

Understanding Child Welfare in the U.S. for Refugee Youth and Families



What is child welfare?

Child welfare is a range of services that help keep children safe and support families when there are concerns about a child's safety or care. Child welfare services include prevention services, child protective services, foster care, and adoption.



The goals of child welfare are to:

- Keep children **safe**
- **Support** parents and caregivers
- Help families **stay together** whenever it is safe
- Make sure children grow up in **safe and stable homes**

How Child Welfare Can Support You

Child welfare support is typically short-term and focused on helping families stabilize and remain safely together. In many cases, services can begin even before a crisis occurs, connecting families to community resources, providing case management, and coordinating with schools, doctors, and other trusted supports. Prevention programs are designed to address challenges early, strengthen families, and reduce the need for more intensive intervention.



These prevention services are usually voluntary and do not involve Child Protective Services (CPS). Child welfare is not intended to judge or punish parents, nor does it automatically result in children being removed from their homes. It is also not connected to immigration enforcement. For more information about prevention services available in your community, contact your case manager or your local child welfare agency.

Understanding Mandatory Reporting

Mandatory reporting means that some professionals are required by law to report concerns about a child's safety to child protective services (CPS).

These professionals may include:



Teachers and school staff



Doctors, nurses, and other health providers



Social workers and case managers



Childcare providers



Counselors and therapists



Law enforcement officers

Mandatory reporters **must make a report to CPS when they believe a child has been abused or neglected**. They are not required to prove that abuse has happened—only to share concerns so they can be reviewed by CPS.

- **Important to remember:** Mandatory reporting is meant to protect children.
- Making a report to CPS is a way for professionals to ask for help when they are worried about a child's safety.
- A report does not always result in an investigation or the removal of a child from their home.

