

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why did we need a new Intake Tool?

A: A Program Evaluation Division study was completed on behalf of the NC General Assembly regarding the current Intake Tool. There were several problems noted with the current Intake Tool used by Child Welfare to include:

- Inconsistent and inaccurate screening decisions across the State.
- Counties developed their own policies that differed from the State policy.
- Inconsistent and untimely guidance from the State level due to an inability to view data in real time.
- The Intake Tool is lengthy and redundant.

As a result of the findings a legislative mandate was issued to develop a new Intake Tool.

Q: How was the new Intake Tool developed?

A: North Carolina Child Welfare partnered with Evident Change to develop a Structured Decision-Making Tool to complete Intake assessments. North Carolina also included the Safety Design Team, comprised of county child welfare workers, supervisors, program administrators, and directors along with external professional stakeholders and individuals with lived experience.

The Screening and Response tool that is now used in Intake begins the next step in implementing North Carolina's Practice Model that builds on the Practice Standards and now adds the Structured Decision Tool. It incorporates elements of Safety Organized Practice including Provisional Harm and Worry statements which provide clear details about the harm or maltreatment without judgement and behavioral statements of the worry concerning the child now and, in the future, to help child welfare better assess safety.

Q: What does Child Welfare hope to accomplish with this new tool?

A: Child welfare hopes to achieve better outcomes for children and families by providing strong and balanced interviewing skills combined with critical thinking to accurately and equitably assess reports. We recognize the importance of building and developing good professional relationships with reporters while gathering information about family strengths and family supports that engage the community in assisting with the safety of children. Also, valuing and understanding the context and culture of families and communities to accurately assess maltreatment and assist with developing solutions.

Q: What changes should I expect from the new Intake process?

A: The new Intake process allows child welfare to meet the legislative requirement for a new Intake process. More importantly, it is designed for a better experience for reporters and child welfare staff. It has been streamlined and developed to be intuitive to use to decrease the time a reporter stays on the phone and more quickly assess any safety concerns for children so that there is a timely response. Inter-rater Reliability testing was completed on the new tool and minimal training workers were able to produce 80% consistency. Child welfare workers also engaged in User Testing and were able to complete the Tool within the system in a much shorter time than expected with minimal training.

The tool has been designed with a built-in internal logic system that sorts maltreatment information from the report into categories that indicate the correct Assessment Track (Investigative or Family Assessment) and the correct Response time based on the allegations. This is designed to create consistency (children and families should get the same child welfare response no matter where they live in North Carolina) and accuracy (the correct Assessment Track and Response Time should be selected) in all 100 counties. The internal logic also creates equity in the screening and response to reports of child maltreatment. It is important to note that the system does not make screening decisions for child welfare but helps to capture the information needed to determine if the call requires a child welfare response, which track and how quickly a response is needed.

The new system will remove the requirement for reporters to be asked about every maltreatment type that exists in state statute. The workers are now guided to focus on questions that are specific to what the reporter is worried about. Some questions are even specialized for reporters who may have a different level of information to assist in the decision making process such as Medical Providers, Educational Personnel, or Law Enforcement.

The definitions in the tools have been more strongly aligned with statute to create clarity for reporters, stakeholders and child welfare staff in the decision-making process. Changes include:

- Words like inappropriate and improper have been replaced with “unsafe”.
- Educational neglect policy has been clarified when non-educational personnel make a report.
- Substance use removed as a separate maltreatment type to ensure that child welfare is only involved when there is statutory maltreatment.
- When a child is born substance exposed, there must be medical impact, or another maltreatment concern associated in order to screen in. A child’s positive toxicology, alone, is not sufficient to meet NC’s statutory definitions of maltreatment and there is case law established to support this stance. This adjustment to policy is ensuring alignment with statutory requirements that NC Child Welfare may not become involved with a family unless what is reported, if true, meets a definition of maltreatment

Q: What does child welfare request of the reporter?

A: What has not changed is that the reporter should remember their statutory mandate to report all suspected child maltreatment to their local county social services. The reporter should be prepared to provide as much knowledge as they have regarding the situation and answer any questions that the Intake worker may have to gather clarifying information.

The entire State child welfare staff is moving to a new system of assessing maltreatment and engaging technology and the reporter should be prepared for a brief transition while workers learn the system. This may create questions for the reporter and any questions should be asked. All reporters should provide any constructive feedback to their local county social services agency to ensure that we are developing a system that works for everyone.