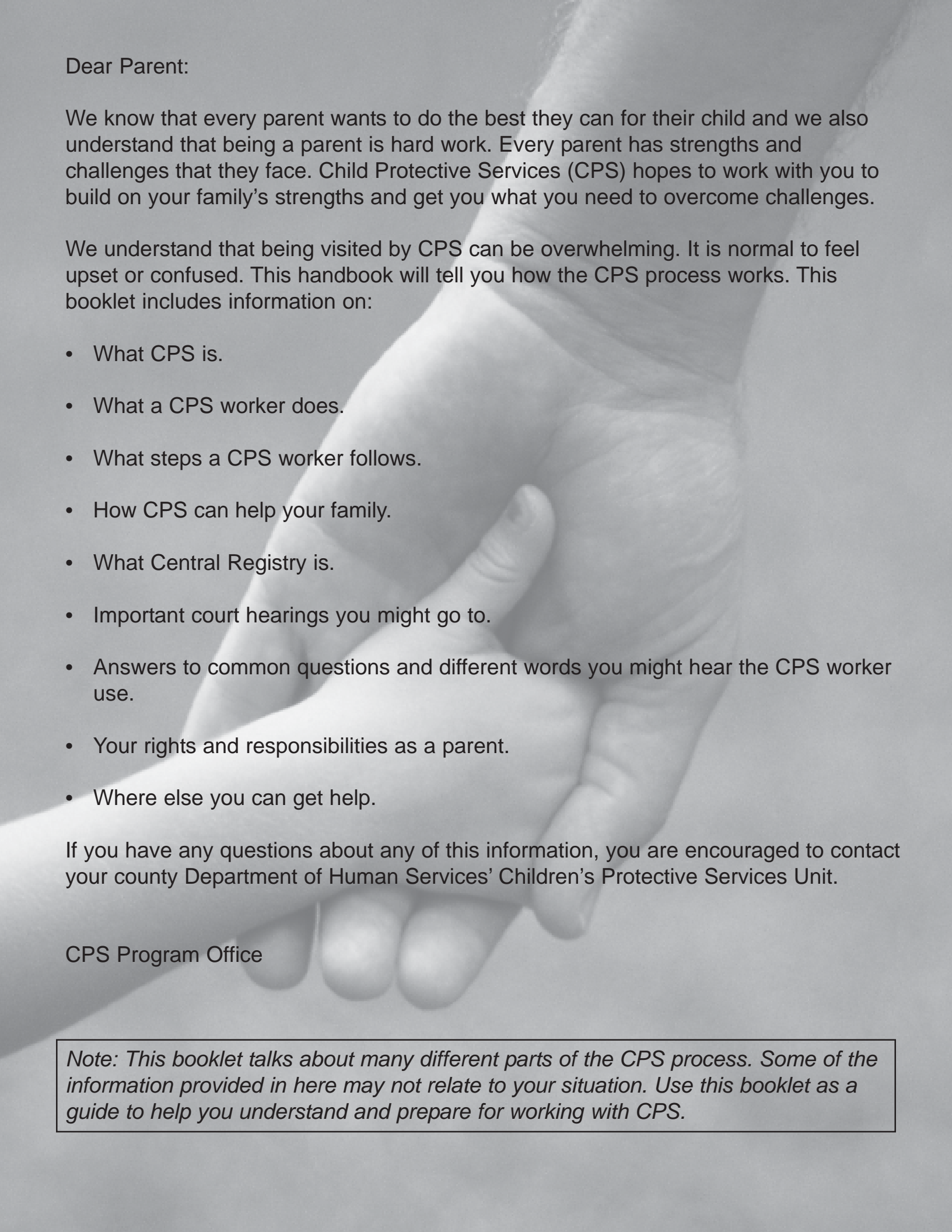


**A Parent's Guide to  
Working  
with Children's  
Protective  
Services**



**Children's Protective Services Program  
Michigan Department of Human Services**



Dear Parent:

We know that every parent wants to do the best they can for their child and we also understand that being a parent is hard work. Every parent has strengths and challenges that they face. Child Protective Services (CPS) hopes to work with you to build on your family's strengths and get you what you need to overcome challenges.

We understand that being visited by CPS can be overwhelming. It is normal to feel upset or confused. This handbook will tell you how the CPS process works. This booklet includes information on:

- What CPS is.
- What a CPS worker does.
- What steps a CPS worker follows.
- How CPS can help your family.
- What Central Registry is.
- Important court hearings you might go to.
- Answers to common questions and different words you might hear the CPS worker use.
- Your rights and responsibilities as a parent.
- Where else you can get help.

If you have any questions about any of this information, you are encouraged to contact your county Department of Human Services' Children's Protective Services Unit.

CPS Program Office

*Note: This booklet talks about many different parts of the CPS process. Some of the information provided in here may not relate to your situation. Use this booklet as a guide to help you understand and prepare for working with CPS.*



## **What is Children’s Protective Services (CPS)?**

CPS is a state program that is part of the Department of Human Services (DHS). State law says CPS has to make sure children are safe. CPS believes that the best place for a child is with his or her family when it is safe for the child. It is the goal of CPS to strengthen families by providing services.

## **CPS visits begin when someone makes a report.**

A report to CPS can be made by anyone who is worried that a child is not safe.

## **CPS investigates to see if children are safe.**

“Safe” means a child is:

- Not being abused (being hurt).
- Not being neglected (not being taken care of).
- Not at risk of being abused or neglected in the future.

## **CPS works with families.**

Just like you, CPS wants safe and healthy children. If a child is not safe, CPS works with a family to change that. Together, parents and CPS can make families stronger.



## **CPS looks for signs of abuse and neglect.**

CPS looks at abuse and neglect of a child by a parent, guardian, or a person responsible for the child's care. State law defines child abuse and neglect.

Child abuse means that a child's body or mind is being injured. This could be:

- Punching, kicking, or burning a child.
- Breaking bones, cutting, or bruising a child.
- Always putting a child down or making them feel afraid.

Neglect means failing to give a child what he/she needs. This could include:

- Not stopping others from hurting a child.
- Lack of food, shelter, or medical care.
- Lack of supervision.
- Leaving a child in an unsafe place.
- Allowing someone else to abuse a child.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Having sexual contact with a child.
- Using a child for prostitution.
- Taking sexual pictures of a child.
- Not stopping others from sexually abusing a child.

An unsafe environment is a home where the things listed above happen.

## **CPS follow steps.**

When a CPS worker gets a complaint regarding a child being abused and/or neglected because of the actions of the parent, guardian, or person responsible for that child, the CPS worker must take steps to find out if the complaint is true.

### **1. A CPS worker looks into the complaint.**

A CPS worker begins an investigation within 24 hours of receiving a complaint.

The CPS worker will talk to:

- Your child(ren).
- You.
- Any other parent or person who cares for your child or lives in the same household.
- Other people who know your child, like a relative or teacher.

The CPS worker needs to ask questions about what happened and about your family.

The CPS workers may visit:

- Your child at school or day care.
- You at your home or job.
- People who know you.

### **2. A CPS worker writes a report.**

A CPS worker writes a report about what was learned during the investigation.

The report will document if:

- There was abuse or neglect.
- There is a risk for future abuse or neglect and how high it is.

- Your home is safe for your child.
- Your family needs services.

The report should be done in 30 days. If your child has not been abused or neglected, CPS stops here. If your child has been abused or neglected, CPS goes to step #3.

If CPS finds that your child has been abused or neglected, your name may be listed on Michigan's Central Registry. See page 6 for information on Central Registry.

### **3. The CPS worker will make a safety plan for your child.**

If your child has been abused and/or neglected, most of the time the CPS worker can work with your family to make a plan so your child can remain in your home. If your child is unsafe, CPS can ask the court to remove your child from your custody. See page 7 for information regarding court and removals.

### **4. You and the CPS worker will develop goals for your family.**

No one knows your family better than you, so together you and the CPS worker will figure out the strengths of your family, what causes problems, and what services will make your home safe for your child. This information will allow you and the CPS to develop goals for your family.



## **CPS can recommend or refer you to services.**

It is the goal of CPS to strengthen families by providing services. These services will help make your home safe and help you become a better parent. CPS *may* recommend or refer you to one or more of the following services:

- Counseling to help manage anger, stress, or other problems.
- Help for a drug or alcohol problem.
- Help for family violence.
- Job training and search services.
- Legal help.
- Classes on parenting skills.
- Help for mental health problems.
- Help with housing, clothing, food, or money.
- Information on or referrals to other services.

Each community has different resources available, so ask your CPS worker what services are in your community.



## What is Central Registry?

Central Registry is a listing of people who have abused or neglected children. The registry lists all the following information:

- The name and birthdate of individuals who abused or neglected a child.
- The name and birthdate of the child who was abused or neglected.
- Any other people or children in the home that were not involved in the abuse or neglect.
- The type of abuse or neglect that occurred.
- The date of the incident.
- The county in which the incident occurred.

A person's name stays on Central Registry forever.

## How It Works

If CPS finds proof (preponderance of evidence) that your child has been abused or neglected, your name may be listed on Michigan's Central Registry.

The CPS worker will do a risk assessment on your family. The risk assessment shows the level of risk to your child for future abuse and/or neglect.

- If the risk is *high or intensive*, your name will be listed on Central Registry and the CPS worker will provide services to your

family. The court may also be involved. See pages 4, 5, and 7 for more information.

- If the risk is *low or moderate*, your name will not be listed on Central Registry. However, if the risk increases to high or intensive while CPS has your case open, your name will go on Central Registry.

Note: The Child Protection Law requires certain persons' names to go on Central Registry regardless of the risk.

## What are your rights?

You have a right to be notified that your name is being placed on Central Registry; this is called due process. You will receive a letter through certified mail or it will be hand delivered by the CPS worker.

The letter will explain :

- That your name is being listed on Central Registry and why.
- Who can view your name on Central Registry.
- What to do if you disagree with your name being listed on Central Registry.

## What to do if you disagree:

- Write a letter to the CPS worker's supervisor requesting that your name be taken off (expunged from) Central Registry.
- Ask, in writing, for an Administrative Hearing to have your name taken off (expunged from) Central Registry.

## **You may have to go to court.**

Most of the time, cases do NOT go to court.

You may need to go to court if:

- You need court ordered services to keep your child safe in your home.
- Your child is in danger and needs to be moved to a safer place.
- You do not make your home safer for your child.
- The law requires court involvement.

## **You should go to all hearings.**

If your case goes to court, you will be told the date, time, and place of the hearing. You will also get a copy of the paperwork given to the court, called the petition. The petition will say:

- Why the court needs to be involved.
- Why your child is not safe in your home, (if applicable).
- Where your child will be safe.

## **You have rights.**

You have the right to:

- Have a lawyer -- the court will get you one if you need one.
- Tell your side of the story.
- Provide names of relatives that may be able to care for your child.
- Have questions answered about your case and the court hearings.
- Know what you need to do make your home safe for your child.

Your child will also get his or her own lawyer, called a lawyer guardian ad litem (LGAL).

Note: A child rarely is removed from his or her home. When it does happen, the CPS worker, the foster care worker, and parents can usually work together to bring the child back home.





## **Common words or terms you may hear.**

Ask your CPS worker if you need anything explained.

**CAN or “child abuse and neglect”:** See page 3.

**Central Registry:** See page 6.

**Expunge:** To have your name taken off of the Central Registry.

**Petition:** A document asking for a court hearing for a child. The CPS worker is required to give a copy to the parents, the lawyers, judge or referee.

**Preliminary hearing:** A hearing where a judge or referee determines if there is evidence to back up the information in the petition and where a judge or referee decides what the safest place is for your child.

**Referee:** A person appointed by a judge to hold hearings.

**Risk:** How likely it is that a child will be abused and/or neglected in the future.

**Substantiated:** There is proof that a child has been abused and/or neglected and the risk of future harm is high or intensive.

**Unsubstantiated:** There is no proof that a child has been abused or neglected or there is proof that a child has been abused and/or neglected and the risk of future harm is low or moderate.

**Preponderance of evidence:** Evidence which is of greater weight or more convincing than evidence which is offered in opposition to it. CPS determines whether there is a preponderance of evidence that a child has been abused and/or neglected.

## **Answers to common questions.**

### **Can I find out who reported me to CPS?**

No. It is against the law for CPS to release this information. The only exceptions are if a judge orders CPS to release this information or the person consents to the release.

### **Can I see my CPS records?**

Yes. You have a right to see them. Ask your CPS worker or lawyer about seeing your records.

### **Will everyone know about my CPS visit or hearing?**

CPS records are confidential. But, CPS court hearings are open to the public. This means anyone can attend the court hearing.

### **Does a CPS visit mean I am a bad parent?**

Being a good parent is very difficult. Part of being a good parent is knowing when you need help. A visit from CPS may be a chance for you to get help to be the best parent you can be. Talk to your CPS worker about your worries. Together, you can make a safe home for your child.

### **I am angry CPS has visited me. What can I do?**

You do not have to like CPS coming to your home. But the better you and your CPS worker can work together, the sooner your case will be resolved.

### **Where will my child go if removed?**

Your child will likely stay with relatives or foster parents. You can visit with your child, unless the court says you cannot. You will have to follow certain rules for visiting your child.

For the sake of your child, work with CPS. For example, send your child's favorite toys. Tell CPS about how your child is used to doing things, like going to bed. Also, tell CPS if your child has any medical needs or allergies.

It is okay to ask about your child. For example, you can ask about your child's health and schoolwork.

### **How do I get my child back?**

Your child cannot come home until it is determined by the court that your home is safe. You need to work with the foster care worker, your lawyer, and the court to develop goals and to determine what needs to happen before your child will be considered safe in your home. Once these goals are developed, you need to work to successfully complete them.

**Keep track of meetings, hearings, and other dates.**

Make sure you go. It shows you want to make things better for your child(ren). Write down dates, times, and meeting places. If you cannot make one, call and say so beforehand. Tell your worker if you need help getting to the meeting.

**Meeting**

**Date**

**Time**

**Place**

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## Questions

Write down any questions you have for your worker.

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## Notes

Write down answers to questions, or other things you want to remember.

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# Names and phone numbers to remember

## CPS worker

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Foster Care Worker

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lawyer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Service providers and others:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## **We can all use help.**

These are just some groups that can help you and your family. Your CPS worker can tell you about others:

**National Drug & Alcohol Treatment Hotline:** 1-800-622-HELP

**National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information:** 1-800-729-6686

**National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233

**National Child Abuse Hotline:**  
1-800-4-A-CHILD

**National Council on Child Abuse & Family Violence:** 1-800-222-2000  
(24 hours) Provides information and referrals on child abuse and other types of family violence

**Parent Help Line:** 1-800-942-HELP

**National Youth Crisis Line:**  
1-800-HIT-HOME

**National Mental Health Association:** 1-800-969-6642

**National Maternal & Child Health Clearinghouse:** (703) 821-8955,  
ext. 254

**WIC (Women Infants and Children):** 1-800-26-BIRTH Helps moms get nutritional food for their children under age five.

**Legal Aid:** (517) 346-6300 Call the Michigan Bar Association or look in the yellow pages for local offices near you. Provides legal assistance to low income people.

**Office of Family Advocate (OFA):** (517) 373-2101 Reviews complaints about DHS and other public and private agencies.

**Office of Children's Ombudsman (OCO):** 1-800-642-4326 Investigates complaints about DHS cases.





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