



# Documenting Evidence to Support Proposed Substantiated Findings

## Documentation Tips:

It is imperative that the proposed allegations are supported by the DCS case record. The documentation entered by investigative staff is the key to ensuring the substantiation can be upheld if challenged on appeal.

- **Exact statements of each person interviewed during the investigation.**
  - Do not summarize the response to each allegation contained in the report; use quotes whenever practical.
  - Document *each* person’s knowledge of the abuse or neglect, noting whether it was direct or indirect knowledge.
  - Identify each person by name, not “child” or “parent.”
- The exact date or time frame of the abuse or neglect.
- Any admission, denial, or knowledge of the incident or condition provided by the alleged perpetrator.
- Observations of the injury, the specifics of the neglect (food, shelter, clothing, supervision or medical care) or conditions of the home, with specific details.
  - If observations were not made, provide the reason.
- Consistency or inconsistency of the explanation as compared to the injury.
- Witness account(s) of the incident, to include when and what they saw or heard.
- Specific concerns *and* the unreasonable risk of harm for any conditions that the children were exposed to at the time of the investigation.
- Unsuccessful efforts to interview persons and the reason(s) the person could not be interviewed.
- Additional information the reporting source provided that is not contained in the initial report to the Hotline.
- Detailed information about discussions with other professionals involved in the investigation.
- Your professional assessment as to *each person’s credibility*, giving reasons for that determination.
  - Consider and explain why was one person was more credible than another, if applicable.
- Supporting documentation obtained and reviewed, such as police reports, incident reports, medical reports, photographs, forensic videos or summaries, behavioral or psychological evaluation reports, correspondence from family members or others, etc.
  - Include report numbers and dates, where applicable.

- Conflicting opinions or documentation between professionals involved in the investigation, and note the review of those opinions/documents.

## Documenting witness statements:

- **Do not write:** Johnny said his dad hit Billy and Billy got bruised.
- **Instead write:** Johnny said he saw his dad hit Billy on Sunday morning, 9-2-07, in the family room because Billy spilled his milk. Johnny said later that night he saw the big bruise Billy had on his thigh from where his dad hit his brother.
- Documenting admissions by the alleged perpetrator:
- **Do not write:** Dad said he was only trying to get Billy to obey.
- **Instead write:** John Jones admitted to this case manager that he spanked Billy with a belt on Sunday, 9-2-07, but denied he caused the bruise on the child’s thigh. Mr. Jones stated that he “does not know how Billy got the bruise.”
  - **Or:** John Jones admitted to this case manager that he spanked Billy with a belt. He stated that he “never saw any bruises on Billy.”
  - **Or:** John Jones admitted to this case manager that he spanked Billy with a belt on Sunday, 9-2-07, but denies he caused the bruise on the child’s thigh. He stated that “Billy got the bruise on his thigh from falling from his bike on Saturday, 9-1-07.”

## Documenting unsuitable living environments:

- **Do not write:** The home was dirty.
- **Instead write:** This case manager observed the home. The living room contained moldy spoiled food, soiled diapers, marijuana pipes and cocaine, all accessible to the child.

## Other Tips:

- If investigating multiple reports at the same time, the documentation must clearly delineate which information pertains to which report. Melding of report information can compromise the success in substantiating maltreatment.
- **Do not document personal opinions.** Use only *professional* opinions based on your training, experience, and education.

