

Structured Interview

A structured interview is a standardized way of asking questions based on the need to obtain specific information. Depending on the reporter, the questions may vary. However, structured interview questions should be open-ended. Carefully ask questions to determine if the report of suspected child abuse meets criteria to be accepted for assessment.

When responding to a caller who is reporting suspected child abuse, requesting CINA services, or calling for another reason, the intake worker will follow a general script:

Introduction/Reporter or Referral Source

Engage with the reporter by providing a thorough and courteous interview. The following outlines what you might say and ask:

1. “Department of Human Services, Centralized Intake (leave out “Centralized Intake” if after hours). My name is _____. Do you have a concern you would like to report?”
2. “May I please obtain your contact information?”
 - “What is your name?” (Obtain the correct spelling from the reporter.)
 - “What is your relationship to the child victim?”
 - Assist the reporter in determining if the reporter is a mandatory or permissive reporter. (See the *Sources of Reports* section of the intake manual.)
 - “What is your address?”
 - “What is your phone number?”
 - “Do you have an alternative phone number where you may be reached?”

If the reporter has concerns with providing his or her information, advise him/her regarding confidentiality of reporters. If the caller is a mandatory reporter, inform them that they are required to provide their contact information.

Explain the following to any reporter of child abuse:

- The reporter has immunity from liability when making a child abuse report in good faith.
- The reporter’s identity shall be safeguarded during the assessment process. It is Iowa law and Department policy not to identify the reporter, but the Department cannot guarantee that the reporter’s identity will not be released if the case results in juvenile court, civil court, or criminal court action. The reporter may be named in the report as a collateral source of information. The family may deduce who made the report.

Household Composition

3. “I am going to guide you through the process and gather some basic information about the household and then we will discuss your concerns.”
 - “In what county does the family reside?”
 - “What is the family’s address (including the house number, street, city, state, and zip code)?”
 - “Does the family have a home telephone or cellular number?”

4. "What is the current location of the child (where is the child right now)?"
 - If the child is at school, ask what time school will be dismissed.
 - If the child is at childcare, ask what time the child is generally picked up and by whom.
 - If law enforcement is the reporter, ask if they are taking custody of the child.
5. "What is the name of the child or children that you are calling about today?"
 - Obtain each child's gender, DOB, and SSN, if reporter has this information.
 - "What are the names of the child's parents?"
 - "Does the child or children reside with a biological parent?" (If so, who. If not, ask who they live with and if there is a legal guardian.)
6. "Is there a spouse or significant other to the parent or guardian that resides in the home?"
 - Obtain the gender, DOB, and SSN for the spouse or significant other.
7. "Are there other children that reside in the home?"
 - Inquire about their relationship to the child victim.
 - Obtain their gender, DOB, and SSN.
8. "Are there other people residing in the home that we have not discussed?"
 - Obtain their name, relationship to family, gender, DOB, and SSN.

Collateral Sources

9. "Who is the child's non-custodial parent (if applicable)?"
 - Document their name, address, phone number, DOB, and SSN.
10. If there are multiple reporters, document additional reporter information.
 - Obtain their name, address, and phone number.
 - Note their relationship to the child and agency if applicable.
 - Document if they are a mandatory or permissive reporter.

Person Reported as Responsible for Alleged Abuse

11. "Who is responsible for the alleged abuse?" and "Are there other caretakers or parents aware of the alleged abuse?"
 - Document their name, relationship to the child, address, phone number, DOB, and SSN.

Narrative Description/Child Safety Concern

12. "What is the concern you would like to report today?"
 - Listen for specific allegations being reported (who, what, where, when).
 - Ask open ended and clarifying questions that may lead to additional allegations of abuse or neglect.
 - Certain questions may be necessary when inquiring about specific types of abuse. (See the **Criteria for Accepting Reports of Suspected Abuse** section of the intake manual.)
 - Clearly and concisely, document all concerns.

- Carefully ask questions to determine if the report meets criteria to become accepted for assessment. (See the **Making the CPS Intake Decision** section of the intake manual.)
- Determine what category of abuse best matches the allegations being reported.

NOTE: Your task is to determine whether the allegations made in the report of child abuse meet the criteria to be accepted for assessment, not to determine if the allegations are true or false. You must accept a report when there is insufficient information to reject it. The assessment will determine whether the allegations are true or false.

Additional Information

13. Ask the reporter about each of these sections. (See the **Documenting the Intake, Additional Information** section of the intake manual.)

Domestic violence, substance abuse, as well as the other topics in this section are prevalent and have great impact on children. Routinely inquire about each of these topics with all reporters during the intake process, even if the allegations are not specific to the topics. When asking questions about these topics, convey that these are routine questions asked in every case.

Preliminary Decision from Intake Worker Provided to Reporter

14. Provide the reporter with a preliminary decision regarding acceptance or rejection of allegation. (See the **Intake Decision** section of the intake manual.)

NOTE: The decision on the assessment path has not yet been made. It is not necessary to inform the caller if this will be a child abuse assessment or a family assessment. It is also not necessary to inform the caller of the observation timeframes. These decisions will not have been made at this point in the process.

Explain the following to any reporter of child abuse:

- The final decision to accept or reject is made by a supervisor and the reporter will be notified orally within 24 hours (except for permissive reporters who elect to remain anonymous) if the final decision is different from the preliminary intake decision.
- The reporter (except for permissive reporters who elect to remain anonymous) shall be sent a written notice within five business days.
- When intake information is accepted for assessment, the Department's child protection worker will usually contact the child and family within 24 hours. The reporter can expect to be contacted by the assigned child protection worker.
- If immediate concerns regarding the safety of the child arise after making this report, the reporter should call law enforcement and recontact the Intake unit.

Closing the Call

15. "Thank you for reporting the incident. Based upon the information you provided today the Department will... (provide one of the two responses)."
- "Accept the report for assessment" *OR*
 - "Reject the report as the information you provided today does not meet the criteria for assessment. We have documented the call and information you have provided today which will be maintained on record for three years. If you obtain additional information or have further concerns, please call us back."

The information will also be reviewed for appropriateness in offering other services, or in some case forwarding the information to law enforcement when a criminal act harming a child is alleged but may not be as a result of a person responsible to the child.

16. "I will speak with the supervisor about this situation and call you back if a different action will be taken."
17. For mandatory reporters, advise them to email csiu@dhs.state.ia.us or fax 515-564-4011 the written mandatory reporter form to your attention. You may provide the incident number of the intake to the reporter.

NOTE: Mandatory reporters have specific duties to report allegations of child abuse. Mandatory reporters must make a written report to the Department within 48 hours of the oral report and must contact law enforcement if there is reason to believe that the child needs immediate protection. People who are not mandatory reporters are not required to submit a written report.

If the intake is accepted for assessment, advise mandatory reporters that they shall be provided a notice of the outcome of the assessment and may request a copy of the assessment report if the report is founded. (A provider of care to the child may request a copy of the assessment report upon completion regardless of finding.)

18. "Have I answered all your questions and addressed your concerns today?" If yes, "Thank you for calling the Iowa Department of Human Services' Abuse Hotline. Goodbye."