Wisconsin's Child Welfare Process Explained: Access



Wisconsin's child welfare system is divided into three stages - access, initial assessment, and ongoing. The access stage is where local and tribal child welfare agencies receive information about suspected child maltreatment from community members and mandated reporters. Using this information, they determine whether a report should move to the next stage - initial assessment. The below infographic showcases how a case moves through the access stage of the system.

A person suspects abuse or neglect of a child and makes a report to their local child welfare agency.

For concerns that are not related to child abuse or neglect, information about resources to support families may be accessed through 211 Wisconsin or other local providers.

A child welfare professional asks a series of questions to gather relevant information about child safety and other family characteristics, such as identifying whether the child is an Indian child.

Tribal child welfare agencies may have a different process that is guided by tribal law or code. Additionally, county child welfare agencies must follow policy and/or guidance related to tribal families, which includes collaboration with the Indian child's tribe.

The local child welfare agency determines if the allegation meets the legal definition of child abuse and or/neglect according to Wisconsin State Statutes.

In the case of an Indian child or unborn child – the appropriate agent of the Indian child's tribe or band must be notified within 24 hours of the report being received.

Screen In

If the report meets the legal definition of child abuse/neglect, the case is assigned to one of the three possible response timeframes based on the assessment of information and potential safety concerns.

Case Is Assigned to **Initial Assessment**



Same-day

24-48 hours 5 business days

Screen Out

If the report does not meet the legal definition of child abuse/neglect, it is screened out and the case is closed. Agencies may refer the family to voluntary community supports.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608)266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

Agencies are required to open **Service Reports** for certain circumstances (i.e. drug affected newborn).

Agencies also have discretion to open a **Services Report** if the family could benefit from a specific service the agency offers or refers to.