



Matching the Right CPS Investigator with the Right Investigation

Child protective services (CPS) administrators and supervisors spend hours focusing on numbers. How many reports of abuse and neglect are outstanding? How many investigations must be completed by what time? How much staff is available? Valuable time is spent on collecting, analyzing, and reporting these numbers.

Are these same administrators and supervisors spending enough time and effort thinking about which investigator should be assigned to each particular case? Is each assignment made randomly, or simply based on worker availability? With all our technology, we have lots of data. But are we looking only at the quantity of cases in determining assignments, or are we also looking at the quality of cases? In rural areas where there is only a limited number of available CPS investigators, this discussion is probably moot. But in major metropolitan areas where one might be able to choose among many CPS investigators, perhaps there is some value in this exploration.

Better Investigations by Building Better Relationships

We hear it all the time: relationships matter. Can relationship skills be applied to CPS investigations? If so, what does that mean for the CPS investigation assignment process? After all, assigning the right investigator for a particular investigation can mean the difference between a child who is safe or a child who is left at risk. If we can assign investigators so they are able to maximize their relationship-building



skills, this could lead to more effective investigations. And when CPS investigators are more effective, more children might be safe.

When we experience an emotional connection with someone, we say we “click”; we are describing that feeling of being on the same wavelength, of sharing a common conceptual understanding. The best salespeople understand this and know how to make that connection with people, starting by establishing a rapport that can grow into a relationship. Of course, selling cars or shoes is not the same thing as investigating child abuse. But effective CPS investigators make the same effort to establish rapport and then build on that rapport to form relationships. Especially

because many investigations may take a long time, good CPS investigators are not simply investigating; they are engaged in a relationship.

The problem with relationship building is that it is the last thing anyone takes the trouble to do when they are stressed out about just getting the job done. Relationships take time and empathy—both of which are in short supply when CPS investigators are tossed from one type of investigation to the next, each one with the potential to involve different regulations, administrative goals, and unstated expectations. One way to lessen the stress inherent in CPS investigations is to organize and

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Title: Health Policy and Program Associate

Time at APHSA: Five months

Life Before APHSA: I worked for two years as a clerk at Fairfax County General District Court in Northern Virginia. There, I was an assistant to the 11 judges of the court, and I handled all mental health paperwork, ranging from civil commitments to psychological evaluations in criminal cases. Working with the judges was always fun (I found, through various clerking opportunities at various courts, that there is no such thing as a boring judge), but involved a lot of firefighting. Before my work at the court, I studied law and health care compliance at the

Mitchell Hamline School of Law in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Priorities at APHSA: Because of my degree and previous work experience, I was hired to be a part of APHSA's National Collaborative for Integration of Health and Human Services (NC). I am assisting Megan Lape, the director of the NC, to conduct research and analysis of health policy, funding opportunities, and cross-programmatic metrics and measures to further enable coordinated service delivery across health and human service programs. Once I am settled in, I will also assist in the development of guidance and tools, and will update content on the NC's web page.

What I Can Do for Our Members: Provide APHSA members with a better understanding

of health policy and how it intersects with Human Services.

Best Way to Reach Me: As a millennial (and not ashamed of it), I am in constant contact by phone. My cell number is (202) 360-8778, my email is cbecker@aphsa.org, and our main line office number is (202) 682-0100. I look forward to hearing from you!

When Not Working: I'm always in the kitchen, either cooking or eating.

Motto to Live By: As a classical history major, I studied Latin for three years. One of the (only) phrases that has stuck with me from those lessons is "festina lente." The saying is translated as "make haste slowly," and it's a reminder to work slowly and thoroughly to get things right the first time. 📖

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specialize, to the extent staffing levels allow. One possible effective way to organize the assignment of CPS investigators is a two-tiered structure along these lines:

- First, assign investigators according to the setting in which the abuse took place: in the home of the custodial parent(s); in foster care; or in an institutional setting like a day care center, group home, or juvenile detention center.
- Second, assign the investigators on each of those teams to handle certain types of abuse cases (recognizing there will be overlap): physical; sexual; neglect; or situational abuse, such as adult domestic abuse or criminal activity in the home.

By allowing CPS investigators to specialize, relationships are easier

to build in at least two ways. First, specialization brings familiarity, confidence, and expertise, all of which reduce the stress level of accomplishing the job. These skills mean better investigations on the front end, and, where criminal prosecutions are required, better trial witnesses later on. As investigators worry less about learning the lay of the land, they have more time and energy to spend establishing rapport and building those important relationships.

Second, some relationships extend across investigations. If investigators cover all types of investigations arising in all types of settings, they might never see the same face twice. Investigators that are assigned according to specialty might cross paths with others who specialize along similar lines: law enforcement officers,

facility administrators, prosecutors or defense attorneys, counselors, or child advocates. Whether or not these people are on the "same side," relationships with them matter, especially over the long term. Specialization allows more opportunity to develop these relationships.

From a strategic and results-oriented standpoint, CPS investigation specialization might be worth a try. 📖

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