

We are your Children's Aid Society

What is the Mandate of Family and Children's Services (FACS)?

A Guide for Parents,
Caregivers and Community
Members.



Our VISION

All children and youth are safe
and have increased well-being.

Our MISSION

We protect children and youth from abuse and neglect by ensuring their safety in a permanent and nurturing environment in partnership with families and the community.

What is the Mandate of Family and Children's Services?

Family and Children's Services is a child protection agency. Our responsibility is to protect children from harm or risk of harm, such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. We are required by law to investigate concerns from the community with respect to children under the age of 16, within St. Thomas and Elgin County.

We understand that receiving a call or a visit from FACS can be a very difficult and stressful experience, and that you may have many questions and concerns. We provide services for families and the community to ensure children's safety and well-being.

What is the Authority for FACS to investigate child protection concerns?

Ontario's Child and Family Services Act mandates that FACS must undertake prompt investigation of any referral alleging that a child may be in need of protection.

The Community has a duty to report to FACS when there is reasonable grounds to believe a child is in need of protection.

How long does a child protection investigation take?

Investigations are usually completed within 60 days based on government standards. We determine if services are needed to ensure the child's safety.

The child protection worker consults with a supervisor to review and approve decisions about your family. He or she will discuss these decisions with you at the conclusion of the investigation.

If there are no concerns, or the concerns are adequately addressed, the case will be closed and a closing letter will be provided to you. If continued services are required, to reduce the risk of abuse or neglect, a worker will be assigned to provide help to the family.

What happens during a “child protection investigation”?

Not all calls or referrals to FACS result in a child protection investigation. Some issues are better addressed through other community resources. We can help you find the services that may help.

For those situations that do require investigation, you can expect that we will:

- Talk with, and observe, the child in question - at school, at home or another reasonable location and time. Depending on the severity and urgency of the concern, this may occur without the knowledge or consent of the parent or caregiver.
- Speak with the parents about the concerns that have been reported, and assess if there is ongoing risk of harm or abuse to the child.
- Speak with, and observe all other children in the home.
- Interview anyone alleged to have caused harm to the child, and those who may have information about the situation - including those who can verify facts and information provided by others.

A child protection worker may:

- Request access to any records about your child, yourself or persons alleged to have harmed the child.
- Arrange for any medical, psychological or psychiatric examination of the child, if necessary to ensure his or her immediate safety, or to establish if abuse or neglect has occurred, or is at risk of occurring.

What are the possible outcomes of an investigation?

After reviewing all information and evidence gathered during an investigation, the child protection worker must determine whether the allegation is verified or not.

Verified means that it is more probable than not that the incident occurred.

Will FACS take my child away?

Removing children from their caregivers would only occur without a warrant if, in the time necessary to obtain a warrant, there would be substantial risk to the child's health or safety. A court hearing must be scheduled within 5 days.

The belief of Family and Children's Services is that children should remain with their families in their own homes whenever possible. The vast majority of our cases involve working with families while their children remain at home.

FACS will only place children in foster homes when there are no known family or community members to care for the child. A family or community member must be approved as a caregiver according to Kinship Regulations. Foster care is considered as a last option.

FACS will make every effort to resolve protection concerns through Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), Mediation, Family Group Conferencing and/or First Nations ADR / Original Dispute Resolution (ODR).

www.lfcc.on.ca/adr-link

First Nations and FACS

Where the FACS is involved with an Indian or Native Child, the FACS will notify the Native Community or Band Representative during an investigation and during the course of the families involvement with FACS.

Where there is a substantial reason to remove a child from their caregiver, the child shall be placed with a member of extended family, a member of the child's band or native community; or another Indian or Native family.

Police Involvement in Child Protection Investigations

Though most investigations will be handled solely by FACS, if there is an indication that a criminal offence may have occurred against a child, FACS must inform the police and work with them according to established protocols for investigation.

Where a protection worker believes his/her safety is at risk, police assistance may be required.

Do I need a Lawyer? What is the role of Family Court?

Most of our work with families is done without court involvement. However, you have the right to dispute our intervention. Family Court ensures individual rights are respected, everyone has a fair hearing and that children are protected.

FACS employees cannot give legal advice. You have the right to consult a lawyer at any point during the provision of services to you by FACS.

You may also receive support through Legal Aid, Duty Counsel or the Office of the Children's Lawyer 1-800-668-8258.

Confidentiality and Privacy

FACS is committed to protecting your privacy. The law requires that we keep any report, record or investigation confidential from the public, including employers.

It is against the law to make public (i.e. Facebook, YouTube, etc.) any information that identifies a child who is a witness, participant in a hearing, or the subject of a child protection proceeding; or to identify the child's parent, foster parent or member of the child's family.

What is the role of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Child Protection Workers?

Although many child protection workers have social work degrees, they are not currently required to be registered with the College. Nor does registration with the College automatically qualify a person to practice child protection work.

Child protection staff may voluntarily register with the College.

Child protection investigations are conducted by child protection workers authorized under the Child and Family Services Act.

Child Protection Workers have a Bachelor of Social Work or a Masters of Social Work or related degrees and child protection experience.

Workers continually participate in child welfare training.

Accountability: Complaint Resolution Procedure.

If you have concerns about the services you have received or are receiving, we want to know. The following are ways in which you can bring forward your concerns:

- Speak directly with the child protection worker involved, or his or her supervisor directly.
- You can make a written complaint to FACS, which is part of the regulated Complaints Review Process and includes your right to access the Internal Complaints Review Panel. A written response will be provided to you within 7 days.
- You may also bring complaints that are not before the court, directly to the Child and Family Services Review Board .
<http://www.cfsrb.ca/>
- The Family Court System plays an important role in ensuring individual rights are respected. You can attend a Family Court Information clinic for more information.
- Under the Child and Family Services Act, the Provincial Advocate's Office is authorized to advocate on behalf of children and families who are receiving services or seeking services through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.
- FACS welcomes any opportunity to discuss ways to improve services and supports to children and their families.

FACS is committed to providing consistently high service to all service users regardless of race, creed, age, gender, or ability.

Disrespect will not be tolerated within our workplace.

FACS will make every reasonable effort to ensure services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

If you require special assistance, please make your request known to your child protection worker.

To Contact us

Family & Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin
410 Sunset Drive, St. Thomas, ON N5R 3C7
519-631-1492 / 1-800-260-6960

www.caselgin.on.ca

Worker / Contact Information

Name _____ Extension _____