



Office of Children
and Family Services

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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS & NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES ANNOUNCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

NYS OCFS Recently Launched Updated Mandated Reporter Training to Confront & Address Bias in the Child Welfare System

Over 4,500 Employees at NYC Public Schools & Office of School Health Staff & Leadership Have Participated in Trainings About When to and When Not to Make a Report to the State Child Abuse Hotline

The NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), NYC Public Schools (NYC Public Schools) and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) today announced strategies to help reduce racial disproportionality among the families that come to the attention of the child welfare system. ACS, NYC Public Schools and OCFS are working together to "narrow the front door" of the child welfare system and educate mandated reporters on the many ways to provide support to families without making a report to the State's child abuse hotline.

First, OCFS has launched a new training for all professional groups who are "mandated reporters," which means they are required by state law to report suspected child abuse and maltreatment. A key focus of the new training is an implicit bias component to prevent calls to the Statewide Central Register of Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) based on race and poverty. Updates also include material to explain the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children and families and to prevent inflicting additional trauma by unnecessarily subjecting a family to a child protective services investigation. The overarching theme of the new mandated reporter training is "You can support a family without having to report a family." Referrals to vital necessities like food, health care and housing can make all the difference when a family simply needs to be supported rather than reported.

The updated training also helps mandated reporters to develop improved skills to recognize signs of abuse and maltreatment in virtual settings, reflecting the increase in telemedicine and virtual mental health services since the pandemic. More than 50 professional groups, including teachers, social workers, child care workers, doctors and police officers, are mandated reporters. They must complete the free, online, self-directed course -- which is available in English and Spanish -- by April 1, 2025.

Second, ACS and NYC Public Schools recently revised their annual training, based on the new OCFS material. The revised training focuses on helping school staff understand the impact of a

making a report to the SCR, the need to focus on objective facts and be aware of implicit bias when deciding whether to report, and how to access the many resources available to families citywide without making a report. So far, over 4,500 employees at NYC Public Schools and the Office of School Health staff and leadership have participated in the training. Additional trainings and supportive conversations with schools are planned for this fall, including a 30-minute training for all school-based personnel citywide, led by each school's designated liaison for child abuse prevention.

Third, OCFS, NYC Public Schools and ACS are taking many steps to increase families' access to culturally responsive and effective community-based services. Both school staff and families can find services here:

- Contact the ACS prevention support line: 212-676-7667 (Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.) or connect@acs.nyc.gov
- Visit nyc.gov/ForFamilies to access free community-based programs
- Visit MyCity.nyc.gov to access child care assistance
- Contact OCFS's new HEARS family line (Help, Empower, Advocate, Reassure and Support): 1-888-55HEARS (Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.).

"Child welfare investigations can be traumatic, stressful, and intrusive for families, and they disproportionately impact families of color. In 2022 alone, a Black child in New York City was seven times more likely than a White child to be in a child protective investigation, and 1 out of every 2 Black children in New York City has been the subject of an investigation by the time they reach the age of 18," **said Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services Anne Williams Isom**. "Today's announcement is an important step to address this, while also making sure that families in need of services or support are receiving it. Additionally, we are improving our cross-agency cooperation and giving new tools and training to our frontline staff to help tackle equity issues over the long term and help keep children safe."

"ACS is working hard to ensure that mandated reporters, who are professionals working closely with children each and every day, know how to best connect families to the supports and services they need to thrive – whether that means access to concrete resources, like food, clothing and diapers, or interventions like substance abuse treatment and mental health counseling." **said ACS Commissioner Jess Dannhauser**. "Calls to the State's child abuse hotline should be reserved for when a child's safety is at risk and our strong collaboration with NYC Public Schools will help make sure that is happening in New York City. By working together on behalf of New York City children, we can help provide much-needed supports further upstream and reduce the number of unnecessary investigations experienced by Black and Hispanic/Latinx families for far too long."

"Our educators and school staff members provide critical, wraparound supports for our young people each and every day. It is essential that these caring adults are aware and equipped with the tools and resources needed to ensure the safety of our students and are trained in the proper reporting standards for suspected cases of child abuse," **said Schools Chancellor David C. Banks**. "Thousands of New York City Public School staff have already participated in the new designated liaison training, which tackles implicit bias, and addresses the devastating impact that an unwarranted investigation can have on a family. It takes a village to raise a child, and it is vital that our educators and school staff work hand in hand with our families and communities to ensure the wellbeing of every child."

OCFS Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave said, “If decades of the child welfare system’s disproportionately negative impact on people of color have taught us anything, it’s that we must collaborate to transform our child welfare system into one that is grounded in equity. Our mission remains the same – to protect New York’s precious children – but now we are guided by our ‘North Star’ of doing everything we can to strengthen families first. I’m grateful to our partners at ACS and NYC Public Schools, who are making these principles a part of every educators’ mandated reporter training, knowing they interact with children as much, if not more, than their caregivers do.”

“COFCCA and our member agencies work collaboratively with our government partners to make meaningful change for the children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. Our agency caseworkers are actively engaged in preventing family separation through the delivery of prevention services. The call to support families instead of reporting families is a major shift in child welfare practices and a giant step in the right direction to “narrowing the front door.” As stakeholders, we must do everything possible to avoid unnecessary and harmful family separations,” **said Sophie Charles, Ph.D, COFCCA Associate Executive Director, Downstate.**