

the child's welfare, under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened thereby, as determined in accordance with [federal] regulations. (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, P.L. 100–294, Section 14 [4])

Should a child be maltreated or if there is a concern that maltreatment is a possibility, specialized agencies and workers become involved in the child's life. These units are known as child protective service agencies.

Child Protective Services (CPS) The term **child protective services (CPS)** is typically used to refer to the state system, department, or agency responsible for the investigation of allegations of abuse or neglect, the protection of children at risk of abuse or neglect, service delivery, and the placement of children who have been maltreated. Social workers serve as CPS intake workers, caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators. Although child protective services workers are involved in assessing maltreatment, they are also involved in numerous other services for children and families.

When a family cannot care for a child or is legally found to have mistreated a child, CPS workers rely on services that temporarily take the place of the family. **Foster care** is a major social welfare program to care for children outside of their families. The idea is for a child to be placed in a foster home while his or her family receives services to overcome problems. The ultimate goal is for the child to return home.

This goal is implemented through **permanency planning**. To provide stability for children in foster care, social workers follow federal guidelines. The first choice should be to return a child home. If that fails, the second choice is **adoption**, which involves legally moving a child to an adoptive family. If a child is not adopted, foster care becomes the long-term solution.

LO 3 A stronger commitment to keeping families together has developed over the past 30 years. When children cannot be kept in their homes, the goal is to keep the separation as short as possible. CPS and private child welfare agencies offer prevention and support services. **Family preservation services** are "activities designed to help families alleviate crises that might lead to out-of-home placement of children, maintain the safety of children in their own homes, support families preparing to reunify or adopt, and assist families in obtaining services and other supports necessary to address their multiple needs in a culturally sensitive manner" (Administration for Children and Families, 2013, p. 121). The purpose of family preservation is to provide support so that crises can be averted; if crises do occur, families are helped to cope and stay together. Often these supportive services include parenting education classes, individual or family counseling, alcohol and drug services, in-home visits, and referrals to needed community services.

The role of CPS workers can be extremely difficult and controversial. Information on abuse and neglect cases must be collected with enough detail to make a well-founded decision, but the decision also must be made in a timely manner. Many CPS workers have large caseloads and sometimes must make assessments within minutes. It can be extremely complicated to know what is in the best interest of a child, and evidence (what can be seen) and

information (what a third-party report states) may not always corroborate. Public scrutiny is often greatest in the child welfare domain as cases of severe child abuse and neglect attract news coverage. This can add to the stress of the job. CPS is a challenging field, yet a critical place for trained social workers.

Juvenile Justice

Each state also maintains a juvenile justice system that handles delinquency, juvenile detention, probation programs, juvenile court proceedings, and case management. Local and state governments use the system to deal with legal issues related to children, such as crime, violence, and running away. It is also the legal forum where decisions about removing children from their homes in cases of abuse or neglect are made. **Because of its involvement in abuse and neglect cases, the juvenile justice system is considered to be part of the child welfare system.**

The Roles of Social Workers

As the needs of children became further identified and clarified in the twentieth century, social work took the lead in intervening with children and their families. Today social workers play three main roles when working with children and their families: case management, direct practice, and advocacy and policy building.

Case Management **LO 4**

Although social workers utilize case management with many populations, it is especially useful with children and families. Case management with children includes assessing a child's problems and needs and determining what steps are necessary to provide services for the child and his or her family. This may include contacts with other service providers. Case managers may need to advocate for a child to obtain services despite barriers in the process. Case management is involved when a social worker tries to find low-income housing for a family in need, works with a foster family to provide counseling services for a child placed in the home, and works in a hospital to help a family find aftercare services for a child.

Direct Practice

Direct practice with children and their families can be varied depending on clients' needs and the environment in which a social worker is based. Generally, direct practice involves face-to-face contact with children and family members to form a therapeutic relationship and work through issues (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Cottfried, & Larsen, 2017). Relationships may be formed for only one day, as in the case of a crisis intervention specialist, or for a longer period of time, such as with a therapist at a behavioral health center.