



Integrated Casework Practice Model

factsheet

Differential Response and Initial Assessment

One of the key components of DCF’s Integrated Case Practice Model (ICPM) is a “Differential Response” to allegations of child abuse and/or neglect. During the past two decades, Differential Response systems have been implemented in more than two dozen States across the country. Differential response provides an opportunity for a child welfare agency to respond to a report of child abuse and/or neglect (often referred to as a “51A” report in Massachusetts) based on severity of the allegation(s) as well as the unique circumstances and individual needs/ strengths of a family.

The DCF model of differential response provides for assignment of a screened in 51A report of abuse and/or neglect for either an **Investigation** or an **Initial Assessment**. Both an *Investigation* and an *Initial Assessment*, however, are considered “protective” responses and the Department has the same legal authority regardless of which track is selected (under Chapter 119, Section 51B).

What is an Initial Assessment?

An Initial Assessment is generally conducted in response to allegations where the severity of the suspected abuse and/or neglect does not rise to the level requiring an Investigation. An Initial Assessment provides an alternative approach for DCF to work with a family who may need help from the Department in addressing issues of neglect or safety for their children.

The purpose of an Initial Assessment is to engage the family in an immediate, collaborative, information-gathering effort focused on determining:

1. The safety of the child(ren);
2. The impact of parent action or inaction on the child;
3. The potential risk of any future abuse and/or neglect; and
4. Whether or not DCF involvement would be helpful to a family.

An Initial Assessment involves a review of the reported allegations, assessing safety of and risk to the child, identifying family strengths and determining what, if any, supports and services are needed. In some cases, services may also be delivered during the Initial Assessment period in order to avoid opening a new case with a family. The results of an Initial Assessment are documented in a 51B report just as in an Investigation.

What is the Difference between an Investigation and an Initial Assessment?

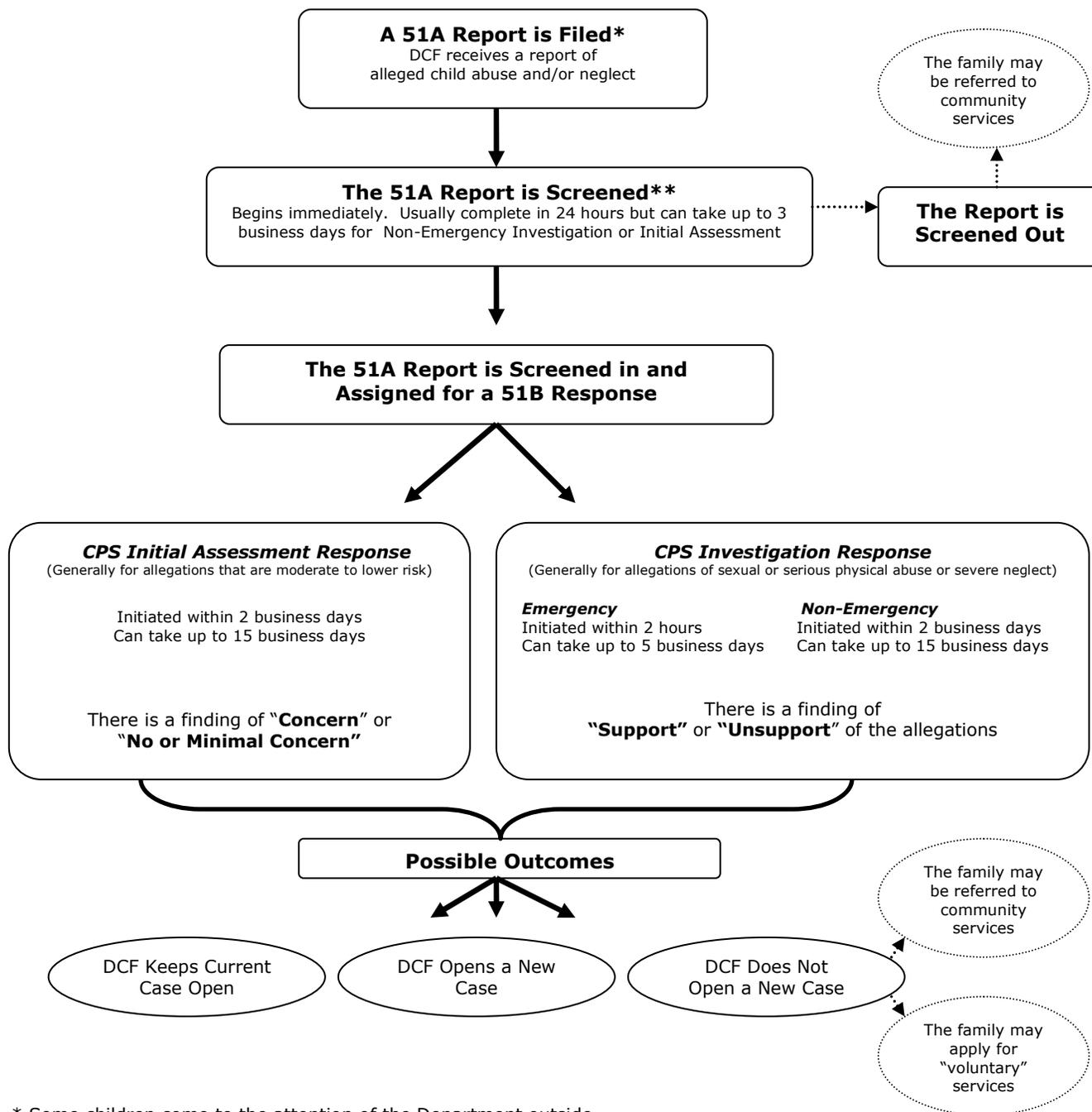
While both an Investigation and an Initial Assessment are designed to determine whether there are danger factors impacting child safety *and* to effectively and respectfully engage families, there are differences in focus and expected outcome.

Investigation	Initial Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally for allegations of serious physical abuse, sexual abuse or severe neglect • Identification of victim and assessment of what actions/supports are needed • Identification of “perpetrator” or responsible caretaker • Determination of fault • Finding of “Support” or “Unsupport” of allegation(s) • When appropriate, listing of perpetrator on Central Registry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally for allegations that are moderate or lower risk • Assessment of what actions/supports are needed • No identification of a “perpetrator” or responsible caretaker • No determination of fault • Finding of “Concern” or “No/Minimal Concern” regarding the child’s safety and wellbeing • No alleged perpetrator discoverable on Background Record Check (BRC) for employment

At the conclusion of the Investigation and Initial Assessment there is a determination as to whether DCF involvement is warranted and whether the family can benefit from DCF services.

Child Protective Services (CPS) under Differential Response

What happens when DCF receives a 51A report?



* Some children come to the attention of the Department outside the 51A reporting process. These include Baby Safe Haven and CHINS or other court referred children, and voluntary applications.

** In cases of serious physical abuse or sexual abuse, referrals may be made to the District Attorney at any point during the Child Protective Services Process.