# Working at CPS

Video transcript

19 minutes

**Montage of DFPS staff speaking:**

This is probably the best job I've ever had.

What I like about this job is being able to make a difference.

This is rough reality.

This would be a horrible job if you didn't care about people.

Well the people who are like, I want to help, I encourage that, I'm ok, well then this is the job for you.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

The job of a CPS investigator is to investigate reports that we receive on a statewide level regarding abuse or neglect to children. We receive reports based on the county in which the family resides. Once we receive the report, it's assigned to a particular unit and then a particular caseworker.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

When I get a report of abuse or neglect, the first thing I do is look at the history of the family.

From there I go out and visit the children. I visit people that know the children, the family dynamics. I go to meet with the parents, get medical information. I do school collaterals and from there I go ahead and look for resources to help the family out.

When you first knock on a door you can be a little anxious and nervous.

You don't know what's behind the door. Today though, I'm revisiting a family who is involved in domestic violence and they are in north Austin. There is an emergency protective order in place and I'm here to check the children again and mom to make sure everything is ok because I want to make sure, one, that he's not trying to come back here and law enforcement has not come here looking for him. I want to make sure that he doesn't come back and try to get in. If he comes back, don't open the door and tell your son do not open the door. Tell him to leave the residence otherwise you're going to call law enforcement and so then he'll go because we do not want him in this house. I do not want anything to happen. You've got a great kid, you do a good job with him and you need to be here for him.

**Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker**

When investigations determines that the family needs more assistance, that's when they send it on to Family Based Safety Services so that we can help them strengthen their family, strengthen their parenting. We have a lot of parents that have not had the experience of having good role models as they were growing up so they don't know how to do a lot of things. Maybe they they're not very good at cleaning and I have to show them, you know, this is how you organize things. Maybe they're not very good at talking with their children. We want our families to succeed because children deserve to be raised by their parents, they deserve to be there. Parents deserve to be part of their children's lives.

**Title:**

But sometimes…

Children can't be safe at home

**Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker**

So when the investigator determines that a child is not safe in their home one of the options is to remove the children and when that happens the children can be placed either in foster care or in what we call a kinship home and a kinship home is a family or friend, someone the child knows and is comfortable with where it's safe for the child to stay in the meantime.

So today I've got three visits scheduled and my first stop is a kinship caregiver but she's basically like the children's grandmother. She's tried to be there to support them, she's championed the things that they've done well and she's tried to help the parents make better decisions. This is the kid's room. Oh, and that's mother kitty. She's the queen of the house. Is she a mother? Yeah, she was once-upon-a-time but she's no longer doing those duties. Both girls are still on the bottom and Eli's on top? Yeah, he's on top. And we may have to do something different if you become a licensed foster parent so, you know, if you need to get a bed let me know, there are ways we can help with the bed also. He, that's in the works, hopefully.

Our role is to ease the transition for the families.

Foster families have been through a lot of training, they know what they're getting into whereas kinship families often don't really know what they're getting into, there's a lot of complications with the CPS system, with the legal system. They may not realize what's really happening in the home with the children, they may have a lot of things to deal with, with the parents and so in kinship our role is help them through all of those difficulties.

**Title:**

Every child in CPS care also has a caseworker

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

What we do is we help children who have been removed from their home and placed into foster care or kinship placement. Kinship placement is when they're placed with a relative. We give the family the opportunity to get the child returned to them. They have usually have between 12 and 18 months to get the child back and to do that, they have to go to court with us and demonstrate that they've changed their behavior so that the child will be safe in their care. We also monthly visit the child to make sure the child is safe in their current placement.

So can you read me a story?

Twinkle twinkle little star, a bedtime story.

We facilitate visitation with the child and parent.

We sometimes assist the parent with transportation to various courses and classes they have to take so they can learn new skills to make them safer and more capable to be a parent for their child.

More often than not, the parents start their time with CPS hating us. They don't like us, they don't like the fact that we're involved with their life and normally I get told that they didn't do anything wrong, CPS is wrong for interfering with their business and so their just already angry by the time I get the case.

It's my job to try to de-escalate the situation to talk to them to get them to work with me. Sometimes I'm successful and then sometimes I'm not. I've had parents who just refuse to work with the agency at all and that's very frustrating because we're here to help.

**Title:**

When children can't go home…

Adoption becomes an option

**David Calvo, Adoption caseworker**

In order to adopt a child the process can take anywhere from six months to one year. We need an adoptive home study. They need to be licensed to adopt. We interview the family. We present the child's case to them so once they're chosen to be a permanent home the child will need to be placed in the home for six months before we can proceed to consummate the adoption. This agreement is showing that you are in agreement with making your home for an adoptive placement from today until the adoption. In order to match a child with a family, first of all we need to know the child very well. I need to know his life, his diagnosis, what kind of behaviors he exhibits at home, at school. Do you all get along well? Yeah. You all don't fight right? The reason we wait six months is to provide support services and ensure that the child is well adjusted, that the family is able to manage and that it's a successful placement. We want to be supportive for all these adoptive families.

**Title overlay:**

The job is stressful, unpredictable, emotional

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

If you like things that are regimented and predictable, this is not the job for you. What I tell my caseworkers is the only thing that's constant about investigations is change.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

And it can be fast paced because everybody wants it now. They want to make sure that child is safe, then they want you to get everything documented, then you're put on another case while you're documenting this case, trying to contact this family member while you're also trying to go back and revisit other families, and other cases, so you juggle.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

I can plan for just being in my office all day long but then I get a call and I got to go out. I have to go pick up the kid because the placement broke down. I have to go transport a child to a doctor appointment because the parent cannot all of a sudden. There, you just never know sometimes what you're day's going to be like.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

We're up early in the morning. I've met clients at seven o'clock in the morning before they go to work. I drive around and meet them on their lunchtime. I've gone on construction sites to meet with individuals so we do what is necessary to get that information to make sure the child is safe.

**Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker**

You definitely cannot take the bus to do this job. You're going to need your own car it's going to need to be a reliable car and you're going to have to be able to pay for all the things that are going to be required to do the job. Eventually you will get paid back, uh, mileage, you get a mileage reimbursement for it but when your car is being driven an extra 500 or 700 miles a month then you're going to have more maintenance costs as well so you have to be prepared to do all that yourself.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

You can't go into this job expecting everything to be rainbows and roses. There are going to be hard times. There are going to be times where you're like, why am I even doing this because you feel as though you've failed. You have failed.

**Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker**

It takes an emotional toll because you're seeing situations that you have no control over that you can't make better or you see children being hurt.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

The most frustrating part of this job for me is the removal of a child or child death. I, that's heartbreaking. You have to recover from that and you don't really get a time to process it because you have to go on to the next case.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

One of the cases that really sticks with me is involving domestic violence. We received a report concerning domestic violence between mom and the father to one of her children. She was, she appeared very protective and we had given her resources to the local domestic violence shelter for counseling services and the actual perpetrator, the aggressor, he was not living in the home, and mom signed plans to the effect he wouldn't be in the home, and then on Halloween, following about a month after the investigation had come in, he entered the home and he murdered the mother and then he shot himself and you always just look back and think what else could have been done? I played that investigation over in my head a multitude of times and felt that as an agency we had done what we could. We had offered services, but people are just unpredictable and there are just a lot of things we can't control.

**Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker**

One thing that I do in particular when I have very bad days, I will go and visit my daughter and my grandchildren, just so that I can sit and watch them and say this is why I do what I'm doing because every child deserves to have a happy home and to grow up like this, and then it makes it ok then I can go on for another day.

**Title:**

Training prepares you

Teamwork sustains you

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

When an individual is hired to be a CPS investigator or an FBSS specialist or a CVS specialist, they're going to go through a training program where they'll be given an individualized training plan, also called the ITP. With the ITP they are assigned a mentor. The mentor can be a certified mentor who has been with the agency two years or more or it can be a mentor candidate whose been with the agency a year or more. That protégé, that new hire, will follow that mentor throughout the duration of their day so if that mentor works 8 to 8 then that protégé is with that mentor from 8 to 8. Eighty percent of the training is going to be on the job field training and twenty percent is going to be in the classroom. The protégés are followed, they're given regular feedback, they meet with supervisors weekly, they meet with their mentors every day, they are actually able to work on real cases, they're seeing real families, they're seeing real services, they're seeing real home visits and they're doing more inside the home than working with actual investigators then spending time in a classroom.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

If your unit is really connected and really supportive of each other then they can help you out. Also, they're someone to talk to when things get difficult, when things get overwhelming because they're in the same boat as you and sometimes they have techniques that you're not aware of to help them cope, help them get things done quicker and sometimes they're finished with whatever they had to take care of and they can help you out.

**Title:**

Do you have what it takes to work at CPS?

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

To do this job I believe that it takes a character, a type of character where you're going to have a passion for what you do, you have to put everything that you have into this job, in terms of, if something is not done at the end of the day, then you could potentially be leaving a child at risk.

**David Calvo, Adoption caseworker**

The skills necessary to be successful in my job is first of all having people skills, you have to be, you will be engaging with people all time.

**Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker**

And you're talking to people who are angry and upset and, you know, the job is to help whittle through what it is that they're upset about and, you know, help them out with that and if you don't care you're just going to get worn out. It's going to beat you down, and it's going to happen quickly.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

A good investigative caseworker needs to be organized, they need to be very detail oriented. They need to be well spoken and well written. They also need to be able to adapt to change and that is very constant in this agency. They need to be able to work long hours and handle the stress, um, that comes along with this job.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

The qualities necessary to be a good caseworker are patience, a willingness to help.

**Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker**

Have sympathy, empathy, and a passion.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

A person has to be willing to roll up their sleeves, get in the middle of everything, and clean up.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

You can't have a chip on your shoulder, I mentioned that earlier and you can't go in here thinking, ok, I dislike this person because of what they've done. I dislike this person because of the way they dress. You can't do that. You have to go in and be polite, be nice.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

I think there are many people that probably are not suited to handle this job. You have to separate your emotions, at the end of the day you have to make sure you have a good balance. You have to make sure that you can separate your work from your personal life. You have to make sure that, if the work does affect you in ways that is becomes concerning that you reach out for help and that you ask someone for help but it does take a particular type of character, to do this job and to be able to have that separation.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

I think one of the biggest perks of working here is the mobility, all of our caseworkers are mobile, you have the ability to work from Starbucks if you'd like. You have the ability to work from your home if you'd like. You have the ability to spend your morning documenting and then doing afternoon home visits or vice versa, you have the ability to schedule your day how it best works for you.

**Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker**

For me, I would be horrible for just sitting at an office so I like to be out and doing things. I don't like to be doing the same thing, you know, day after day, I want to be meeting new people and for me, that sort of keeps me going.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

Seeing my kids graduate from high school is one of my favorite things to do. I love going to the graduation, being there, getting to clap for them, celebrate with them afterwards. I love seeing my kids. I spend time with them playing on the floor, reading books. It's just so rewarding to see these kids succeed and go on and do better things after what they came from.

**Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker**

If you're thinking about a career in CPS, you have to ask yourself, you know, how hard are you willing to work because this is not going to be a job that is easy, but if you do care about making a difference with children then you can make a huge difference.

**Donna Allen, Investigative Worker**

I do this job because I like seeing a difference in a person's life. I like to see a success story and, that's what we're looking for and sometimes you don't get success stories but when you do get one it just makes you just feel great inside, energetic.

**Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker**

What I like about this job is being able to make a difference, being able to change the lives of children, change the lives of parents, change generations.

**Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker**

If someone is thinking about taking this job I'll tell them that if they're doing it for the money, it's not the job for them. But if they want to help, if they want to go out there and change somebody's life, if they can be flexible, this job might just be the one that they're looking for.

**Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor**

This is probably the best job I've ever had. I've worked at this agency for seven years. I have a passion for it. I can't imagine honestly can't imagine working anywhere else. If you have the passion and you have the drive and you have the want to be here this is definitely the job to have.

**Title:**

The Cast

Christina Smith, CPS Supervisor

Donna Allen, Investigative Worker

Anna Lubawski, FBSS Caseworker

Anna McCartor, Kinship Worker

Rhonda Young, Conservatorship Worker

David Calvo, Adoption caseworker

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