- brief counselling and support
- support to carers facing critical incidents.
1.3 Liaison with CSSC ‘on-call’ staff

When responding to after hours matters, CSAHSC staff make every effort to resolve the issue presented, without requiring contact with CSSC or RIS staff, however, at times it will be necessary for the CSAHSC to contact the on-call staff member to:

- request additional information about a matter
- request specific case-related information that is required to assist the assessment and inform the response
- gain approval for certain actions by a delegated officer.

Maintaining **up-to-date ICMS case information** and providing a ‘Child Safety After Hours Service Centre: After hours referral form’ will ensure that CSAHSC staff have access to relevant information and important case-related details, and limit the need for contact with the on-call staff member.

It is the responsibility of each CSSC manager to ensure the CSAHSC has a current copy of the CSSC on-call arrangements.

CSSCs also provide CSAHSC with details of foster carers, other placement options and youth worker services, including the availability of staff and carers who provide after hours support to children in out-of-home care.

1.4 Recording by CSAHSC

The CSAHSC does not hold any case management responsibility, and all client contact is recorded in ICMS. The following information will be recorded in the relevant event, document or client profile by the CSAHSC:

- the presenting issues and specific actions taken by the CSO-AHS
- the outcome of the actions taken
- a plan outlining any further recommended actions
- alerts on relevant client profiles.

In addition, CSAHSC staff:

- adhere to the **Critical incident reporting** policy and reporting requirements and record all Critical incident report forms received
- record all child deaths in Queensland
- receive and record advice of arrests on Youth Justice Information System and advise local court officers of the subsequent Saturday (or scheduled holiday) court appearances
- manage and record details in relation to after hours detention of young people in watch-houses
- organise admissions to youth detention centres after hours, for young people where bail has been refused
- receive ‘Request for interstate alert’ forms from another jurisdiction when the family’s address is unknown, and where appropriate, record information in ICMS
- provide the outcomes of after hours child protection history checks to interstate child protection agencies
• manage the after hours Central Screening Unit functions, including the processing of paperwork, police checks and child protection history checks for the provisional approval of carers.

2. Make an after hours referral

2.1 Make an after hours referral

The primary communication tool between the CSAHSC and CSSCs or RISs is the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre: After hours referral form.

The purpose of this form is to provide the CSAHSC with:

• current information regarding client families where after hours contact is considered likely
• advice about a predicted situation and the contingencies developed by the CSSC or RIS in response to the situation
• clear instructions and rationale for any requested action, for example:
  • an application for a TAO
  • returning a child to a placement
  • assessment of a presenting after hours scenario and the action necessary to ensure a child’s safety
  • liaising with the CPIU to determine the immediate safety of a child
  • details of placement options arranged if placements are anticipated or required.

When requesting specific action by the CSAHSC, CSSC or RIS staff will:

• complete the 'Child Safety After Hours Service Centre: After hours referral form' and ensure the team leader approves the information provided and action requested
• complete any necessary supporting documentation (unless in exceptional circumstances), for example:
  • a draft TAO or TCO application
  • advice of placement options
• cut and paste the 'Child Safety After Hours Service Centre: After hours referral form' into a 'Referral' case note (as per the drop down list for ICMS case note types) and title it 'After Hours Referral'.

The team leader must phone the CSAHSC team leader to advise them of the after hours referral (including the ICMS event number and client names) and negotiate the specific action to be undertaken.

Together, the CSSCs and RISs are responsible for the completion of all intake activities, investigation and assessments, the development of case plans and referrals to other agencies, and consultation with recognised entities during business hours, where there are no recognised entities funded for after hours consultation. A referral to the CSAHSC is appropriate when additional after hours support is required to ensure practice standards are met and a child’s safety cannot be ensured outside normal business hours.
2.2 Additional services

The CSAHSC also has the capacity to provide:

- emergency relief
- emergency commercial accommodation
- emergency transport, for example, a rail warrant.

These services are only to be considered when all other viable options have been exhausted. Decisions regarding the use of these options must be clearly recorded in accordance with the CSAHSC recording requirements.

What ifs - responding to specific CSAHSC matters

1. What if conflict arises between the CSAHSC and a CSSC or RIS?

At times conflict may arise between the CSAHSC and a CSSC or RIS. This may relate to a specific case-related issue or an issue between staff members. If immediate resolution is not possible, or the issue is of a more serious nature, refer the matter to either the CSAHSC team leader (or CSAHSC senior practitioner if the team leader is not available) or CSSC or RIS team leader for resolution between team leaders. Discussion between the CSAHSC and CSSC or RIS managers is the next level of resolution, if required.

If the conflict occurs in relation to decision-making and the recording of child protection concerns, the conflict must be resolved in a timely manner, to ensure compliance with departmental procedures and timeframes. For example, a disagreement over the appropriateness of a 24 hour response timeframe for a notification must be resolved within 24 hours. Where team leaders are involved, the team leader who approved the original decision should be consulted.

For further information refer to Chapter 10.6 Downgrading or deleting an approved notification.

Addressing issues as they arise is an important aspect of building relationships between the CSAHSC and CSSC or RISs and contributing to improved outcomes and consistent delivery of services to children and families who come into contact with the child protection system.

For further information refer to Chapter 1, 13. What if there is disagreement with a RIS intake decision?

Resources

Forms and templates

- Child Safety After Hours Service Centre: After hours referral form
- Critical incident report

Departmental resources

- Practice resource: CSAHSC - profile and crisis intervention model
- Practice resource: Regional intake services workflow