



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

ROY COOPER • Governor

KODY H. KINSLEY • Secretary

SUSAN OSBORNE • Assistant Secretary for County Operations for
Human Services

June 1, 2023

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**ATTENTION: DIRECTORS, CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS, MANAGERS,
SUPERVISORS, AND SOCIAL WORKERS**

SUBJECT: Child Welfare Resource: Unsafe Discipline Versus Physical Abuse Guidance

REQUIRED ACTION: Information Only Time Sensitive Immediate

To help support Child Welfare workers, supervisors, program managers and administrators' efforts in conducting comprehensive screenings and assessments of child welfare reports, NC DSS has developed a statewide guidance document to assist specifically with distinguishing between unsafe discipline versus physical abuse, and how best to respond. Please note this guidance document includes updated language such as unsafe discipline, which replaces inappropriate or improper discipline. In alignment with the changes to policy outlined in DCDL_CWS_29_2023, this guidance will assist workers with better assessing unsafe discipline and physical abuse.

The NC DSS Child Welfare Resource for Unsafe Discipline Versus Physical Abuse guidance document highlights screening thresholds for neglect and abuse, discerning impact to a child versus caregiver intentions and culture, and discussion prompts social workers may utilize with reporters and families to deepen engagement and understanding. This guidance document also aims to promote child-focused safety and screening and response types that align with policy.

When reports of child maltreatment are screened and responded to appropriately, Child Welfare workers can reduce further harm and risk, especially for vulnerable populations of children. Child Welfare workers who can appropriately identify the difference between unsafe discipline and physical abuse during assessments will be better equipped to engage with families and communicate specific safety concerns to promote desired behavior changes.

The NCDSS Child Welfare Resource for Unsafe Discipline Versus Physical Abuse can be found on the policies and manuals site under [Child Welfare Practice Resources](#).

If there are any questions regarding the new guidance document, please contact Jadie Baldwin-Hamm at jadie.baldwin@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,

Kathy Stone
Section Chief for Safety and Prevention
North Carolina Division of Social Services

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

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