



OFFICE OF
CHILD ADVOCATE

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“Together we
strive to see
FACES, NOT
cases”



AGENDA

- What is OCA?
- OCA Review Process
 - Identified Trends
- Multi-Disciplinary Approach
 - Child Welfare Statistics
 - MDT Purpose/ Roles
- Group-work- Utilizing the MDT Approach
 - Building a Strong MDT
 - Questions and Answers

- Established in 2002 by an Executive Order of the Governor. The Missouri Office of Child Advocate was created as part of the response to the death of 2-year-old Dominic James, due to injuries sustained while being shaken in his foster home at the hands of his foster father.
- Following the tragedy, Governor Holden appointed Richard C. Dunn and Judge Frank Conley to investigate the Greene County child welfare system, in addition to interim committees being created to conduct statewide reviews.
- OCA was developed as a recommendation from these committees.
- Operates Under the Office of Administration
- OCA is an independent reviewer of the Child Welfare System in which citizens can obtain an independent and impartial review of cases.

What is the Office of Child Advocate?

Office of Child Advocate Review Process

Complaint Received by OCA

Investigator reviews complaint to determine if a review should be conducted or referred to more appropriate agency.



Notify Children's Division, Juvenile Office and Complainant

OCA Investigator will notify via email that a review has been opened and that all records should be made available



Case File Review

Investigator will review information in FACES, OnBase, and request records from other parties as deemed appropriate to conduct a full review. This may include reaching out to individual team members or participation in meetings.

Complete Review

Investigator will complete a disposition letter stating whether or not we agree with the direction of the case, note any policy or practice concerns, and make recommendations.



Send Disposition

OCA Investigator will send the Disposition letter to Director of Social Services, Deputy Directors, Constituent Services, Chief Juvenile officers, Field Support Managers, Circuit Managers, Case Supervisor, case workers, and complainant**. If deemed necessary, we also include Guardian ad Litem's and Circuit Judges.

Case Trends

What is a case trend?
Areas of concern that
OCA identifies over
multiple case reviews in
certain areas or
throughout the state.

Trends Identified:

- ❖ Placement Hierarchy
- ❖ Lack of Diligent Efforts
- ❖ Underutilized TAPA's/ Lack of JO Involvement
- ❖ Lack of Assessment Skills during Investigations
- ❖ Parent/Sibling Visitation
- ❖ Continuity of Assessment Process for Placement
- ❖ FST Meetings/ Lack of MDT Involvement
- ❖ Social Service Plan Inconsistencies
- ❖ Monthly Parental Visits
- ❖ Inconsistent GAL Involvement
- ❖ Consistency in Policy and Practice



The Multi-Disciplinary Team Approach

IMAGINE A SOCIETY...

... where children do not die from abuse or neglect.

... where children are valued, loved, and cared for first and foremost by their parents.

... where the safety and wellbeing of children are everyone's highest priority, and federal, state, and local agencies work collaboratively with families and communities to protect children from harm.

... where leaders of child protective services agencies do not stand alone but share responsibility with multiple partners to keep children safe long before families reach a crisis.

... where all children are equally protected and their families equally supported, regardless of race, ethnicity, income, or where they live.

... where state and local agencies charged with child safety have the resources, leaders, staff, funds, technology, effective strategies, and flexibility to support families when and how it is most helpful.

... Imagine child welfare in the 21st century where children are safe and families are strong and where prevention of child abuse and neglect deaths is a reality.

What Will It Take to Get There?

ALL OF US!!

WE ALL NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO KEEP KIDS SAFER. IT NEEDS TO BE A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY. IT COULD NEVER BE ONE AGENCY, ONE DEPARTMENT; IT HAS TO BE ALL OF US.

How big is the problem of child abuse?

- ❖ Five children die every day from child abuse in the United States
- ❖ 66.1% of all child fatalities involved children under three.
- ❖ 81.8% of child fatalities involve at least one parent.
 - ❖ 44.7% were under the age of one
 - ❖ 76.4% were neglected.
 - ❖ 42.1% were physically abused and/or in combination with another maltreatment type.
 - ❖ Boys had a higher child fatality rate than girls (3.26 boys & 2.25 girls per 100,000)

**American SPCC 2022 (most recently released data)*

Child Abuse Statistics- Missouri

- ❖ The CANHU received 139,739* hotline calls between July 2022 and June 2023. Of those reports, 61,712 were classified as Investigations or Assessments and involved a total of 86,088 children.
- ❖ During FY 2023, 4,347 children were involved in incidents that were concluded as substantiated for abuse and/or neglect. Of the six categories of Preponderance of Evidence, Neglect was the most prevalent substantiated category at 53% during investigations, staggering above physical and sexual abuse.
- ❖ Missouri had 44 fatalities in 2023 in which abuse or neglect were associated with the child's death. Of the 44 fatalities, the majority were under the age of one and white males.
 - ❖ A natural parent and parent's partner accounted for the majority of substantiated perpetrators involved in an investigation.

*(Child Abuse and Neglect 2023 Fiscal Report)

THE NEED FOR A TEAM APPROACH

Video

The Team approach-The Center for Hope

MDT Mission

To facilitate justice and healing for children and families impacted by abuse through collaboration and shared decision making that centers the child's voice and safety so that we can create a community where children can truly thrive.



5.3.2 Multi-Disciplinary Teams

Pursuant to Section 210.145, RSMo., "multidisciplinary teams shall be used whenever conducting the Investigation as determined by the division in conjunction with local law enforcement. **Multidisciplinary teams shall be used in providing protective or preventive social services**, including the services of law enforcement, a liaison of the local public school, the juvenile officer, the juvenile court, and other agencies, both public and private."

Multi-Disciplinary Teams Cont.

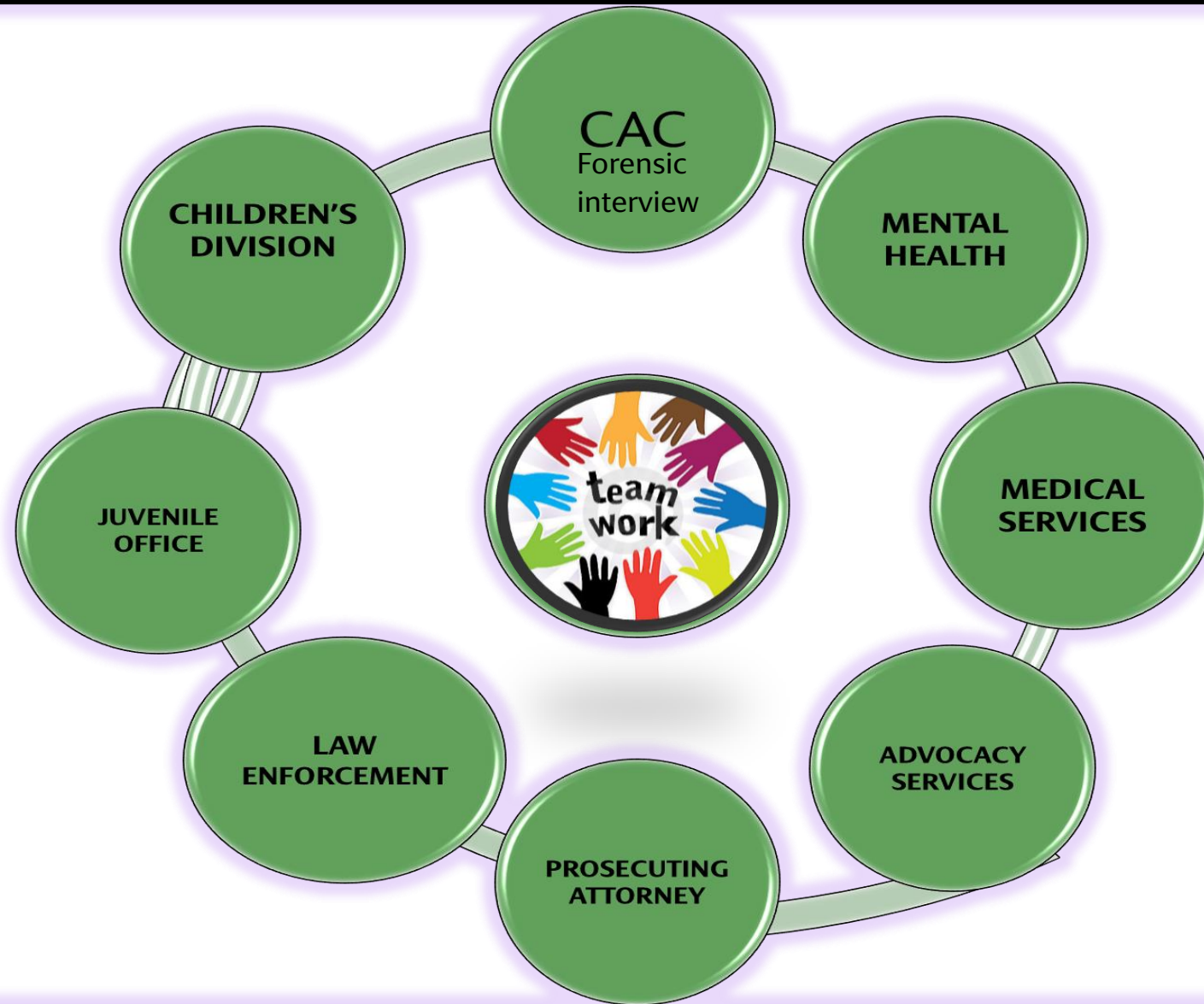
Section 660.520, RSMo., further defines multi-disciplinary teams (MDT) to include a prosecutor, or his or her representative, an investigator from the children's division, a physician, a representative from a mental health care services agency and a representative of the police agency of primary jurisdiction.



INTERESTING FACT

THE LEGAL BASIS FOR THE MDT FALLS UNDER 660.520 WHICH ESTABLISHED A SPECIAL TEAM KNOWN AS THE STATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM **(STAT)** FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

THE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM

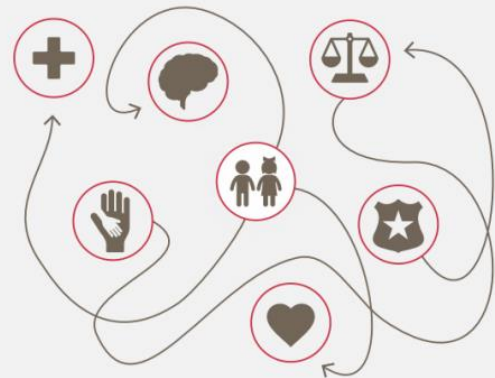


Child Advocacy Centers

In Missouri, most circuits report the local CAC coordinates their MDT. CAC Services include:

- ❖ Forensic Interviews
- ❖ Medical Services
- ❖ Family and Victim Advocacy
- ❖ Mental Health Providers

Without CACs



With CACs



NOTE: if these services are not available at your local CAC, the MDT needs to research these providers and invite them to the team.

The Purpose of MDT Collaboration

- ❖ Provide a clear framework for planning and investigating and subsequent service provision involving alleged child victims/witnesses of sexual abuse, physical abuse/neglect, or other violent crimes;
- ❖ Coordinate intervention to reduce potential trauma to children and families, while preserving and respecting the rights and obligations of each agency to pursue their respective mandates;
- ❖ Efficiently gather and share information in a timely manner;
- ❖ Broaden the knowledge base with which decisions are made by including information from many sources, and improve communication among agencies;
- ❖ Encourage understanding of MDT member roles and responsibilities and avoid conflicts within the MDT collaboration to improve efficiency, timeliness, and reliability of case intervention;
- ❖ Increase MDT members requisite skills through training, coordination, and critical review of action taken.

The Children's Division

The Children's Division is responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of children. When mandated reporters and others make reports of abuse and/or neglect of children by caregivers to CD, investigations are conducted to determine the need for protective measures and supportive services.

Law Enforcement

Local, state and/or county law enforcement departments conduct investigations to determine whether a crime has been committed. They participate in the forensic interview at the CAC by observing. They also conduct investigative interviews with caregivers, suspects and other witnesses, gather evidence, file criminal complaints and make arrests depending on the specific circumstances of a case. Charging decisions may be made ultimately in coordination with prosecutors.

Prosecutor

The prosecuting attorney has the final decision as to whether the case will be criminally prosecuted. In many jurisdictions, the prosecuting attorney works closely with law enforcement to make charging decisions based on the strength of the evidence in an individual case. It is important that you understand the rationale for prosecution decisions, including the obstacles prosecutors face in achieving a unanimous verdict if a case goes to trial. Sometimes cases that seem strong to you and others on the MDT may be viewed differently by prosecutors.

The Juvenile Office

The Juvenile Office provides court intervention when necessary to ensure child safety. They may also be involved in situations that involve juvenile perpetrators.

Additional Resources

Think outside of the box when determining who may have information regarding the families you are working with!

Guardian Ad Litem's

Home Visiting Providers

Collateral Contacts

Relatives

Medical Providers

School/Daycare Providers

Group Activity

The Case of Missed Opportunities: The Turner/ Lott/ Lawless Family

Things to Consider:

How would you handle a case like this in your circuit?

What are the opportunities for intervention/ collaboration?

What are some sources of information that could be utilized?

What steps could be taken to prevent this outcome in the future?

At the end of the exercise, ask yourself “What can I take back to improve my MDT?”



WHAT MAKES A STRONG MDT?

Communication and coordination: Team members should understand each other's roles and responsibilities and be open to constructive criticism.

Respect: MDT members should respect each other and agree to disagree.

Diversity: MDTs should be made up of a diverse membership with distinct perspectives and ideologies.

Collaboration: MDTs should work together to ensure that each incident is properly investigated and responded to.

Leadership: MDTs should have an identified leader.

Honesty: MDT members should be honest.

THE BENEFITS OF AN MDT

- ❖ Less “system inflicted” trauma to children and families.
- ❖ Better agency decisions, including more accurate investigations and more appropriate interventions.
- ❖ More efficient use of limited agency resources.
- ❖ Better trained, more capable professionals.
- ❖ More respect in the community and less burnout among child abuse professionals.
- ❖ **A SAFER COMMUNITY!**

SOUND FAMILIAR??

- I don't have time for this. "Too many cases, not enough resources."
- "Someone else dropped the ball, why should I have to clean this up?"
- "These families are never going to change."
- "I can't control anyone else."
- "No one understands the restrictions I face."
- "I work alone."
- "You want to put people in jail; I need to put families back together."
- "I have enough meetings; I don't need anymore."

Instead, focus on what you can bring to the table?

KEEPING THE TEAM ACTIVE

- **Resolve conflict-** conflict is inevitable and normal, figure out a way to agree to disagree.
- **Promote teamwork-** everyone plays an important part on the team.
- **Do not lose sight of why the MDT exists-** revisit successes
- **Meet on a regular basis-** maybe over lunch (food is always a good idea)
- **Periodic evaluation** is essential if the team is to know whether it is functioning effectively and being properly maintained.

Where does Missouri stand?

There are 46 Circuits in Missouri

Of those 46 circuits, 30 responded to questions regarding their MDT structure.

- 22 Circuits are led and organized by their CAC
- 2 Circuits are led by the prosecuting attorney
- 1 Circuit doesn't meet due to staff shortages
- 1 Circuit meets as needed
- 2 Circuits don't have an organized MDT
- 2 Circuits are struggling to get an organized MDT but would like suggestions and help
- 17 Circuits meet monthly
- 7 Circuits meet quarterly
- The MDTs were made up of CD, Law Enforcement, Prosecuting Attorney, JO, & CAC.

It is beyond the power of government to prevent this from being a world in which children suffer and die, but it is the responsibility of government to protect children and bring those responsible for mistreating them to justice.

Secrets That Can Kill: Child Abuse Investigations in New York State
New York State Temporary Commission of
Investigation, 1996

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Contact Information

*Thank you for all
that you do for
children and
families!*

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