

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN INTERACTING WITH ACS

- An ACS investigation begins because someone made a report of suspected neglect or abuse to the Statewide Central Register (SCR) hotline.
- ACS investigators may not look official. They may call themselves “caseworkers,” “child protective specialists,” “social workers” or just “ACS”.
- ACS may say they are there to help and ask questions about how they can support you and your family.
- Everything you say or do when interacting with ACS will be documented and can be used against you later. Be cautious about how you behave and what information you share with ACS.
- Be prepared for ACS to look into every aspect of you and your family’s life, including your home, children’s school, other family members, doctors, neighbors, and social media accounts.
- During an investigation, you are allowed to consult with a lawyer or advocate. **You should contact your local family defense office right away for free legal services.**
- During an investigation, ACS may ask you to attend a Child Safety Conference (CSC). You are not required to attend. If you do attend, you are allowed to bring a support person like a family member, friend, or parent advocate from a local family defense office. If ACS tells you they that they will provide you a parent advocate, beware, that person works for ACS.
- If your case goes to Family Court, then you will have the right to a lawyer, and the court will provide one to you for free if you cannot afford to pay.



DOs

- ✓ **Try to stay calm**, even though the conversation may be upsetting.
- ✓ **Ask to see the caseworker’s ID.** Ask for their supervisor’s name and phone number.
- ✓ **Call your local defender office** for free legal services.
- ✓ **Ask questions** if something doesn’t make sense.
- ✓ **Only answer questions you feel comfortable answering.** If you are uncomfortable with a question, tell ACS that you need to talk to a lawyer before answering. Anything you do or say can be used against you later.
- ✓ **Ask ACS to come back later** if it’s a bad time.



DON'Ts

- ✗ **Don’t panic.** Take a deep breath and contact your local defender office for support.
- ✗ **Don’t show that you’re angry.** This can be used against you later, including in court.
- ✗ **Don’t share more information than is necessary.** If something happened in the past that is no longer relevant to your parenting or family (like smoking marijuana as a teen) you do not need to talk about it. You can say that you don’t currently have issues with that. Ask for time to speak with a lawyer if you don’t want to answer right away.
- ✗ **Don’t sign blank documents**, especially HIPAA forms or consents to release information. Take pictures of the document and review with a family defense legal advocate.