

Frequently Asked Questions about the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Child Fatality/Near Fatality Review Team

Why did DHS create a Child Fatality/Near Fatality Review Team?

A state legislative mandate required all county child welfare agencies (Act 33 of 2008, SB 1147) to implement CF/NF Review Teams as part of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' reporting system, as required by the state Child Protective Services Law. This review team allows DHS, team members who represents various community and systems' partners, and related providers to focus on service delivery in cases of system-involved children, and, in the case of non-system-involved children, allows the team to look at community responses to child deaths/ near-deaths and community responses related to the prevention of future deaths/near-deaths.

Goals

- To identify deficiencies and strengths in compliance with statutes and regulations and services to children and families
- To identify recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on reducing the likelihood of future child fatalities and near fatalities directly related to child abuse and neglect
- To identify recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on monitoring and inspection of county agencies
- To identify recommendations for changes at the state and local levels on collaboration of community agencies and service providers to prevent child abuse and neglect

What qualifies as a “near fatality”?

On September 03, 2008 PA DHS indicated that the “near fatality” definition is, “*an act that, as certified by a physician, places a child in serious or critical condition.*”

Who participates as part of the CF/NF Review Team meetings?

The Allegheny County Review Team is chaired by Dr. Mary Carrasco, Director of A Child's Place. Meetings are facilitated by Dr. Elizabeth Winter, Associate Professor from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Team members are representatives of various county departments and have expertise in the prevention and treatment of child abuse. Members include county DHS program office representatives, other Allegheny County departments, including the Health Department, District Attorney, and Medical Examiner, state child welfare officials, law enforcement, medical experts and CYF Advisory Board members.

How does this group differ from other child death review meetings?

The CF/NF Review Team is mandated by legislation and focuses on cases of child deaths and child near-deaths when there is suspicion or substantiation of abuse or neglect.

Who attends the meetings?

There are two groups of attendees at each meeting – one group of standing CF/NF Review Team Members and another group of professionals with information related to the case(s) that are under review.

What powers does the CF/NF Review Team have to request information?

According to Act 33 of 2008, CF/NF Review Team is required to review the circumstances of the child's fatality or near-fatality and the delivery of services to the child and family. “Services”

include, “*law enforcement, mental health services, programs for young children and children with special needs, drug and alcohol programs, local schools, and health care providers.*” 23 Pa.C.S. § 6365(4)(i)-(ii). Full review of these providers’ records is essential for review of that service delivery. Furthermore, Act 33 amends 23 Pa.C.S. § 6340 to include that confidential reports shall be made available to a member of a CF/NF Review Team.

Will I be held criminally or civilly liable if I share confidential information with the CF/NF Review Team?

Act 33 amends 23 Pa.C.S. § 6318(a)’s grant of immunity to specifically include disclosures to this Review Team, “*a person, hospital, institution, school, facility, agency or agency employee that participates in good faith in the making of a report, whether required or not, cooperating with an investigation, **including providing information to a child fatality or near fatality review team...** shall have immunity from civil and criminal liability that might otherwise result by reason of those actions.*”

Do Act 33 reports become public?

The CF/NF Review Teams’ reports that are approved by the state DHS are to be made available to the public, with some exceptions. Identifying information is to be redacted from the report, except for:

- Identity of deceased child
- If child was in the custody of a public or private agency and the agency’s identity
- Identity of contracted agencies for services to the child and in the family’s home
- Identity of any county agency that convened a CF/NF review team.