Child protection in Minnesota: Keeping children safe

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, along with county and tribal partners, is engaged in efforts to ensure children are protected against child abuse and neglect, and promote family and community well-being. Data included below represents preliminary 2018 information.

Protecting children

The department has been working on many improvements and revisions in policy and practices focused on screening guidelines, training, comprehensive assessments, resources, oversight and transparency in recent years. Child safety continues to be of primary concern when responding and providing services to families involved in child protection. In partnership with local social service agencies, the department has created a Safety Framework Advisory Committee to examine Minnesota’s safety framework.

This advisory committee will help ensure that the child protection system is child-focused, and the safety and best interests of children are paramount.

Reporting abuse and neglect

Certain individuals, based on their professional association with children, must, by law, report any suspected abuse and neglect to authorities. In 2018, school personnel and law enforcement officials made approximately 32% of all maltreatment reports. Some children were reported for more than one form of abuse or neglect.

- 54% of all child maltreatment reports alleged nonmedical neglect, including emotional, physical and educational neglect; disregard for safety; inadequate supervision; abandonment; and prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol.
- 32% of reports alleged physical abuse.
- 13% alleged sexual abuse.
- 8% alleged threats of injury.
- 5% alleged emotional or mental abuse.

Assessing and investigating reports

In Minnesota, 38,751 children were the subject of screened in child maltreatment reports in 2018, assessed by county and tribal agencies, a 23% increase since 2015. Of those screened-in reports:

- Approximately 40% of all children in maltreatment reports were age 5 or younger; just over 22% were under the age of 3.
- American Indian and African-American/black children were around five and three times more likely, respectively, than Caucasian children to be the subjects of maltreatment assessments or investigations.
children with two or more identified races were more than three times as likely as Caucasian children to be the subjects of screened-in maltreatment reports.

- About 81% of all alleged offenders were victims’ birth parents; other relatives, including stepparents, adoptive parents and siblings, accounted for 12% of offenders; parental companions accounted for 7% of offenders.

Counties and tribes completed 12,131 investigations of child maltreatment involving 17,208 children including investigations in licensed facilities. During investigations, counties and tribes make a determination of whether maltreatment occurred. Additionally, during family investigations it is determined whether child protection services are needed.

- 7,652 Minnesota children had a finding of abuse or neglect within their family or by a caregiver.
- 309 children were abused or neglected in licensed facilities, such as family foster care, residential facilities or in-home child care.
- Ongoing child protection services were needed in approximately 39% of family investigations.

Counties and tribes completed 18,414 assessments, involving 23,658 children, using the Family Assessment Response, which ensures children’s safety while supporting families without making a determination of maltreatment. Approximately 16% of families were determined to need ongoing child protection services.

The prevailing family conditions associated with maltreatment reports were mental illness, domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, poverty, inadequate housing and parenting concerns. Families in poverty often have less stable housing and less adequate social support systems to assist parents in their child care responsibilities; both of these conditions have been linked to higher maltreatment rates. According to national research, children living in poverty are approximately seven times more likely to be neglected than other children.

For accessible formats of this information or assistance with additional equal access to human services, write to dhs.info@state.mn.us, call 651-431-4671, or use your preferred relay service. ADA1 (1-18)