

Alternatives to Calling DCFS



**A guide and resource list
developed by graduate students at the
UIC Jane Addams College of Social
Work**

Why this Guide Exists

We developed this guide to assist social workers to challenge the role that family regulation or "child welfare" plays in policing families instead of providing essential resources and support. With the recent calls for social workers to replace police, we must address how social workers frequently police communities.

"If all we do is replace police with social workers without eliminating these carceral aspects of social work, we will simply subject vulnerable people to cops by a different name."--Social Service Workers United Chicago

Illinois Mandated Reporting Laws

The Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act [ANCRA], requires all mandated reporters to contact the Department of Children and Family Services [DCFS], if they suspect a child is being physically abused, sexually abused, and/or neglected.

However, the state definitions of "neglect" are extremely vague and subjective, and can lead to families being policed and punished for lacking resources.

Unlike the criminal legal system, families facing investigation by DCFS do not have the right to counsel, or the right to remain silent. Any comments, or lack of comments, can be used against them.

Bias and Reporting

According to research from Washington University in St. Louis, approximately one third of all children in the US will experience a child protective services investigation by 18, and approximately 53% of all Black children will experience an investigation by 18.

Additionally, a considerable body of literature shows that serious cases of child maltreatment, including serious physical injury, are under-reported when abused children are white.

Family regulation doesn't prevent children from being harmed. It only harms marginalized children and families.

Sources:

Kim, H., Wildeman, C., Jonson-Reid, M., & Drake, B. (2017). Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment Among US Children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(2), 274-280. doi:10.2105/ajph.2016.303545

Jenny, C. (1999). Analysis of Missed Cases of Abusive Head Trauma. *Jama*, 281(7), 621. doi:10.1001/jama.281.7.621

Breaking Down ANCRA

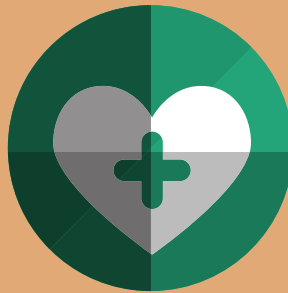
ANCRA Neglect Definitions



“a person responsible for the child deprives or fails to provide the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or needed medical treatment.”

"when an adult provides inadequate supervision of a child."

Actual Needs



Safe, affordable, permanent housing. Rent and mortgage cancellation due to COVID-19.

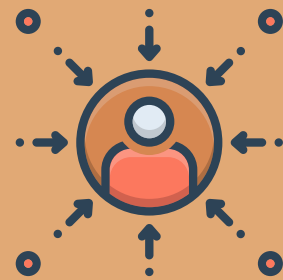
Affordable and accessible health care.

Affordable and accessible healthy food.

Affordable and accessible childcare. Jobs that accommodate the needs of working families.

Investment of resources that will permit safe school reopenings. Flexible online learning schedules for small children.

Biases That Drive DCFS Calls



Belief that removing a child from their family is a “better” intervention than providing them with financial assistance to obtain or remain in housing, or other resources.

Belief that parents having challenges finding childcare, or who need respite from the stresses of parenting are neglectful.

Breaking Down ANCRA, continued

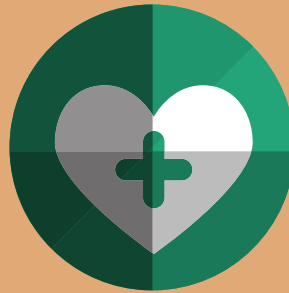
ANCRA Neglect Definitions



“when children are left either unsupervised or in the care of someone unable to supervise due to his/her condition.”

“Taking illegal drugs during pregnancy or if a child is present during the manufacturing or sale of drugs or if a newborn tests positive for drugs.”

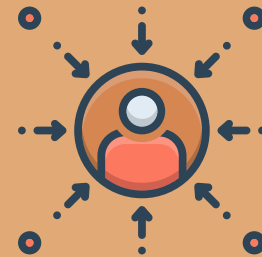
Actual Needs



Affordable and accessible childcare. Jobs that accommodate the needs of working families. Investment of resources that will permit safe school reopenings. Flexible online learning schedules for small children.

Affordable and accessible addiction treatment programs for pregnant people and new parents. Mental health care to treat co-occurring disorders.

Biases That Drive DCFS Calls



Beliefs that disabled parents or caregivers are incapable of caring for their children. Beliefs that BIPOC older siblings cannot supervise younger siblings.

Beliefs that pregnant drug users are incapable of being caring parents. Beliefs that testing positive for Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome require removal of infants from their birth parents (which is not supported by research).

Schools and COVID-19

During the closure of schools during COVID-19, and transition to online learning, there have been concerns that students and families face additional policing and scrutiny during online classes, or due to not being present during online classes.

Remember, students aren't learning online. They are emergency online learning in the middle of a: pandemic, economic crisis, and political uprising.

**Not all students have access to technology for online classes.
Not all parents know how to use technology for online classes.**

It can be hard to remain engaged in an online class for 6 hours every day, 5 days a week.

For families facing food, housing, and healthcare crises, attending online schooling may not be a priority.

Educators and support staff must consider how online learning policies police children and families for trying to survive and thrive during a pandemic.

Alternative Resources

Greater Chicago Food Depository

To find a food pantry in the metro Chicago area, go to
<https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/find-food/>

Department of Family and Social Services

All DFSS programs and eligibility requirements can be found here:
<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss.html>

YWCA Childcare Assistance Program

For residents of Kane and DuPage counties:
<https://ywcachicago.org/our-work/family-support-services/child-care-assistance-program/>

Illinois Department of Human Services Childcare Assistance Program

Programs and eligibility requirements can be found here:
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30355>

Chicago Childcare Society

For residents of the South Side, Southwest Side, and South Suburbs:
<https://www.cccsociety.org/>

National Advocates for Pregnant Women

Provides legal advocacy for parents criminalized while pregnant:
<https://www.nationaladvocatesforpregnantwomen.org/programs/legal-advocacy/>

Alternative Resources

Illinois Helpline For Opioids and Other Substances

Anonymous hotline and textline for people who use drugs, caretakers, or family members:
833-2FINDHELP or text HELP to 833234
<https://helplineil.org/app/aboutus>

SMART Recovery Illinois

Abstinence-based, secular recovery groups and resources throughout Illinois:
<https://www.smartrecoveryillinois.org/resources>

NAMI Chicago Helpline

Free and confidential helpline staffed by clinicians and peers, operating M-F 9AM-8PM and Sat-Sun 9AM-5PM
833-626-4244

Moms United Against Violence and Incarceration

MUAVI organizes mutual support and participatory defense in solidarity with mothers who've suffered criminalization and separation from their kids:
momsunitedchicago@gmail.com
[Facebook.com/MomsUnitedChi/](https://www.facebook.com/MomsUnitedChi/)

Alternative Resources

Cabrini Green Legal Aid

**Provides multidisciplinary legal and social worker support for people needing criminal and civil legal assistance and representation:
cglanet.org/programs**

Chicago Mutual Aid Networks

**Guide to neighborhood mutual aid networks throughout the Chicago area, connecting residents to local resources:
bit.ly/cmadiirectory**

IL Raise Your Hand

**Advocacy group for public school families in Illinois, with resources for COVID-19 and online learning:
<https://www.ilraiseyourhand.org/>**

National Digital Inclusion Alliance

**Resource list of low cost Internet and telecom programs:
<https://www.digitalinclusion.org/free-low-cost-internet-plans/>**

CTU We Still Teach

**Educational TV program on Fox 32 created by the Chicago Teacher's Union, to assist students facing technology gaps during online learning:
<https://www.fox32chicago.com/shows/we-still-teach>**

El Valor

**Support, programming, and advocacy for disabled children, disabled adults, and families:
<https://elvalor.org/>**

If You Must Call DCFS...



If you truly think the benefits of calling DCFS outweigh the trauma of an investigation and removal, here are some steps to take to mitigate (but not eliminate) the harm:

Involve the family when you call.

Inform the family of their rights and lack of rights when being involved with DCFS: be clear that there is no right to remain silent or right to counsel when investigated by DCFS.

Request the operator repeat back everything you say-- and confirm that they are repeating it accurately.

Highlight the family's strengths and protective factors.

Provide support and advocacy throughout process.

Questions?



If you have questions, feel free to contact the authors of this resource guide:

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