THE OKLAHOMA CHILD WELFARE JOURNEY SFY 2024

THE CALL
A child's journey through Child Welfare generally begins when someone makes a report of child abuse or neglect to the OKDHS Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-522-3511.

When a report is made, it is documented, and a decision is made about whether the reported information falls within the scope of Child Protective Services (CPS). If not, the report is maintained in the Oklahoma statewide-automated child welfare system. When assigned, a response time frame is determined as either a Priority I (immediately, same day) or Priority II (2 to 5 days) based on the seriousness of the abuse/neglect allegations and the age and vulnerability of the child. A determination is also made as to whether CPS staff conducts a CPS Assessment or Investigation. The primary focus in either process is to evaluate the safety of the child.

THE CPS ASSESSMENT
The assessment is a comprehensive review of child safety and an evaluation of family functioning and protective capacities, conducted when the referral does not allege a serious and immediate safety threat to a child. Information is gathered from the child, adult family members, and individuals outside the family in order to obtain an overall picture of how the family functions keeping the child safe.

OR

THE CPS INVESTIGATION
The investigation is a response to an allegation of abuse or neglect that involves a serious and immediate threat to the safety of the child making it necessary to determine: the current safety of the child and the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect; whether child abuse or neglect occurred; and whether the family needs prevention and intervention related services. Information is gathered from the child, adult family member, and individuals outside the family. A criminal investigation may also be worked by Law Enforcement.

THE RESULT
When services are needed for the family, a referral to services in the community may be made; or voluntary services, contracted through Child Welfare, may be provided. A copy of the CPS Assessment report is forwarded to the DA.

THE RESULT
At the conclusion of a CPS investigation, a finding is made. Documentation of the investigation is provided to the District Attorney. If it is determined that the child cannot remain safely in the home and there are no other alternatives, a request can be made to law enforcement or the District Attorney for a court order to remove the child from the home. If the child can remain safely in the home but ongoing supervision and services are needed, then a voluntary or court-ordered prevention case may be worked with the family.

CHILDREN

CHILDREN ENTERING THE CW SYSTEM
If a child is removed, an emergency custody hearing is held within the next 2 days the court is in session. At that time, it is determined whether the child is returned home or remains out of home until a decision is made on filing a deprived petition. By law, the District Attorney has 7 days from the time a child was removed to determine if the child returns home or to file a deprived petition. There were 3,342 children removed in SFY 2024.

GENDER

Male:	50.8%
Female:	49.2%

AGES

Under 1:	25.7%
Age 1-2:	14.0%
Age 3-6:	22.9%
Age7-11:	18.8%
Age 12 +:	18.6%

RACE

White:	56.4%
Black:	16.5%
Native American:	25.3%
Asian	.8%
Pacific Islander	1.0%

WHY REMOVED

Abuse:	14.1%
Neglect:	79.1%
Sexual Abuse:	6.8%

ETHNICITY

Hispanic:	15.6%

THE PLACEMENT
Upon removal, a child is generally placed with kin or in traditional foster homes (bridge homes). Some may be placed in Therapeutic Foster Care, Residential Child Care, or Residential Psychiatric Care if they have emotional or behavioral problems and require a higher level of supervision and treatment. At this time the CW worker will schedule a Family Team Meeting to develop a visitation plan and to begin development of an individualized service plan.
Or the child may return home with no further involvement by the court or Child Welfare, though their parents may volunteer to seek help through counseling or classes.

LENGTH OF STAY IN OUT OF HOME CARE
Ideally, children remain in out of home care just long enough for their parents to take whatever steps are necessary to make the home safe. The goal is for children not to remain in out of home care longer than 12 months. Of those children who are reunited, **31%** are reunited with their families within **16** months. The others remain in out of home care longer. Children remain in out of home care until their parents' home is determined to be safe or if the parents' home remains unsafe, an alternative permanent placement is identified.

Children leave the Child Welfare system one of these primary ways:

THEY RETURN HOME
Children in out of home care who reunite with their families do so within an average of **16** months. This happens mostly because their parents have successfully completed their court ordered treatment plan.

THEY ARE ADOPTED
Approximately **1,297** children are adopted each year after their parents' rights are terminated. They are adopted by their relatives/kin, bridge parents, or people who have applied to be adoptive parents.

THEY ARE PLACED IN THE CUSTODY OF A GUARDIAN
Some children are placed in the custody of a guardian. The guardianship can be granted to relatives, bridge parents, or people who have a kinship relationship with the child.

THEY REACH ADULTHOOD
Some **193** youth per year leave the system when they reach 18. At age 14, CW workers begin to prepare them for Successful Adulthood through life skills development and educational opportunities.

PARENTS

ENTERING THE JUVENILE COURT SYSTEM
When children have been removed from their home, their parents become involved with the Juvenile Court system. The goal is to determine whether the parents can change their behaviors with the help of family and the CW team to provide a safe home so that they can be reunited with their child or if not, to determine the best permanency plan for the child. The goal is to determine this within (Use Policy).

THE FIRST COURT HEARING
An emergency custody hearing is held to inform the parents of the allegations that have been made against them, to have a judge decide whether there is sufficient information to keep the child out of the home and determine where the child will be placed temporarily.

ADJUDICATORY HEARING
An adjudicatory hearing is held within 90 days if the District Attorney has filed a petition alleging the child to be deprived but can be extended an additional 90 days. At the hearing, the parents may agree to the allegations, or they may request a non-jury trial.

THE TRIAL
If the parents do not agree with the allegations, a non-jury trial will be held. The evidence against the parents is presented before the judge. If the allegations in the petition are found to be true, the child is adjudicated deprived.

If the allegations in the petition are not found to be true, the case ends, and the child is returned home.

DISPOSITIONAL HEARING
After the child is adjudicated to be deprived, either by stipulation or non-jury trial, a dispositional hearing is held immediately or scheduled for a later date at which time the custody and individualized service plan (ISP) will be ordered by the court. The ISP will outline the changes the parents must make to be reunified with the child.

PERMANENCY HEARINGS
The court conducts a permanency hearing to address a child's permanency needs 60 days after removal or no later than 6 months after adjudication or 30 days after a determination that reasonable efforts to reunite are not required.

REUNIFICATION
When the child is returned to the parent's home, the family will be supervised by a CW Specialist for up to 6 months. If all goes well, the court case may be closed, and CW services are terminated

TERMINATING PARENTAL RIGHTS
If a parent fails to make the changes ordered in the ISP, a judge or jury may terminate parental rights. At any point during the juvenile court process, a parent may seek to voluntarily relinquish his/her rights to the child. If the parents' rights are terminated involuntarily or voluntarily, a new permanency plan will be ordered and followed.

THE JUDGE MAY CHOOSE ONE OF THESE OPTIONS:
- Allow the child to be placed for adoption.
- Place the child with a relative or responsible adult who agrees to become a guardian assuming legal responsibility for the child.
- Place the child in long term out of home placement where the child remains a ward of the court until he or she is 18 years old.

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