

## Safety Planning Guide for Natural Supports



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***Welcome!***



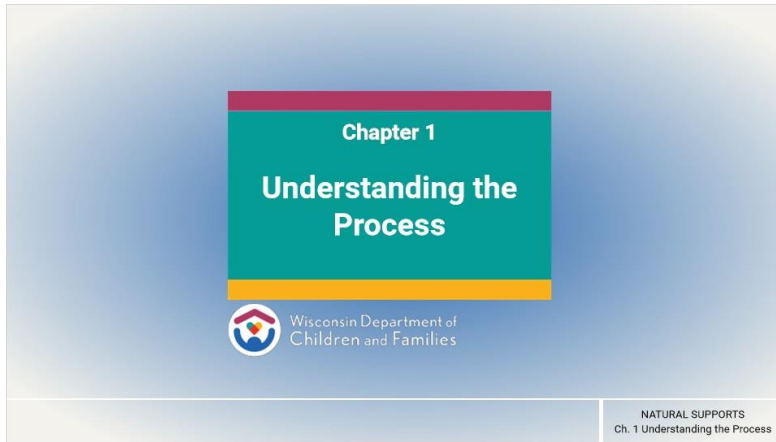
The involvement of Child Protective Services (CPS) can lead to a lot of feelings and thoughts. You may have beliefs and questions about the role and goals of CPS or expectations about what will happen next. This resource is here to help support you with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate your situation.

This resource was developed in partnership with individuals who have had personal experience as a natural support, just like you. They provided valuable information by highlighting what was most important to know when helping loved ones as well as guidance on how you can take care of yourself throughout this process.

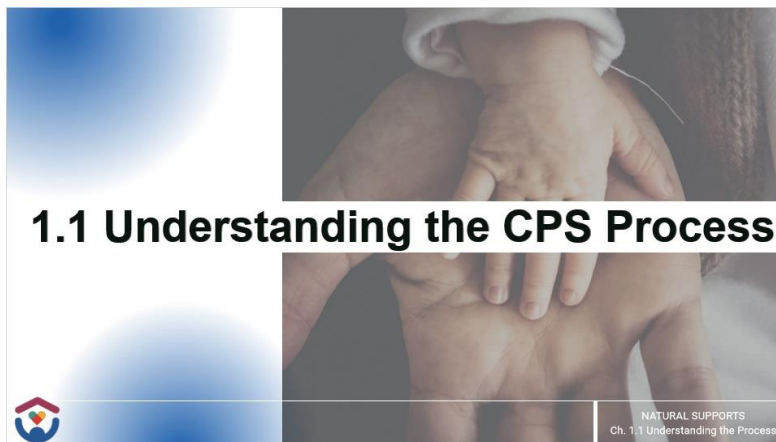
You are welcome to review all the chapters below if you wish; however, you may also skip around to review topics you feel are most relevant to you. Thank you for your time, effort, and the support you provide for the child and family.

## Chapter 1 Understanding the Process

### *Chapter 1: Understanding the Process*

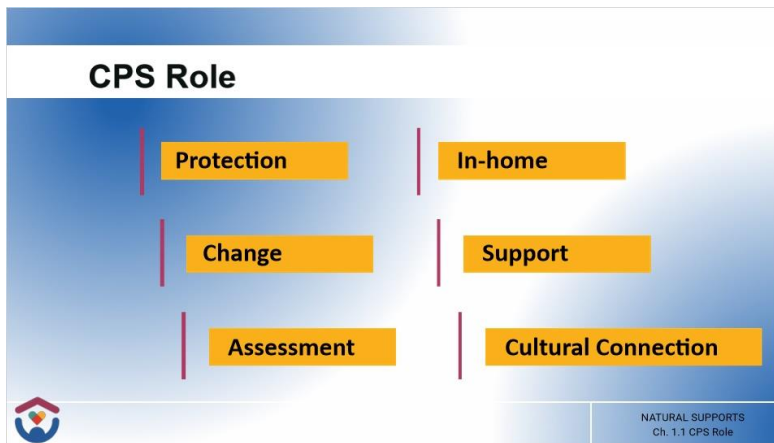


### *Chapter 1.1 Understanding the CPS Process*



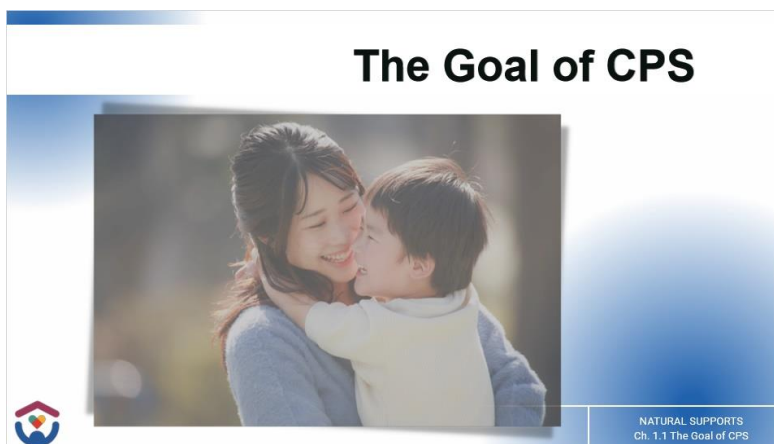
The purpose of Child Protective Services (CPS) is to keep children and youth safe and to support families to provide safe, permanent, and nurturing homes for their children. One way this is accomplished is by safely keeping children and youth in their own home and connected to their family, and community whenever possible. In this chapter, you will learn about the CPS Process in Wisconsin and where you fit within it.

## 1.1 CPS Role



The goal of CPS is to support parents/caregivers in making necessary changes so children are safe and protected in their homes. This work is completed by CPS professionals, who can be from counties or tribes. The CPS professional responds to reports of possible abuse or neglect of a child, also known as child maltreatment.

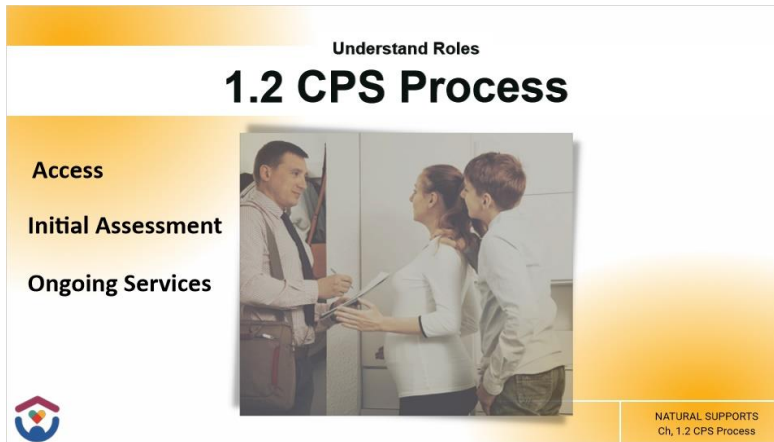
## 1.1 The Goal of CPS



CPS's goal is to ensure children are safe, not to create perfect families. If it is determined that a child is unsafe, CPS will work with the family to create a plan for the child or youth to be safe. CPS will support families in making changes to protect children and youth in their homes while maintaining connection to their family, culture, and community.

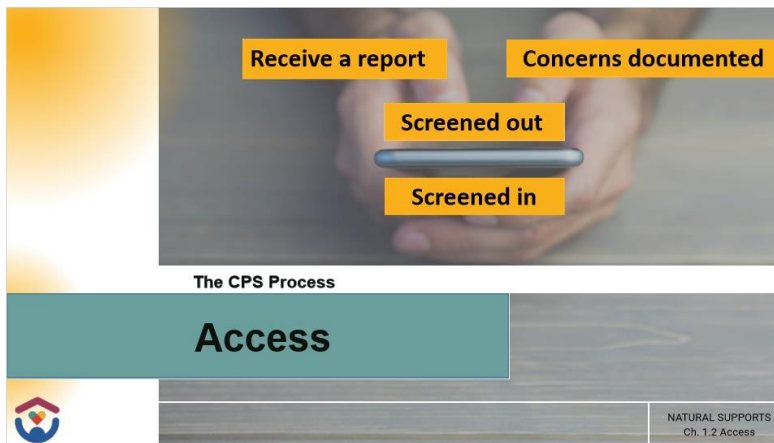


## ***Chapter 1.2 CPS Process***



This chapter intends to give you an overview of the three stages of Wisconsin's CPS process and where you might be involved in each stage of the process. The three main stages of the CPS process are Access, Initial Assessment, and Ongoing Services.

## 1.2 Access



The first stage of the CPS process is called Access. This is where county or tribal child welfare agencies receive a report from a concerned individual, who could be doctors, school personnel or anyone else with concerns for the child. Please note, the identity of reporters is protected by confidentiality. The reporter describes the suspected maltreatment of the child or children.

The CPS professional asks the reporter a series of questions to gather specific information about possible maltreatment and safety of the child. In order for CPS to get involved with a family, the maltreatment described at access must meet the legal definition of abuse or neglect. Remember, the information received at that initial phone call is merely “suspected” maltreatment.

If the report of suspected maltreatment does not meet the legal definition of child abuse and neglect, the report is “screened out” and CPS will not get further involved. If the report of maltreatment does meet the legal definition, the report is “screened in” and CPS will open a case for the family. All CPS reports involving an Indian child, regardless of the screening decision, are shared with the Indian child’s tribe. Once a report is screened-in and a case is opened, the next step of the CPS process is called Initial Assessment.

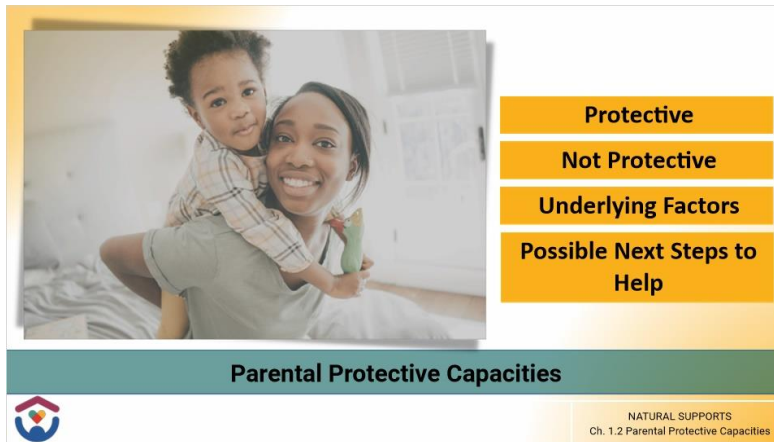
## 1.2 Initial Assessment



After a CPS report is screened in, Initial Assessment is where a CPS professional will gather information about the family and the reported concerns. This information includes:

- Details of the suspected maltreatment
- Safety of the child(ren)
- Strengths of the family.
- Needs of the family.
- How the parents/caregivers are protective of the child or where they may be experiencing challenges to keep their child(ren) safe. These are called Parental/Caregiver Protective Capacities.
- Or other pertinent information required by policy.

## 1.2 Parental Protective Capacities



During the Initial Assessment phase, the CPS professional will assess these “Protective Capacities” by identifying:

- When and how the parent successfully protects the child
- When and how the parent may experience challenges to protect the child
- Underlying factors that impact the parent’s behavior in each of these moments
- Steps that can be taken to increase the parent’s ability to protect their children in the future.

A Parental/Caregiver Protective Capacity results in the parent consistently meeting the child’s needs. A parent, for example, getting up three times in the middle of the night to feed an infant, even though the parent craves sleep, demonstrates they can put the child’s needs first. The CPS professional uses this information to assess the safety of the children.

The Initial Assessment process can take up to 60 days. CPS professionals try to complete the Initial Assessment as quickly as possible to lessen stress and trauma for the family. Please note that timelines when working with tribes may differ.

## 1.2 Safety Concerns



CPS may identify safety concerns for the child(ren). When a child is determined to be unsafe, CPS will create a Protective Plan or a Safety Plan with the family to ensure the safety of the child(ren). You can learn more about the Protective Plan or Safety Plan in chapter 2, as this is where YOU as a natural support fit into the CPS process. If one of these plans is created, the goal is to support the family in making changes, so they are able to keep the child(ren) safe.

**When there are safety concerns**

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
Division of Safety and Prevention

**Protective Plan**

| Case Name (Last, First, MI)   | Case Number      | Date Protective Plan Started | Date of Review |
|---|------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Family Address:   |                  | Telephone Number:            |                |
| Children Included in This Plan:   |                  |                              |                |
| Parents / Carers and Other Household Members Included in This Plan:   |                  |                              |                |
| Family Strengths and Resources:   |                  |                              |                |
| Description of Present Danger/Threats Identified and how they play out in this family:  |                  |                              |                |
| How are the identified present danger/ threats being addressed? (Name each protection/ provider, the days per week and hours per day of their participation in the plan, the person/ caregiver's role in this plan, and any other involvement in this plan) |                  |                              |                |
| Provider Name:  | Provider's Role: |                              |                |

NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 1.2 Safety Concerns

At the conclusion of the Initial Assessment process, it is sometimes learned that families need additional support. When this occurs, CPS will remain involved to provide ongoing case management. This part of the CPS process is called Ongoing Services.

## ***1.2 Ongoing Services***



In Ongoing Services, families continue to have CPS support as they make changes. CPS will conduct home visits with the family at a minimum of once per month. CPS provides support until the child is safe. CPS works with families to build upon existing strengths and to build Parental Protective Capacities. The CPS professional and the family work together to ensure the child(ren) will be safe.

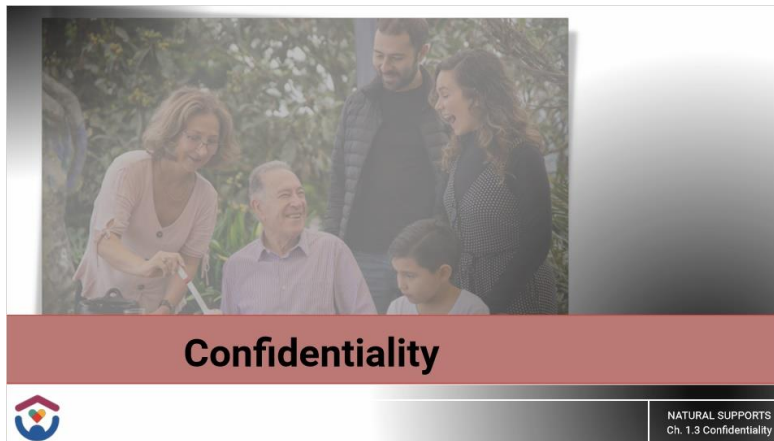
## ***Chapter 1.3 Importance of Your Role***



You have been identified to assist CPS and the parents/caregivers to help monitor the safety of the child. Your role is referred to as a Natural Support to the family. A Natural Support can be relatives, friends, neighbors, or community members. You play a critical role. You were chosen as a natural support because you care about this family and child(ren). You can be an asset to them due to your pre-existing relationship and knowledge of their challenges and strengths. Your help with the family can minimize the amount of trauma the family experiences because they are receiving support from someone they already know.

In many situations, more than one natural support will be identified and included on a plan. In certain situations, it may be appropriate for you to communicate or even coordinate with other natural supports.

### ***1.3 Confidentiality***



As you have heard, child safety and keeping the family together whenever possible is the priority. You have been designated to help support critical CPS functions related to child safety. Because of your involvement, you may be made aware of certain private details of the family. Please be respectful of the family's privacy and do not share details about the family to others. If you do not know what you can and cannot say, consult first with the assigned CPS professional and the family.



### ***1.3 Frequently Asked Questions***



You might have a lot of questions about your role and what you need to know – we understand and that is normal. We understand you are doing this to support the family the best you can. We have created a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to answer some of the common questions you may have. You should always feel comfortable advocating for what you or the family needs. Stay in close contact with the assigned CPS professional and follow up whenever you have questions. Your assistance during this extraordinary time of crisis is applauded and appreciated. Thank you for being willing to help.

See Appendix A for Frequently Asked Questions.

## ***Chapter 1.4 What's Next in Initial Assessment***

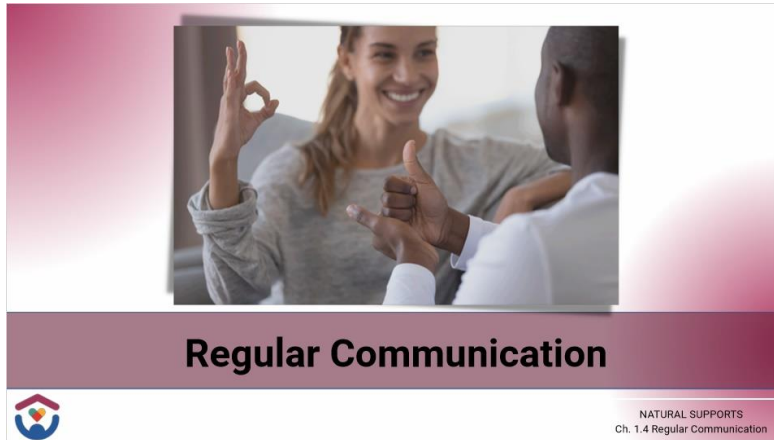


What can you expect in your role related to information gathering in the Initial Assessment phase? Remember, in the initial assessment phase the CPS professional will assess the safety of the children. They will begin to assess Parental Protective Capacities. They will identify the strengths and needs of the family. These are elements of the assessment that determine what, if any, longer-term CPS involvement is necessary. You have a unique perspective as someone who knows the family and is supporting them in a Protective Plan or Safety Plan. To get a better picture, your CPS professional may ask you for information:

- About the family and the reported concern(s).
- Related to the parent's ability to be protective, and
- Regarding any strengths that the parent possesses and/or demonstrates regarding their parenting.

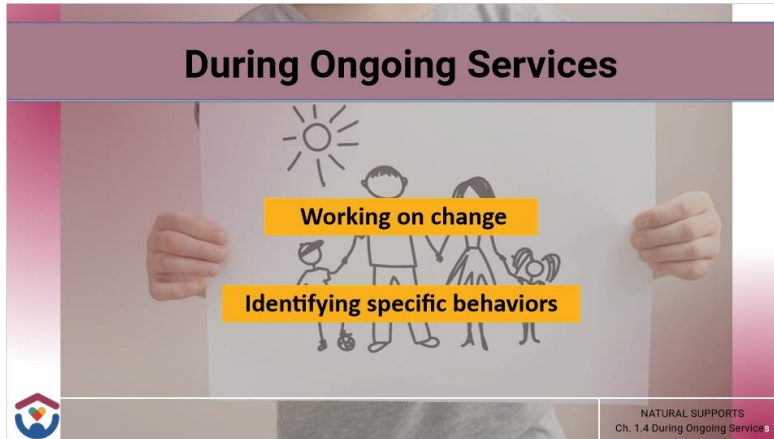
The information you provide will help in planning for the child's safety.

## ***1.4 Regular Communication***



You can expect regular communication from the assigned CPS professional. You should talk to your CPS professional about your preferred methods of communication. Let them know whether you prefer phone calls, text messages, or emails. You can also share what time of day you prefer to be contacted. The frequency of the contact with the CPS professional varies. It will depend on the information they are gathering and the needs of you, the children, and the family. It is not uncommon for plans to be adjusted early in the CPS process due to evolving needs of the family. Contact your CPS professional if you have a question, and to provide an update or observation.

## **1.4 During Ongoing Services**



If the family becomes involved in the Ongoing Services phase of CPS, the CPS Professional will work with the parent(s) to make changes and demonstrate protective behaviors that result in their child being safe. Talk to the assigned CPS professional about what those behaviors may be so you can provide accurate and important information that may assist them in helping the family in achieving their goals. Please note the parent(s) may need to formally agree to your receiving certain items of private information, which often requires a signed release of information. Chapter 3.1 will discuss this topic in more detail.

## ***What are Protective and Safety Plans***



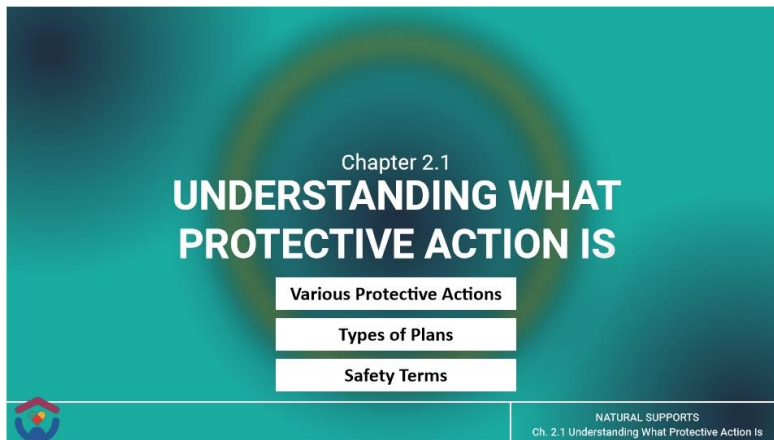
Throughout this chapter, we used the terms Protective Plans and Safety Plans often. Depending on the order you have chosen to experience these chapters, you may or may not have a good understanding of what these plans are. Please refer to chapter 2.3 to learn more about protective plans and chapter 2.4 to learn more about safety plans.

## Chapter 2 Planning With the Family

### *Chapter 2: Planning with the Family*

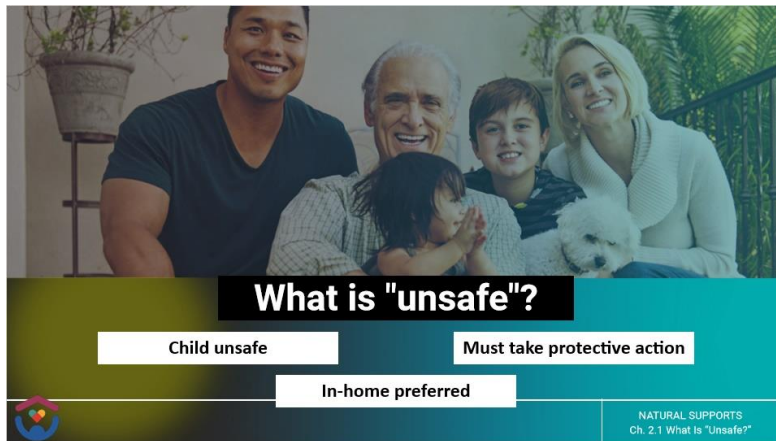


### *Chapter 2.1 Understanding What Protective Action Is*



This chapter provides an overview of Protective Actions and the two types of plans that can be created when a child is unsafe. This chapter will explain protective actions, the types of plans, and define commonly used safety terms you will hear from the assigned CPS professional and throughout the CPS process.

## 2.1 What is "unsafe"?



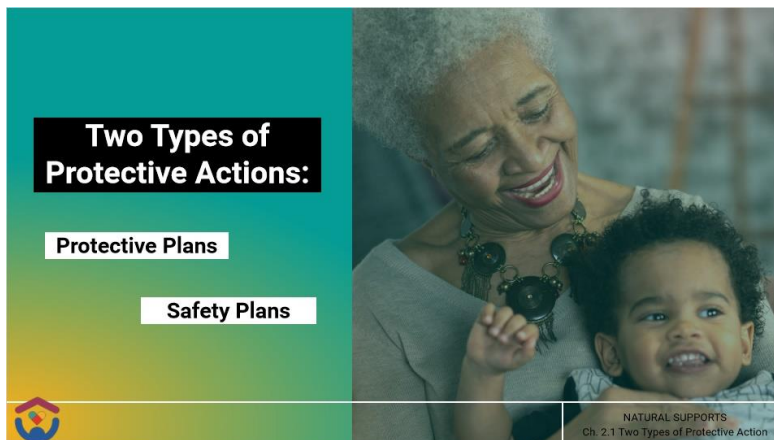
CPS defines a child as unsafe when they are exposed to a dangerous situation or behaviors, and their parents/caregivers are not able to be protective. If a child is unsafe, CPS must intervene and plan for the child's safety. The protective action taken, and the details of the plan look different depending on the family's unique situation. CPS starts with options that allow the child to stay in their home while supporting any changes the parent makes. CPS works with the parents/caregivers to create a plan. They will elicit the parent's ideas about how the child can be safe. They engage the parent in a conversation about resources that could be used to do this, and this includes identifying individuals who can help.

## 2.1 Protective Action



Protective actions occur immediately after a child is deemed unsafe. Protective actions can be short-term plans or, when necessary, longer-term plans used to protect a child from a dangerous situation. Protective actions use natural support (relatives, neighbors, community partners, etc.) who will keep the child safe. The protective action must be in place prior to the CPS Professional leaving the home. If a sufficient plan cannot be agreed upon with the parents, CPS may take further action.

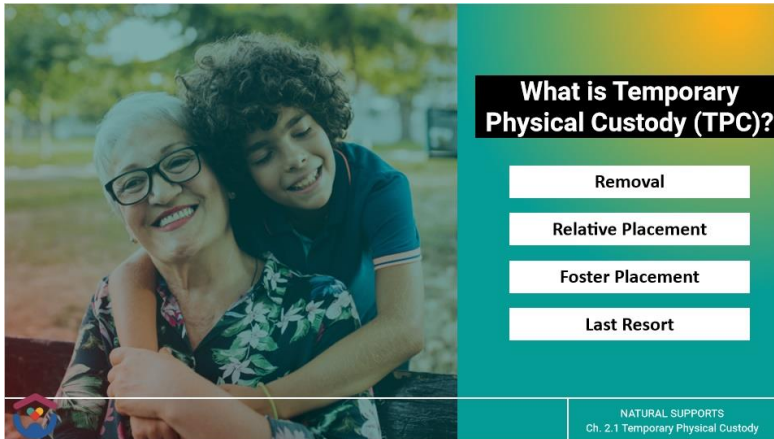
### 2.1 Two Types of Protective Action



Protective Plans and Safety Plans are the two least restrictive protective actions as they allow the child to remain with the parents or other caregivers without formal court or legal action. These two different types of protective actions have very specific meanings, and you will learn about their purposes, timelines, and the difference between the two of them throughout the rest of Chapter 2.

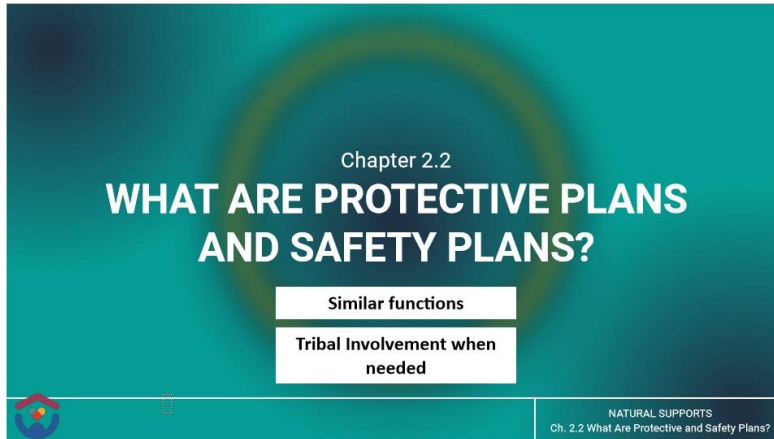


## 2.1 Temporary Physical Custody



If the safety concerns are not resolved through the implementation of a Protective Plan or Safety Plan, CPS may need to intervene further and take Temporary Physical Custody (TPC) of the child. When TPC is taken, the child is removed from the home and placed with either a relative or foster care provider. TPC is used as a last resort when one of these less restrictive plans cannot be created. If a child is placed out of the home, CPS will engage with the family and provide support necessary for the child to be safely returned to their parents/caregivers.

## ***Chapter 2.2 What are Protective Plans and Safety Plans?***



Protective Plans and Safety Plans are different, but they provide similar functions. Both types of plans aim to collaborate with parents or caregivers to spell out the strategies for keeping a child or youth safe. When planning with children and families who are or may be Indian, the CPS professional is required to notify the Indian child's tribe and engage them in the planning process. The CPS professional will work with tribal professionals to support the family. It is possible you will receive communication from the tribal child welfare professional pertaining to the Indian child/family.

## 2.2 Developing the Plan



Working Together

Parental Involvement

Least Intrusive


Parents Heavily Involved

**Developing the Plan**

NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 2.2 Developing the Plan


Development of the plan is done in collaboration with the family and tribal professionals with a deliberate focus on parental involvement. This includes gathering the parents' and family's ideas about how the child can be kept safe and engaging the parents in a conversation about how the families' resources could be used to accomplish this. Expect tribal professionals to be involved at the onset of the planning process when working with Indian children and families. Sometimes Natural Supports are a part of this discussion. What are they willing and able to do to plan for the safety of this child? Remember, both Protective Plans and Safety Plans should identify the least intrusive means for the family to ensure child safety. Parents should retain as much of their parenting role as possible.

## ***2.2 Parenting Roles and Responsibilities***



### **Parenting Role and Responsibilities**

- Parents keep rights
- Work with parents
- Partners

 NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 2.2 Parenting Roles and Responsibilities

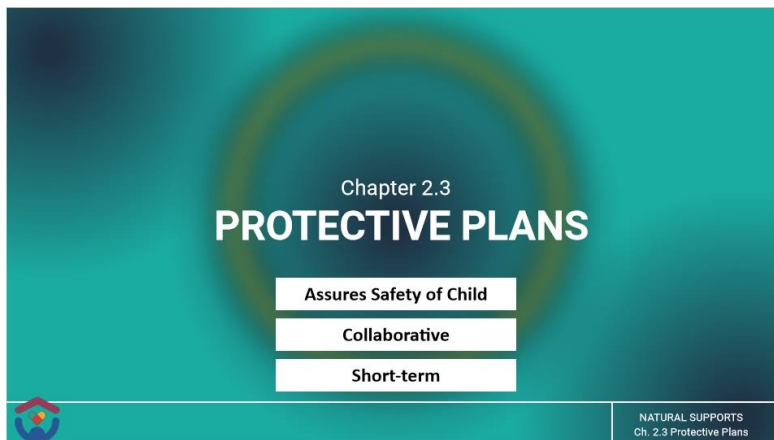
Parents retain their parental rights during the course of the Protective Plan or Safety Plan. During the CPS process, parents should be consulted about all decisions pertaining to their child and when able, they should continue to be active and involved in caring for their child. Your role in this area is to partner with the parent to ensure all decisions, behaviors, and actions are safe for the child. Sharing parenting responsibilities, especially under circumstances where CPS Professionals are involved, can be complicated. Practice acknowledging these challenges with the parent and the assigned CPS Professional. It is important for the sake of the child and their family that you all receive the support you need to navigate these new, temporary circumstances.

## 2.2 Following the Plan



As a provider on a Protective Plan or Safety Plan, you have a responsibility to follow the plan as written and make decisions to keep the child safe. The extent of your responsibility is defined and described in the written plan. Since Protective Plans and Safety Plans are temporary and may continue to evolve based on the family's needs and progress, consult with the assigned CPS Professional regularly about any questions related to your role or authority regarding the child.

## Chapter 2.3 Protective Plans



A protective plan is a tool used by CPS to ensure a child is safe while CPS completes the Initial Assessment. It is completed in collaboration with the CPS agency, the family, and Indian child's tribe, when applicable. During the time Protective Plans are in place with a family, the CPS professional gathers more information to determine if ongoing CPS involvement is appropriate.

## 2.3 What are Protective Plans?



These protective plans:

- Are most often implemented during the Initial Assessment phase, which is early in the CPS process,
- Are immediate and short-term
- Articulate how a child is going to be shielded from dangerous situations or behaviors, and
- Identify the least intrusive means to ensure safety.

## 2.3 Keeping the Child in the Home



**Keeping the child  
in the home**

In-home is less traumatic

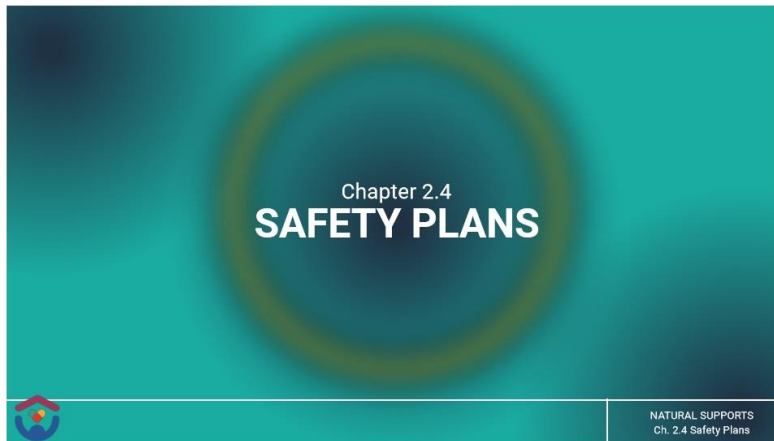
Explore other options if not  
possible

 NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 2.3 Keeping the Child in the Home

Protective plans with a child staying in the home are always ideal. To avoid disruption to the child, it is best for the child to remain in their home as often as possible. To accomplish this, natural supports can be asked to temporarily move into the family's home or to be present in the home during certain times of the day, so the child experiences the least number of disruptions. This is not a small request but remember, protective plans can be flexible.

Occasionally, the plan may need to include the child leaving the home. The benefit of a natural support in this circumstance is that even if the child needs to leave the home as part of the plan, they can go to a familiar setting with someone the child already feels comfortable with.

## **Chapter 2.4 Safety Plans**



Safety Plans are written arrangements created in partnership with parents, the Indian child's tribe, and Natural Supports to articulate how a child is going to be shielded from dangerous situations or behaviors. Safety plans are typically implemented after Protective Plans, often near or at the end of the Initial Assessment process when it is determined that a family needs ongoing support and services. Safety plans are intended to be in place for a longer period of time than a protective plan. How long safety plans are in place will vary based on numerous factors related to the family's individual circumstances. Like protective plans, safety plans are intended to be as least intrusive as possible.



## 2.4 What is in a Safety Plan?



**What is in a Safety Plan?**

|   |
|---|
| Resources   |
| Social Connections and Emotional Support  |
| Supervision and monitoring  |
| Parenting and Home Management   |
| Medical Intervention  |
| Separation of the children from the home if no other alternatives are available |

NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 2.4 What is a Safety Plan?

For Safety Plans to support the safety and stability of the children and family, they can include:

- Resources
- Social connections and emotional support
- Supervision and monitoring
- Parenting and home management
- Medical intervention
- Separation of the children from the home if no other alternatives are available

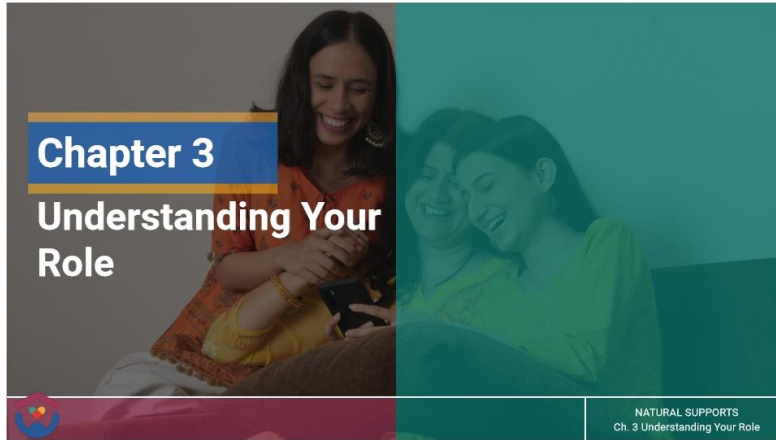
## ***2.4 Safety Plan Timeline***



Safety plans are in place for only as long as necessary. CPS will continue to work with the parents and monitor their progress towards keeping their child safe in their care without CPS involvement. As the parents show new or strengthened Parental Protective Capacities, Safety Plans should be updated to require less CPS involvement over time. More CPS involvement may be necessary if CPS learns of additional concerns regarding the safety of the child.

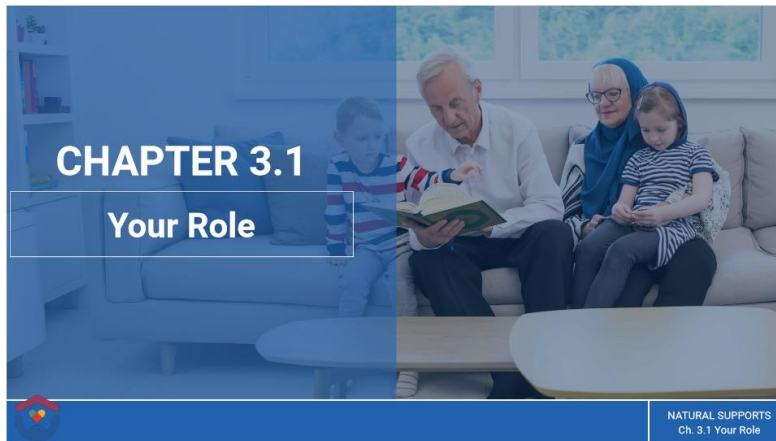
## Chapter 3 Understanding Your Role

### *Chapter 3: Understanding Your Role*



The assigned CPS professional may have explained your role or even written down what it is, but that is a lot of information to process. Review this chapter to update yourself on your role and responsibilities during this process.

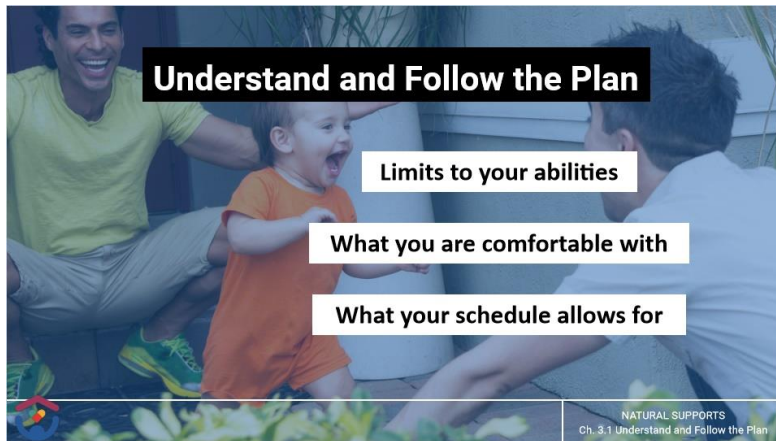
## ***Chapter 3.1 Your Role***



Your number one responsibility when agreeing to be a natural support is to keep the child safe during the times the child is with you. To do this, it is important to understand what behaviors or conditions within the home made the child unsafe in the first place. Please refer to chapter 2.1 for information about how “unsafe” is defined.

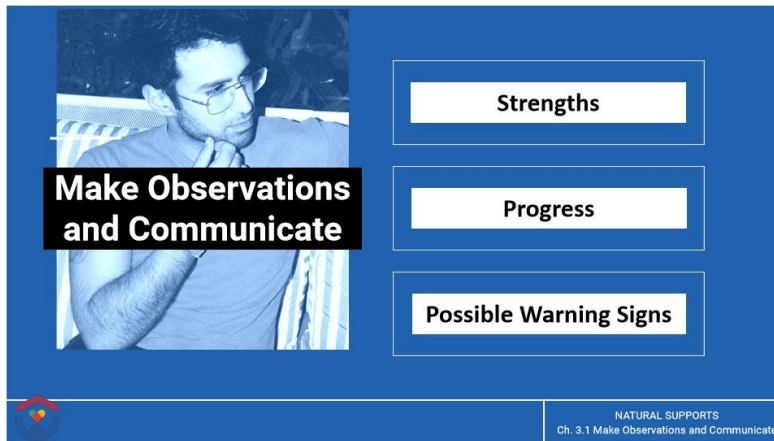
Parents should retain as much of their parenting roles as possible. You are present to ensure the parents are fulfilling their role in a safe manner for the child.

### ***3.1 Understand and Follow the Plan***



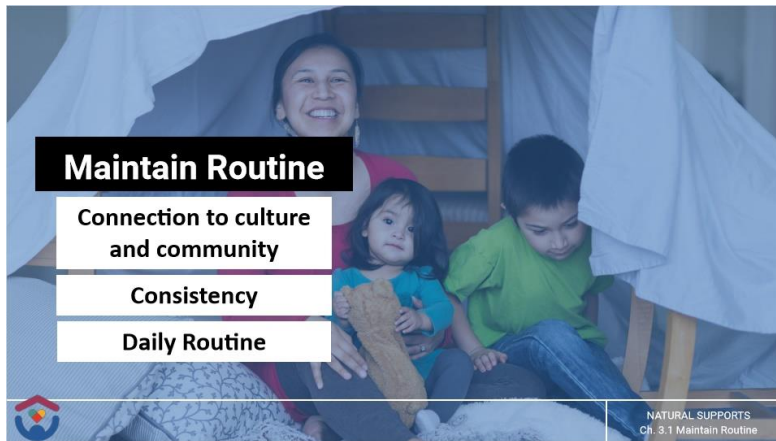
Behaviors and conditions that lead to the child being unsafe will be discussed when writing out the plan. Because the plan needs to be followed as written, you need to have a clear understanding of what you are being asked and have agreed to do. For example, if you are asked to provide supervision between the child and parent, understand what “supervision” means in your situation. In this example, the assigned CPS professional should clearly explain what is meant by supervision and confirm you are able and willing to follow through with this responsibility. Be sure to ask for more information or double check your understanding with the assigned CPS professional. Only you know the limits to your abilities, what you are comfortable with, and what your schedule allows for. It is important to communicate these things to the assigned CPS professional when creating the plan or if something in the plan is no longer working for you. Any changes to the plan need to be made in collaboration with the parent, CPS professional, Indian child’s tribe, and natural support (you) together.

### ***3.1 Make Observations and Communicate***



In your role, you may be asked to make observations of the family to communicate back to the assigned CPS professional. Your observations could help determine how the plan moves forward. The assigned CPS professional can help you identify the “necessary information” they are looking for, including strengths and progress the family is making or possible warning signs that may require a change in the plan for additional support. In your role you will become very knowledgeable about the family dynamics. Your observations should focus on what is working well as well as areas where the plan could be improved.

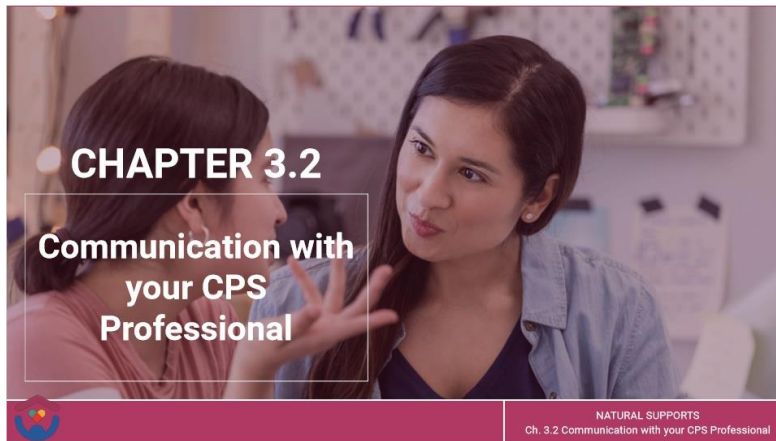
### 3.1 Maintain Routine



One of the goals of a protective and safety plan is to provide as little disruption to the child's daily life as possible. This includes keeping the child's same daycare or school schedule, when possible. This also means the child should ideally keep a connection to their culture and community. Discussions about how to provide consistency for the child will occur as the plans are being created. Any support you can provide to help maintain the child's routine is appreciated.

It's also possible the child has various appointments scheduled, such as doctor visits and dental appointments. This is a good opportunity to team with the parents to ensure all appointments are held and schedules are kept. Balancing multiple schedules and needs can be time consuming and challenging. Identify where you need help in these areas, as the extra effort will always be worth it when it comes to the benefits for the child.

## ***Chapter 3.2 Communication with your CPS Professional***



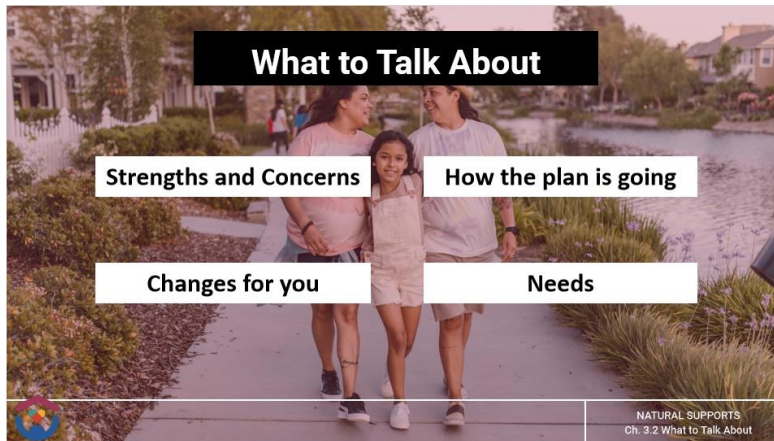
Communication with the assigned county and/or tribal CPS professional is a key part of the plan. It helps you to become confident in what your role requires and to know what to do in various situations. The assigned CPS professional will talk with you about how and when to contact them. They will also share information about communication outside of normal business hours, such as nights and weekends or what to do if a crisis occurs.

It's also beneficial to have an alternative contact, such as a supervisor, to reach out to in the event the assigned professional is not available (out of the office, unexpectedly out sick, at a professional development training, etc..).

Think of how you can include the parents in this communication. That could be by including them in an email, a three-way phone call or calling together, or making a group text.



### 3.2 What to Talk About



The assigned CPS professional is a partner with you on this plan. You are not in this alone, and it is okay to rely on them for support. They are available to assist in thinking through difficult situations and can help communicate decisions that are made throughout the case process. When an Indian child's tribe is involved, they also can be contacted and leaned on as a support for you and the family in the same manner. There are things you should talk about with the assigned CPS professional on a regular basis. These include:

- What you may be noticing about the parent and family including strengths and concerns,
- Your confidence about how you are doing as a provider on the plan,
- Changes in your ability to continue in your role as it is written in the plan,
- What you need to feel supported during this process,
- How much is the parent involved in the daily life of the child and how can that involvement increase,
- What could be changed about the plan to increase its effectiveness, and
- What you need to effectively support the child, parent, and current plan?

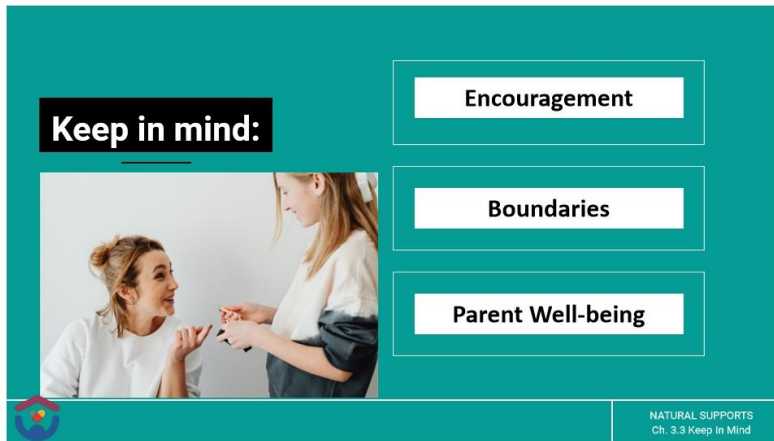
Remember, you are providing a valuable service to the family. CPS professionals want you and the family to feel comfortable and supported. If you have a question about anything, please reach out to them.

## ***Chapter 3.3 Communication with Parents***



Communicating with CPS professionals is only one aspect of communication. Most of the time, you'll be communicating with the parents and children who are the subject of the plan. We recognize in some families your unique and new role will create uneasy feelings between you and the child's parent. Even when those relationships are strong, the changes required of you all due to the plans can be an adjustment for everyone.

### 3.3 Keep in Mind



**Keep in mind:**

Encouragement

Boundaries

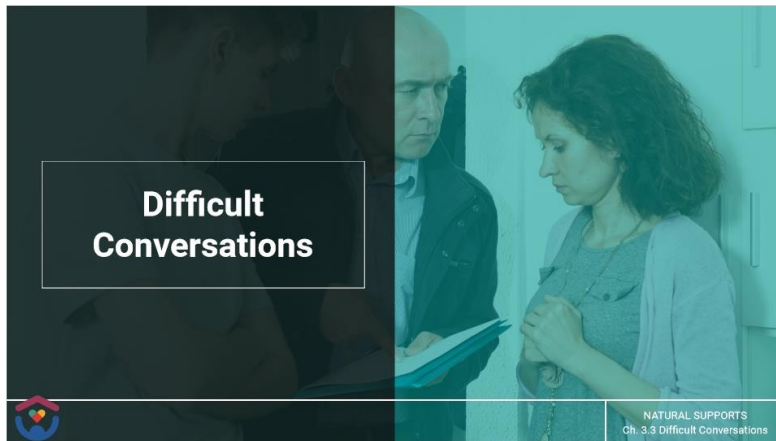
Parent Well-being

NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 3.3 Keep in Mind

Here are some things to keep in mind during your communication with the family: Provide encouragement to parents when they are showing improvements and making progress toward their role in providing a safe environment for the child. While it is not always easy, set boundaries when it is necessary to do so. Remind the parents that you are not only supporting the child, but you are also supporting them. Their wellbeing as an individual is important, too.

The parent involved may be experiencing some discomfort or stress in how to communicate with you or the CPS professional, as well. Try to understand their behavior or ask them how they feel and what they may need. A positive relationship between you and the parents occur when you both feel safe and connected to each other. You both will build upon that connection every time you interact. Some situations may go smoothly, some may be difficult, but the goal is to work together for the safety of the child.

### ***3.3 Difficult Conversations***



You can expect to occasionally have difficult conversations. You are a support person on this plan and tasked with helping to keep the child safe. This may mean stepping in to correct behaviors at times. Difficult conversations are sometimes hard but knowing how to prepare for them will help everyone involved. Please know one of the roles of the assigned CPS professional is to help you through these difficult conversations, help make difficult decisions and communicate those decisions. When an Indian child's tribe is involved, they can be a great support for you as well.

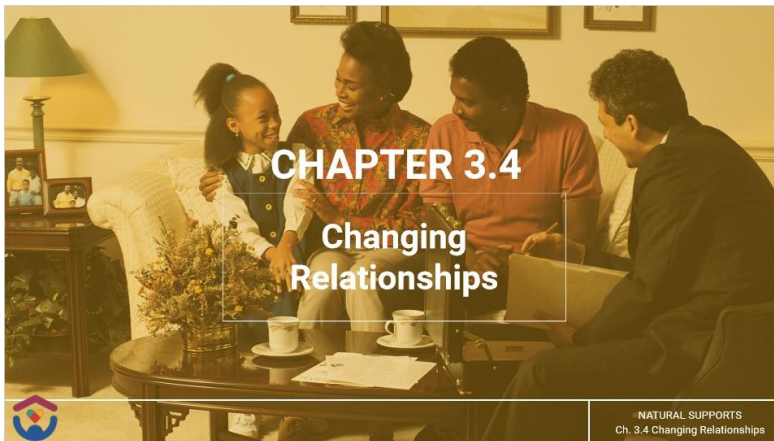
### 3.3 Ask and Advocate



Please advocate for yourself if you are not feeling heard and respected. CPS is committed to the success of this plan and ensuring you have what you need to feel supported is a critical component of that success.

Part of advocating for yourself is requesting resources when necessary. Share what you may need, and CPS will do everything they can to support you, the child, and the family. It is okay if you do not always know exactly what you need; try to communicate how you are feeling to the assigned CPS professional. While available resources may differ depending on where you live, you won't know what is available for you unless you ask. Lastly, be honest about difficult parts of the plan, or areas you would like to change based upon what you and/or the family needs or are observing with the family. Communicating these things is an important part of a successful partnership.

## ***Chapter 3.4 Changing Relationships***



It is common for the relationship between you and the parent to change. It's an adjustment for everyone. Know this is normal and expected. How relationships do or do not change during this process varies depending on many factors, many of which will be unique to you and the family.

### 3.4 Tips for Positive Relationships



It is important that the parents continue to be included and fulfill their parent or caregiver role as much as possible. Supporting them in doing so will help maintain a positive relationship between you and the parents throughout this process. Thinking through how you see your relationship changing can help you be better prepared to have a positive relationship throughout this process and beyond. Your relationship may benefit from having a conversation with the parents in which you both share your feelings, expectations, boundaries, goals and hopes. Understanding each other's points of view will empower you to work together as the team you are. It's okay if you don't know how to have these conversations right away, or if they don't even feel possible. These experiences are normal and working through these relationship changes with the family are an important part of continuing to support the child.

If you are still struggling with maintaining a positive relationship with the parent, think about how you have successfully gotten through challenging times in the past. Perhaps there is something from those situations you can draw from. At any point, you can contact the assigned CPS professional or tribal professional to help you work on your relationship with the parent.

### 3.4 Natural Emotions



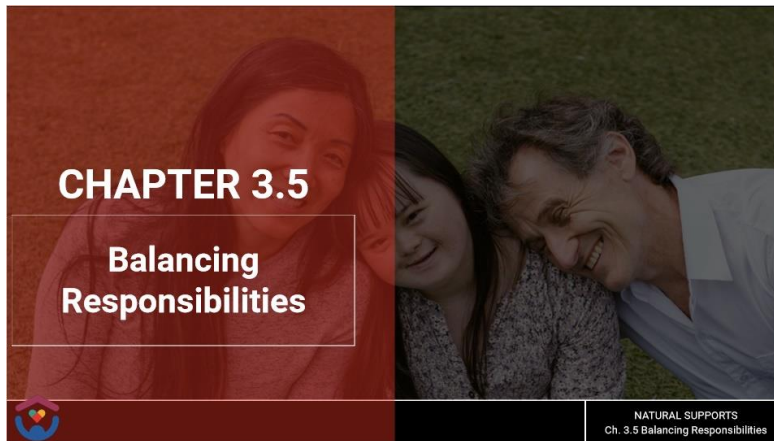
Take some time to recognize the natural emotions you may have. A few examples of these feelings, and reasons you may have them, are:

- Relief (that the family is getting help and the child is no longer in an unsafe situation);
- Anxiety (about what happens now and your role in all of this);
- Confusion (from not understanding how everything works and next steps);
- Concern (what if it doesn't work?);
- Grief (over a parent's difficulties caring for their child);
- Anger (at the parent or at CPS).

What have you been feeling since you were asked and agreed to be a natural support?

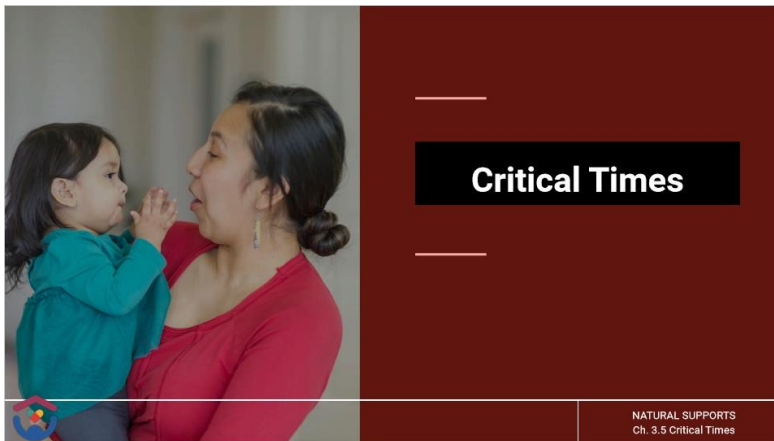


## ***Chapter 3.5 Balancing Responsibilities***



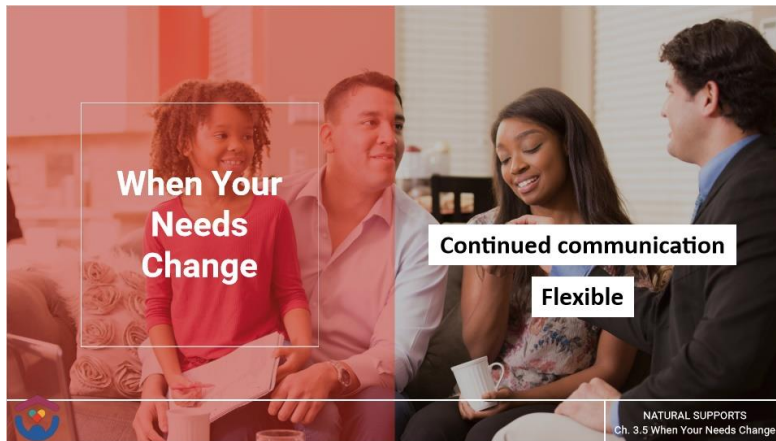
Searching for ways that will help children remain with people they know or love is a priority in a Protective and Safety Plan. As a provider on this plan, it is important that you are up front and honest with the family and CPS professional about what you are realistically willing and able to do. We recognize it can be challenging balancing the responsibilities within the Protective Plan and/or Safety Plan with your own life/family/work responsibilities. If you would like to help but are worried about your ability to do so, talk to your CPS professional about “what it would take” to be able to participate in the plan. This is best addressed during the initial planning process but can also be addressed at any other point in the process.

### ***3.5 Critical Times***



Being available at critical times and circumstances can be important. There may be certain times during the day (after school for example) when your role may be more critical than others. You, the parents, the Indian child's tribe, and the assigned CPS professional need to plan for the child's safety around these critical timeframes. Thinking about how those critical times will impact your own routines and your schedule is important.

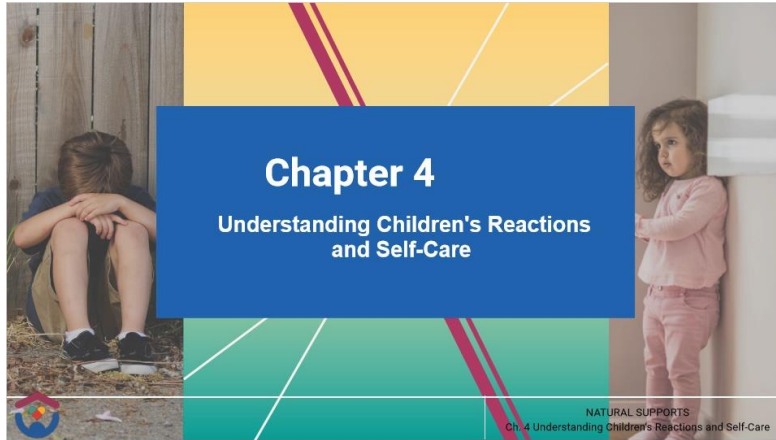
### ***3.5 When Your Needs Change***



Once a Protective Plan or Safety Plan has been implemented and you have gotten to see how it works and feels, communicate your thoughts about your role in the plan to your CPS professional. You may find you can contribute a little more than you thought, or you may need to back off a little bit for various reasons. These changes are common, and even expected at times. These plans are flexible and can be adjusted with the CPS professional, parents, and the Indian child's tribe when applicable.

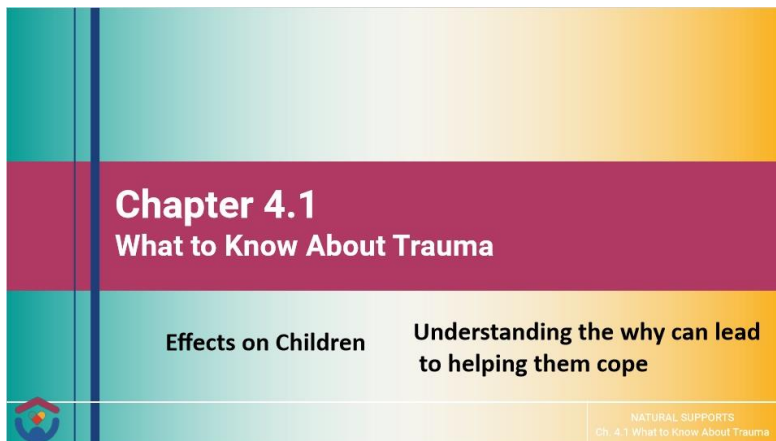
## Chapter 4 Understanding Children's Reactions and Self-Care

### *Chapter 4: Understanding Children's Reactions and Self-Care*

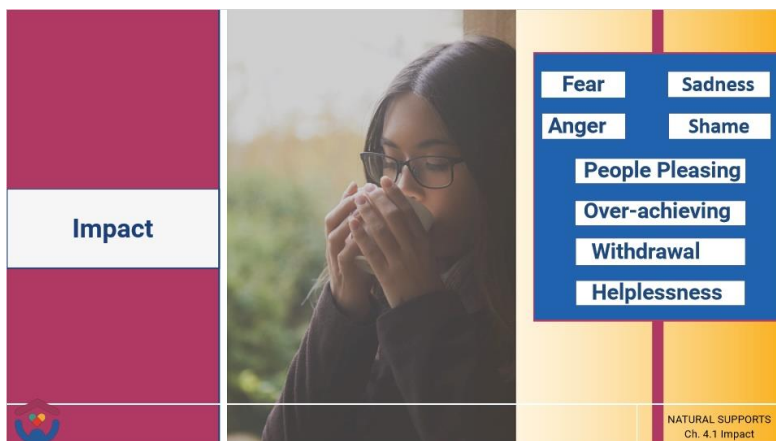


Regardless of what specific circumstance leads to a family's interactions with CPS, any level of governmental involvement in their life can be stressful or even traumatic. The effects of trauma can sometimes be significant. Additionally, reactions to past trauma can bubble up at any time. This chapter identifies those reactions, behaviors, and feelings children, parents, and natural support may display so you can be better prepared to cope with them.

## Chapter 4.1: What to Know About Trauma

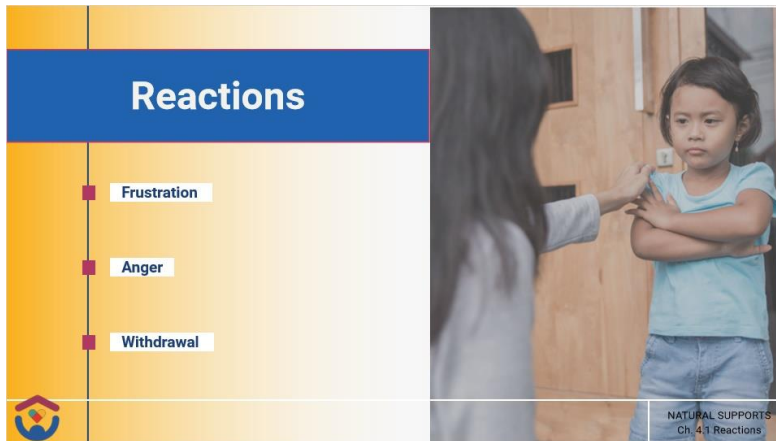


### 4.1 Impact



Understanding how trauma affects children can help you make sense of their behavior and emotions. Once you discover why their behavior may have changed, you along with the parents will be better able to help them cope with the feelings. Even though the child may be acting out with you, those behaviors may not really be about you.

## 4.1 Reactions



Even though using Protective Plans and Safety Plans lessens trauma to children, it's possible they'll still experience some level of trauma, even if we think it appears relatively minor (any level of intervention is a disruption for families). For children, trauma can result in a variety of feelings, like fear, anger, sadness, shame, people pleasing, over-achieving, withdrawal, and helplessness. These feelings along with any others children may have are natural and may result in certain behaviors that you were not expecting.

## 4.1 Managing New Behaviors

**Managing New Behaviors**

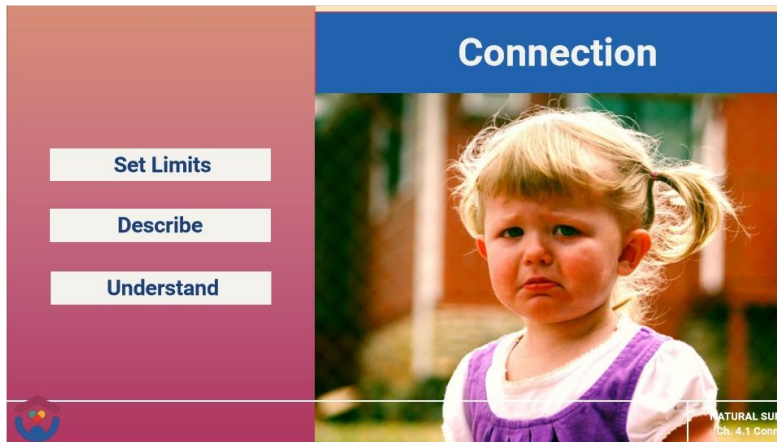
- How might the behavior benefit the child?
- Why might they feel they need to react in that way?
- How is this behavior protecting them in the moment?

NATURAL SUPPORTS  
Ch. 4.1 Managing New Behaviors

A child's reactions and behaviors due to change and trauma may be difficult to predict and manage. Their behaviors may puzzle you. Every child reacts to trauma differently. Therefore, behaviors cannot be predicted by others. Some responses might include trouble going to bed or staying asleep, difficulty concentrating or learning, or unstable emotions - happy one minute and lashing out the next. These are a few typical trauma reactions for children. It is essential to know that you are not alone in dealing with these reactions. The parents, CPS professionals, or other supports are there to help think about why the child is behaving the way they are and to identify ways you and the parent(s) can best manage those behaviors. Remember, there is nothing wrong with the child for behaving this way; the behavior is a natural, adaptive response to their challenging experiences.

Simply knowing that challenging behaviors for a child are likely to show up can help prepare you for managing these behaviors. While those behaviors may appear "abnormal" to you, they are "normal" behaviors for those who have experienced trauma. Next time you experience these behaviors, consider these questions: How might the behavior benefit the child? Why might they feel they need to react in that way? How is this behavior protecting them in the moment? Once you understand why someone might display challenging behaviors, you can proceed calmly to help them identify their feelings and adjust their behaviors.

## 4.1 Connection



Showing empathy can be helpful, even when it is challenging. Understanding behavior does not need to excuse it. You can respond calmly but firmly to emotional or behavioral outbursts. You can set limits. Setting limits helps children not to feel so overwhelmed. Children who have experienced trauma may need to feel they have some control. Find areas to give choices. Letting them know the schedule for the day and what will happen helps them to understand what to expect. It is vital for them to feel connected. After a challenging incident, you can reassure them you still care and love them. They are acting out in the only way they know how to get their needs met at that moment. Please ask for help from your CPS professional if you need more support in handling challenging behaviors.

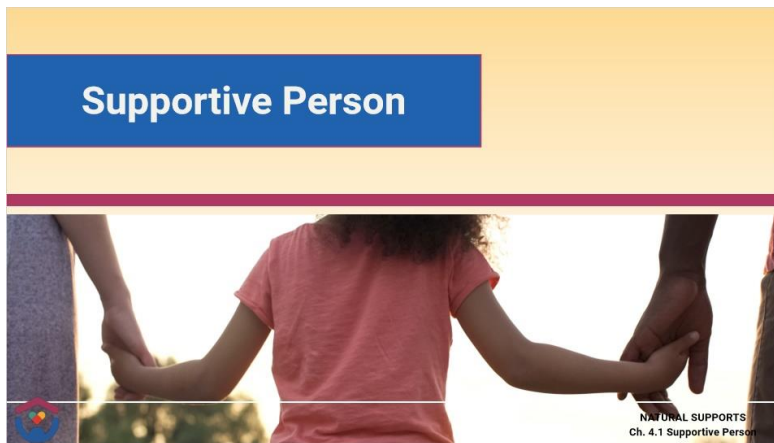


## 4.1 Supporting Parents



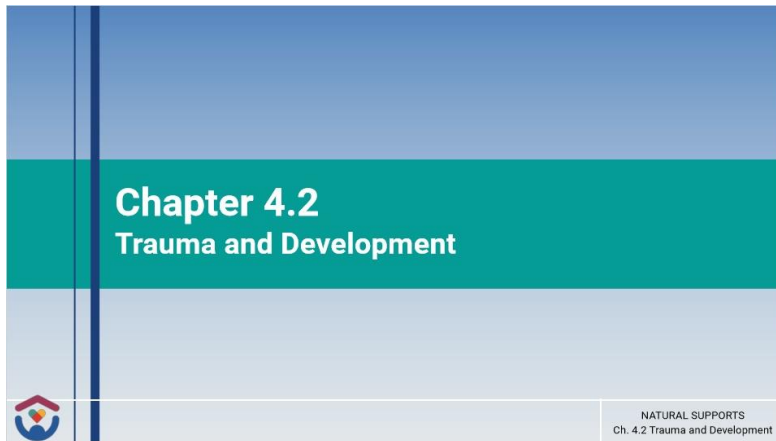
CPS involvement is also traumatic for the parents. Parents can have responses to trauma that affect their ability to regulate their emotions and maintain relationships in a healthy way. Similar to the way children show trauma responses, a parent can also. In fact, a parent's response to trauma may be very similar to a child's. If you experience challenging behaviors from parents, try to empathize with where they are coming from and then respond calmly. Don't hesitate to talk with the professionals involved for support on how to help the parents through this difficult time.

## 4.1 Supportive Person



Although nothing can entirely wipe out the effects of trauma, a consistent, loving, and supportive person is often the most crucial factor in a person's ability to heal. You are in a position to be that person for the child and their parents. By providing calm, consistent care, you can begin to show them they are safe, and that these behaviors are likely no longer necessary.

## ***Chapter 4.2: Trauma and Development***



Knowing how trauma affects children, AND adults, is often helpful. Let's learn about some of the behaviors that could be considered trauma responses. While this section focuses on the effects of trauma on children, slide 59 addresses the effects of trauma on adults or parents.

## 4.2 Trauma Responses



When children experience a traumatic event, they tend to spend a lot of energy responding to, coping with, and coming to terms with the event. While this is an important response for their brains and bodies to understand what has happened and determine if they are safe, it may interfere with their capacity to learn and participate in activities in ways they did before.


Some common responses to significant change and trauma:

- Withdrawn or appearing depressed
- Anxiety
- Regression of previously learned skills (such as toilet training)
- Difficulty eating or sleeping
- Substance use (older children)
- Unhealthy sexual activity (older children)
- Behaviors that are difficult to manage.

## 4.2 What can you do?

### What can you do?

- Help the child focus their attention
- As the child begins to calm down, give them a chance to explain what happened
- Normalize the experience and talk through alternatives to the reaction



A photograph of a man with short dark hair, wearing a brown jacket over a white shirt, sitting and talking to a young man with short brown hair, wearing a light grey sweater and blue jeans. The man is placing his hands on the young man's shoulders in a supportive gesture. They are in a room with a clock on the wall and some papers in the background.

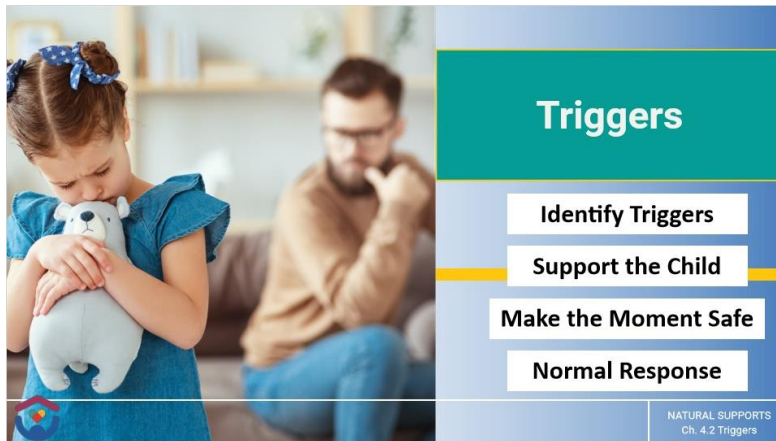
NATURAL SUPPORTS  
C 4.2 What Can You Do?

Managing these behaviors is typically difficult. Remember, children will look to other adults, including you, for cues on how to react. As we have stated in previous sections, parents should retain as much of their parenting role as possible during this process. This includes the parents managing their child's behaviors whenever possible. They may need your support in helping the child and it is possible that if the parent is unavailable or unable to do so, you may need to step in.

In those situations where the child needs additional support approaching each situation with patience, empathy and understanding will help you and the parents in this process. When a child is having trouble controlling their emotions or behavior, one way to help the child, is to have them focus their attention on something in the room. As the child begins to calm down, give them a chance to explain what happened. Normalize the experience and talk through alternatives to the reaction they had so it can be different next time.

Responding in this way may take practice, especially if you are not used to having to respond to these behaviors. If you become frustrated, take time to calm yourself. The most important part will be to return to the situation, acknowledge whatever happened, apologize if needed, and move forward together. Taking a break and coming back to these challenging situations after people have had an opportunity to calm down is an important step in building relationships and helping everyone involved know they are safe.

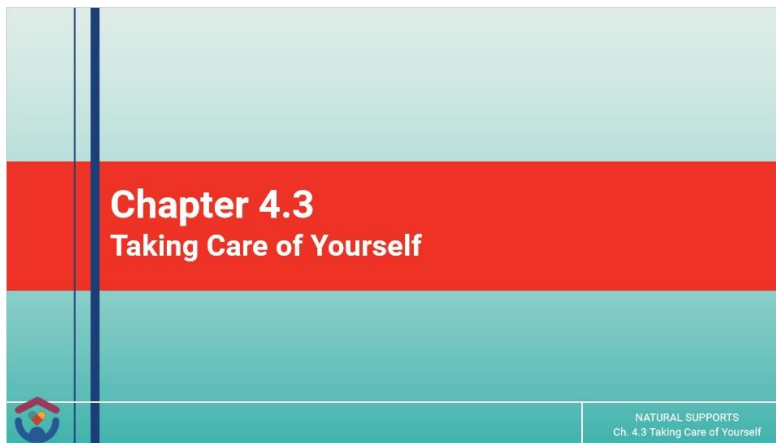
## 4.2 Triggers



If you notice any of these behaviors with a child you are involved with, keep an eye out for "triggers" or situations in which they are more likely to show up (such as during transition times, certain locations, common experiences, or feelings). If you can identify triggers, you, along with the parent(s), can often address these situations before they occur or help to support the child when they do. Asking the parents about a child's triggers and how they manage such behaviors may help. Think about what the child may be feeling in these moments or what might they need to make those moments feel safer? Remember, these challenging behaviors are normal responses to difficult circumstances. Helping the child or parent know they are supported unconditionally can help them move toward healing.

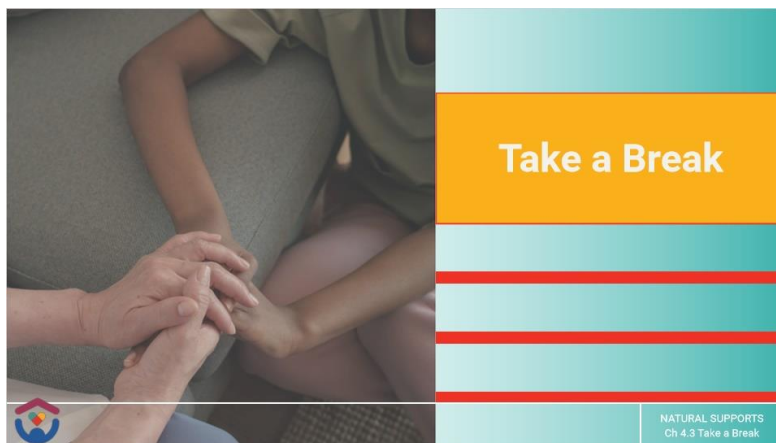
Every day, we are learning more about trauma and its effects on human behavior and relationships. This section is a brief overview of how those topics may impact you as a natural support. If you found this section helpful, consider exploring more in-depth training on trauma, child development, and ways to help.

## ***Chapter 4.3: Taking Care of Yourself***



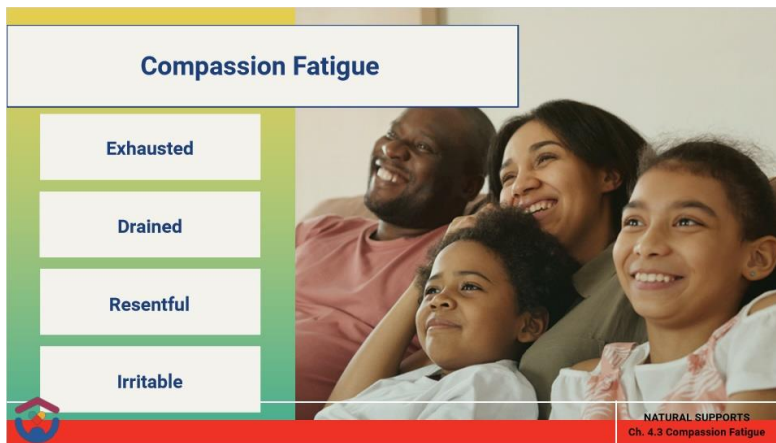
Taking care of yourself is a priority. A lot is being asked of you and practicing good self-care assures you will be there for a child as long as needed. Let's look at ways self-care will benefit you and your family.

### ***4.3 Take a Break***



BREAKS ARE OK. You can have breaks. Talk to the assigned CPS professional about how this can be accomplished. During the planning process, it's often helpful to build in breaks for yourself so you can prevent yourself from becoming overburdened and burnt out. If you are able to do so, think about another person who could perform your tasks as a natural support for a period of time (15 minutes, 1 hour, 1 evening, 1 day).

### 4.3 Compassion Fatigue



The support you provide can take an emotional and physical toll on you. To take care of others, we often put taking care of ourselves last. You can find yourself exhausted, drained, and maybe even resentful. This is referred to as compassion fatigue. Learning how to take care of yourself is one of the most important skills you can develop. By taking care of yourself, you are also demonstrating to the child and parents how to care for themselves.

Taking care of yourself sounds simple but it often is not, especially in your situation where you have agreed to certain tasks. Please continue to do things you enjoy and things you find calming. Taking care of yourself first is a strength and will allow you to be in the best place to support the child and family.

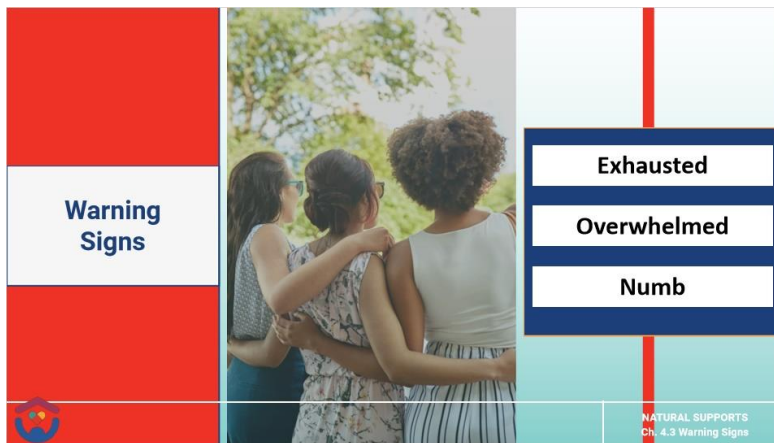


### ***4.3 Secondary Traumatic Stress***



In addition to compassion fatigue, you can also be affected by hearing about others traumatic experiences. This is called Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS). When you are experiencing STS, you may experience a variety of feelings. Secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue are real, and they creep up on you before you know it.

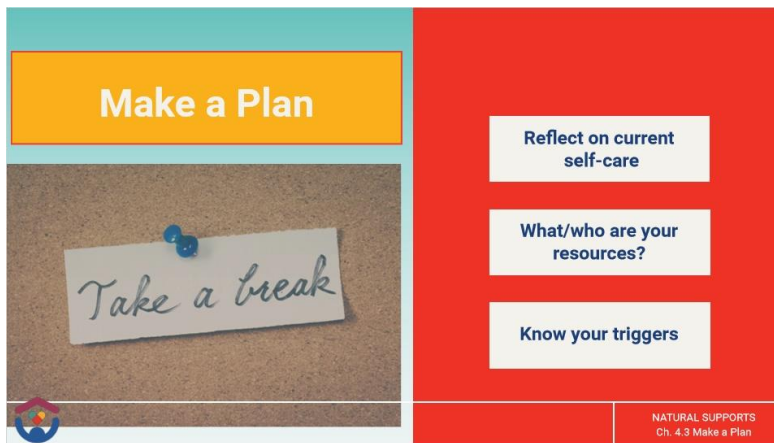
### 4.3 Warning Signs



Please take note of any warning signs that you may be experiencing secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue. It is important to know YOUR warning signs, but some examples of warning signs could include feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, or numb. You are your own expert so take note of what triggers your stress and plan methods of managing that stress.

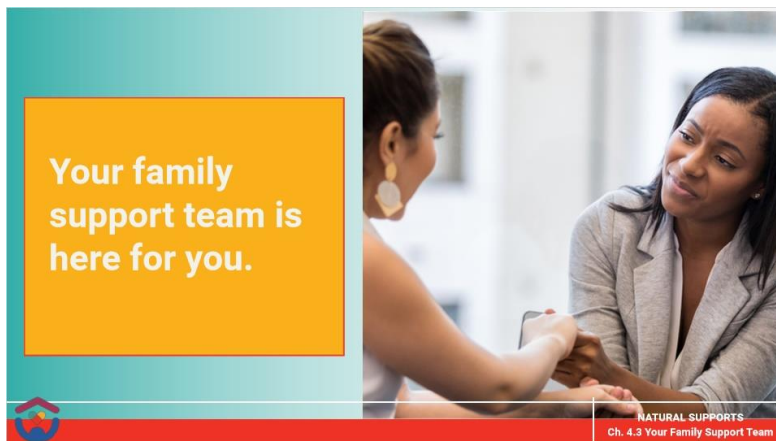
Consider the following recommendations on the next slide.

### 4.3 Make a Plan



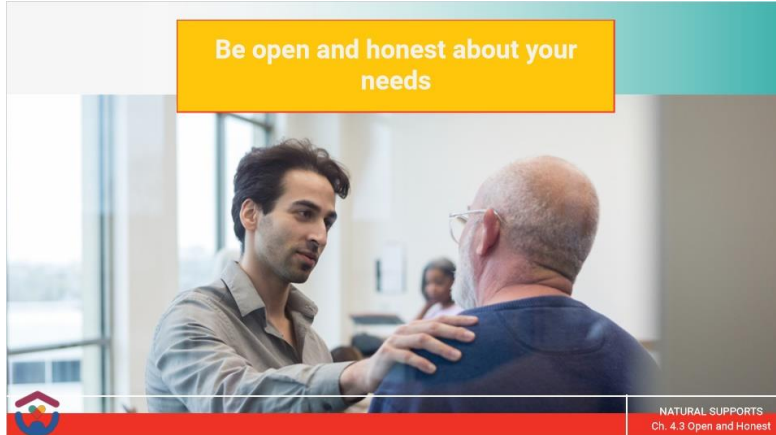
Reflect on ways you currently use self-care. It may be going for a walk, calling a friend, reading a book, listening to music, or any other way you relax or take care of yourself. It is important to balance between what you do for others and what you do for yourself. Think about creating a self-care plan for yourself that maintains that balance. Think about what activities in your life feel like they take very little effort, and leave you feeling better? Maybe in your shower or bath you use a calming scent like lavender, or you take a quick nap while the child is at school. What routines or social interactions are important to you? Maybe this is a quick walk around the block or taking time to cook a favorite dish. What people or resources can help? How can your neighbor help even for 30 minutes? What community activities are going on that can provide you with some fun? These things should be a priority for you in identifying your self-care plan. Be sure to intentionally find ways to keep these activities in your life or routine. It is good to establish a plan to utilize self-care as early as possible. It is easier to understand your own triggers or wellbeing "warning signs" when you are regulated and not already tired. Make a plan and share it with loved ones so they can help support you when you are in more stressful situations.

### **4.3 Your Family Support Team**



Engage support from others around you as a way to attend to your needs. Who else do you care about? Who has helped you in the past? If you can identify other providers to add to the protective or safety plan, contact the assigned CPS professional to have them added so they can take on additional responsibilities when necessary.

### **4.3 Be Open and Honest**



We are so grateful you are a part of the team and also realize this important role can be challenging. Be certain to talk to the assigned CPS professional regularly about how you are doing. Others who have been a part of these plans, have shared that they wished they would have reached out sooner, as they did not realize they were struggling until it felt like a crisis. Sharing openly will allow others to support you, which will help you to continue to support the child and their family.

## 6. Resources

[Coalition for Children Youth and Families – Resources](#)

[Kids Matter Training](#)

[Kinship Navigator Portal](#)



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY NATURAL SUPPORTS

### **What are my rights as a natural support?**

As a natural support, you have voluntarily entered into an agreement between yourself, the local child welfare agency, and the parents/caregivers to ensure the child is safe. Unless a court has ordered otherwise, the parents retain all of their parental rights and have agreed to follow the specific guidelines contained within your plan. Your rights pertaining to the child do not extend past what is written within the protective plan or safety plan. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) or your Child Protective Services (CPS) professional may not provide you with legal advice if you wish to pursue further legal action, such as guardianship of the child.

### **Regarding decisions made on behalf of the child, what am I allowed to decide on my own and what needs to be discussed with the parents and CPS professional?**

The parents should be involved as much as possible in all aspects of parenting. It is important they retain as much of their parenting role as possible throughout this process. Parents should be invited to all medical appointments, school functions, and other typical parenting duties as they arise. There are also some decisions, such as leaving the state, that you will need to discuss with your CPS professional. Communicating with the CPS professional about decision-making will be necessary.

### **Who else can care for the child and who else can visit with the child?**

The answer to this question depends on various details of your specific situation. If someone is listed on the plan as being able to care for or visit the child, they may do so. Otherwise, allowing other individuals to provide care to the child needs to be agreed upon between you, the parents, and the CPS professional. Lastly, there are some circumstances where certain visitors may be prohibited from interacting with the child. Talk to your CPS professional to learn if there are any such individuals in your situation.

### **How long will this go on for?**

Protective plans are meant to be short-term. They are typically implemented to assure for the safety of the child while the CPS professional gathers more information and determines whether ongoing CPS involvement is necessary. This process of information gathering can take up to 60 days from the time CPS received the initial report.

If ongoing services are necessary and you, the family, and the CPS agency enter into an agreed-upon safety plan, the length of involvement is undetermined. The length of a safety plan depends on when the parents enhance their protective capacities so they can keep their child safe.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS BY NATURAL SUPPORTS

### **What are the rules? Am I doing this right?**

Your job is to help ensure the child is safe by following the protective plan or safety plan as it is written. If you are following the plan and the child is safe, you are doing your job. Any questions about your role and expectations should be addressed by your CPS professional as soon as possible.

### **I am having issues getting in touch with my CPS professional. What do I do?**

The best approach is to have a conversation about communication with your CPS professional at the time a plan is being created. You will absolutely have questions that you need answered at some point during this process. Ask your CPS professional what their schedule is, alternative forms of communication (agency cell phones, email, etc.), and others who are available to assist you in case your assigned CPS professional is unavailable, such as a supervisor.

**I'm afraid that if I am honest with my CPS professional it'll be used against me. What do I do?** This is a common feeling natural supports have. Sharing your honest opinion is important. For example, if you are feeling overwhelmed, say something so you receive support and/or the plan can be adjusted. Everyone involved in the plan has the same goal, keeping the child safe, and the CPS professional is there to help problem-solve and make necessary changes to the plan, so it works best for you, the child and family.



## GLOSSARY

**ACCESS:** the first phase of the CPS process. When reports of alleged child abuse or neglect are made by concerned individuals, they are by CPS professionals in this phase.

**CPS (Child Protective Services):** The public agency with the authority to respond to threats to child safety. The CPS system in Wisconsin is run by the individual counties, aside from Milwaukee, which is state-run.

**CPS Professional:** Individual assigned to interact with the family on behalf of the local child county or tribal child welfare agency.

**CPS Report:** A document that the CPS professional creates when given information by a reporter regarding child maltreatment and safety.

**Confidentiality:** Information about the child, youth, and family that is private in nature and should not be shared with anyone outside of the family.

**DCF:** Department of Children and Families (State of Wisconsin)

**Guardianship:** A person who is granted legal status by a court to provide protection and care of a child. This includes the ability to make important decisions for the child or youth. This does not result in the parents relinquishing legal custody or parental rights.

**Household:** Individuals living together in the same dwelling

**Indian Child:** An unmarried person who is under the age of 18 years and is affiliated with an Indian tribe in any of the following ways: (a) as a member of the tribe, or (b) as a person who is eligible for membership in an Indian tribe and is the biological child of a member of an Indian tribe [Wis. Stat. § 48.02(8g)].

**ICW:** Indian Child Welfare

**ICWA:** Indian Child Welfare Act is a federal law providing guidance to states regarding the handling of allegations of child maltreatment and adoption proceedings involving Indian children.

**Indian Tribe:** any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community of Indians that is recognized as eligible for the services provided to Indians by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior because of Indian status, including any Alaska native village, as defined in 43 USC 1602(c) and Wis. Stat. § 48.02(8r).

**Initial Assessment:** Comprehensive evaluations of reported concerns and the safety of children. These are completed after a CPS report is screened-in. Information is gathered and decisions about maltreatment, child safety, and the need for ongoing services are made.

**Maltreatment:** Child abuse as defined in Wis. Stat. § 48.02(1), (5j) and (14g), child neglect as defined in Wis. Stat. § 48.02(12g), or threatened child abuse or neglect.

**Natural Support:** Individuals who are included on a protective plan or safety plan as a “support” and have a pre-existing relationship with the family. The term “natural” refers to the nature of the relationship between the family and the person providing support. Natural supports can be anyone the family views as a support, including but not limited to relatives, neighbors, family friends, and childcare professionals.





## GLOSSARY

**Ongoing Services:** Refers to agency involvement with families beyond the Initial Assessment process where child welfare professionals provide support and services and partner with families to achieve safety, stability, and permanence for children.

**Parental Protective Capacities:** Refers to personal and parenting behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that can specifically and directly be associated with a person being protective of his or her child. A protective capacity is a specific quality that can be observed, understood and demonstrated as a part of the way a parent thinks, feels, and acts that makes her or him protective.

**Protective Action:** An act the agency takes to protect a child from a dangerous situation. Protective actions could be implementing a protective plan, a safety plan, or, if neither of those two plans are an option, placing the child in out-of-home care.

**Protective Plan:** refers to an immediate, short-term action that protects a child from a dangerous situation(s) in order to allow completion of the Initial Assessment.

**Release of Information:** The consent of a party to allow the release of information about themselves or their family to occur between service providers.

**Reporter:** Anyone who contacts CPS to share concerns about the safety of a child. Anyone can report suspected child abuse and/or neglect to CPS. Some people are mandated reporters who by law must report any suspected or threatened abuse or neglect of a child.

**Safe Child:** A child is considered safe when they are either not exposed to a dangerous situation or behaviors and/or their parents/caregivers are able to be protective.

**Safety Plan:** a written arrangement created in partnership with parents, tribes (when applicable), and natural providers to articulate how a child is going to be shielded from dangerous situations or behaviors.

**Separation:** This is in reference to a child's "separation" from his or her home and/or parent. When "separation" is used in a protective plan or safety plan, a portion of the child's day is spent separated from their home and/or parent. Protective plans and safety plans use as little separation as possible to ensure for child safety.

**Service Provider:** An agency or individual who provides a service to a child, family or Human Services (e.g. counseling, parent education, etc.).

**TPC (Temporary Physical Custody):** A protective action when a protective plan or safety plan cannot be implemented.

**Unsafe Child:** A child is considered unsafe when they are exposed to a dangerous situation or behaviors, and their parent/caregivers are not able to be protective.

**WICWA (Wisconsin Indian Child Welfare Act):** a state law to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by establishing minimum standards for the removal and placement of Indian children that reflect the unique value of Indian culture.