

Children's Bureau

Round 4 Child and Family Services Reviews

Fact Sheet for Caseworkers



What Are the Child and Family Services Reviews?

The Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) enable the Children's Bureau to: (1) determine conformity with federal child welfare requirements; (2) learn about the experiences of children, youth, and families receiving child welfare services; and (3) assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The reviews also are an opportunity for jurisdictions to generate data and evidence that helps identify strengths and challenges in their performance. In all stages, states can use program and administrative data to identify areas that might benefit from innovations or interventions that would improve practice, services, and outcomes, and address nonconformity.

The reviews help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs. The goal of the reviews is to help states improve child welfare services and achieve the following seven outcomes for families and children who receive services:

Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanency

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Through the CFSRs, the Children's Bureau also determines states' performance on seven systemic factors. The systemic factors refer to systems within a state that should be in place to promote positive child safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. The seven systemic factors reviewed are:¹

1. Statewide Information System

- Examines whether states collect data about all children and youth in foster care (i.e., demographic characteristics, location, goals) and whether the data is accurate, reliable, and readily identifiable

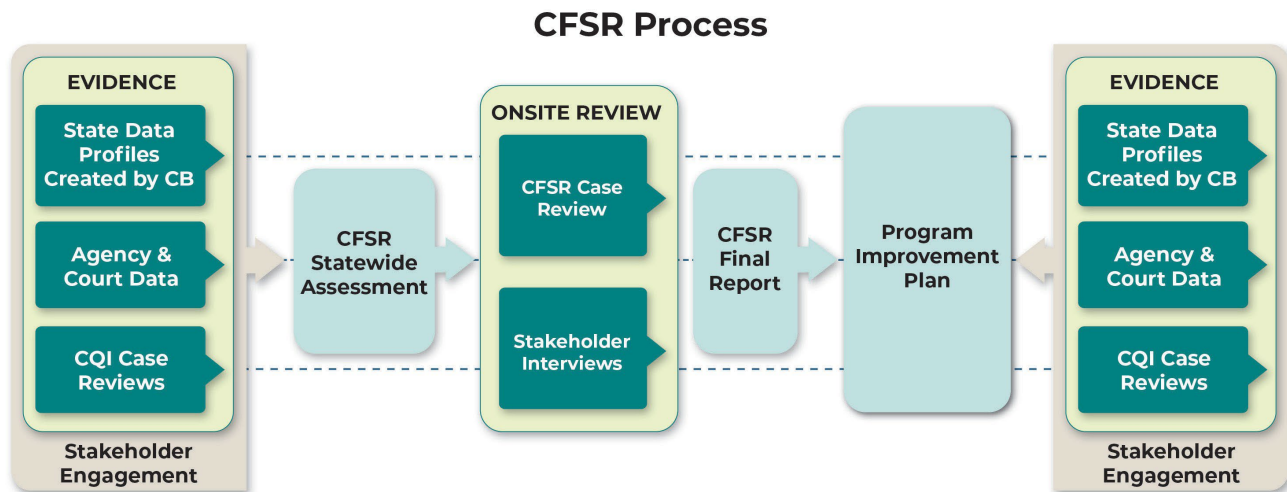
Developing and sustaining a knowledgeable, skilled, diverse, and effective workforce to successfully deliver quality services and supports is critical for ensuring positive outcomes for children, youth, and families. Caseworkers are an essential component of the child welfare workforce. Caseworkers:

- Meet with children and families to monitor children's safety and well-being;
- Assess the ongoing service needs of children, families, and foster parents;
- Engage families in developing case plans;
- Assess permanency options for children;
- Monitor family progress toward established goals;
- Prepare for, attend, and participate in administrative reviews and court hearings;
- Ensure that children and parents are receiving necessary services; and
- Determine at each stage of the intervention, with the support of their supervisors, the types of services children and their families need to ensure that the children are safe, are in or moving toward permanent homes, and have stable living arrangements that promote their well-being.

¹ For more information on the outcomes and systemic factors, see the CFSR Quick Reference Items List, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/cfsr_quick_reference_list.pdf

The CFSR Process

The CFSRs are a partnership between federal and state staff. The process is explained below.



2. Case Review System

- Examines whether states ensure that each child has a written case plan that is developed with the child's parents and ensure that court-related activities occur in a timely manner as required (i.e., periodic reviews, permanency hearings, filing termination of parental rights petitions) and that notices are issued to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of hearings and their right to be heard

3. Quality Assurance System

- Examines whether states review cases for outcomes and collect and analyze other data to improve practice and make systemic change

4. Staff and Provider Training

- Examines whether all caseworkers, supervisors, and foster/adoptive parents are provided with quality training that provides the skills necessary to perform their roles

5. Service Array and Resource Development

- Examines whether services are available to help create safe, permanent home environments for children and youth and provide effective services to them and their families

6. Agency Responsiveness to the Community

- Examines whether agencies listen to and include input from people involved in the child welfare system (for example, persons with lived experience, Tribal representatives, service providers, foster care providers, court personnel) and that services are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs

7. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

- Examines how states recruit foster and adoptive parents to promote the availability of appropriate placement options for children and youth

Statewide Assessment. The statewide assessment provides an opportunity for states to gather evidence (e.g., qualitative and quantitative data) to evaluate their child welfare programs and practices. The statewide assessment begins with the state data profile being created by the Children's Bureau and sent to the state. In addition to the CFSR data profile, states use their own qualitative and administrative data along with relevant data from agency partners and stakeholders to examine performance and systemic factor functioning. The statewide assessment is written by the state in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders, including those with lived experience and the legal and judicial communities, to demonstrate how well the systems are functioning.

Caseworkers partner with parents, youth, and children to build and strengthen relationships, set and achieve goals, and work to provide the services and support they need. Caseworkers are able to provide essential perspectives on the needs of children and families, and on the ability of the child welfare system to meet those needs, including the availability and effectiveness of the state's service array system. Since caseworkers have relationships with children, youth, parents, and families, they are also uniquely able to encourage and support them in participating in all CFSR processes.

The information captured in the statewide assessment informs the Children's Bureau's substantial conformity determinations and is used to inform subsequent phases of the CFSR and Program Improvement Plan processes.

Onsite Review. A joint federal-state team conducts the onsite review of the state child welfare program. The onsite review phase of the CFSR includes (1) case reviews, which include interviews with key case participants, and (2) interviews with child welfare system stakeholders and partners, such as caseworkers and supervisors, courts, community agencies, foster families, service providers, and parents and youth served by the child welfare system. The extent of stakeholder interviews varies depending on the information provided in the statewide assessment.

States meeting certain criteria may conduct their own case reviews and case-specific interviews using the federal Onsite Review Instrument and Instructions and submit the results to the Children's Bureau in lieu of a Children's Bureau-led review conducted in a 1-week timeframe.

Here are some things that you may be asked about during case-related interviews:

- How did you assess for the child(ren)'s safety initially and on an ongoing basis?
- How often did you visit with the child/ parent and what types of things did you talk about during those visits?
- How did you assess the needs of the child/parent initially and on an ongoing basis?
- What services did the child/parent need? Was the agency able to provide those services?
- How did you engage parents in case planning?

In stakeholder interviews, you may be asked questions such as:

- Is the information in the state's system about the child, their foster home, and their permanency goals up-to-date and accurate?
- Are periodic reviews happening at least every 6 months for children in foster care?
- Did the training you had when you first started prepare you to do your job? What ongoing training have you had and has it provided you with what you needed to do your job?
- Do you think foster parents receive the initial and ongoing training they need to provide care for the children in their homes?

- What kinds of services do the families you work with need? Can you get these services for them? Are there services they need that aren't available in your area or that have waiting lists?
- Can you individualize services to meet the unique needs of children and families?

Program Improvement Plan. As noted above, after the onsite review, states determined not to be in substantial conformity with one or more of the seven outcomes and seven systemic factors are required to develop a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to address all areas of nonconformity. The PIP provides an opportunity for the state child welfare agency, partners, and stakeholders to use information from the statewide assessment and the onsite review to develop, implement, and monitor a state-specific plan to strengthen the functioning of the systemic factors and improve outcomes for the children and families served. Stakeholders, partners, and youth and parents served by the child welfare system should be involved in improvement planning efforts and can assist the agency in developing, supporting, and monitoring the PIPs. States must successfully complete their PIPs to avoid financial penalties for nonconformity.

Get Involved

Successful systemic improvement begins with accurately assessing child welfare systems' performance and identifying challenges and their root causes, including those affecting services and outcomes. This assessment is foundational for identifying and implementing the best solutions. The Children's Bureau encourages the involvement of a wide range of individuals in the review process. Hearing from caseworkers throughout the CFSR and PIP processes about their work with families, their training, and the state's service array is crucial for gathering the best information for making assessments and identifying, implementing, and monitoring effective strategies.

As a caseworker, you can help improve the child welfare system in a number of ways:

Statewide Assessment



Caseworkers can help prepare the statewide assessment by being part of a team that pulls it together and/or by lending their insights into where evidence can be found, how it can be collected, and what it means. Caseworkers could also participate in or help facilitate focus groups or complete surveys.

Onsite Review



A caseworker's case may be selected for review and the caseworker could prepare the case record and participate in case-related interviews. They could help schedule case-related interviews with other case participants and/or could serve as a case reviewer for other cases. Caseworkers could also participate in stakeholder interviews to provide information on systemic factor functioning.

Program Improvement Plan



Caseworkers could help identify and understand the root causes for the areas needing improvement in their state's child welfare system, as well as the development of strategies to address them. They could also be involved in the implementation of these strategies and in monitoring the implementation to see how effective the strategies are. If necessary, they could participate in efforts to adjust strategies.



More Information

Caseworkers can learn about the review process by becoming familiar with the outcomes of their state's last review.

Additional information on the reviews is available on the Children's Bureau's website at

<https://acf.gov/cb/monitoring/child-family-services-reviews> and the CFSR Information Portal at

<https://www.cfsrportal.acf.hhs.gov/resources>. Information about the CFSR in your state and opportunities for your involvement may be available on the state child welfare agency's website. A list of state child welfare agency websites is at

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/organizations/?>

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