Substantiating Child Sexual Abuse

**General Considerations:**
Respectively, having a medical exam performed by a qualified physician (one who specializes in child sexual abuse, if possible) and interviewing individuals are the primary methods of assessing a) whether the child sexual abuse occurred per the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law and b) whether the child’s safety is in immediate jeopardy. In addition to knowing that a child welfare professional must refer a child alleged to have been sexually abused to a qualified physician for examination, below you will find key considerations concerning the interviews that also must occur whenever mandated and/or appropriate.

During the investigation stage of the child sexual abuse case, whenever possible, it is important to gather as much relevant information as is possible and necessary to discover the information from the points below and document that information in the case record.

**Interview Requirements per 55 Pa. Code §3490.55:**
- Child welfare professionals must interview (at a minimum):¹
  - The________________________, if appropriate
  - The child’s________________________ responsible for the child’s welfare
  - The________________________ of the suspected child abuse
  - The________________________ of the suspected child abuse, if known
  - __________________________ to the suspected child abuse
  - __________________________ who may have knowledge of the abuse
  - __________________________, or both, if appropriate

**Interview Requirements per the Child Protective Services Law (October 2014):**
The amended Child Protective Services Law now mandates that the investigation include interviews with all subjects of the report of suspected abuse, including the alleged perpetrator (§6368 Investigation of reports [d] [4]). The subject of the report, as defined by §6303 of the CPSL, is any child, parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the welfare of a child or any alleged or actual perpetrator in a report made to DHS or a county agency.

**Information Needed:**
- In addition to other information, when interviewing people, the child welfare professional must attempt to discover:
  - Whether the allegations are true
  - Learn whether access issues exist
  - The client’s culture

¹ Source: Title 55 Pa. Code §3490.55 (relating to investigation of reports of suspected child abuse)(d)(1-7)
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- Whether elements of secrecy exist
- Whether medical indicators exist
- Who lives at the alleged child victim’s home, in addition to the number of siblings, ages, etc.
- The family’s past involvement with the agency
- Whether information offered by everyone corroborates
- Information that allows them to consider other possible scenarios that could explain the reasons for the referral
Person-Specific Considerations:
Although a great deal of overlap might occur regarding what information is needed, how the interview is conducted, in conjunction with whom and when, along with other considerations might vary. Below you will find spaces to capture key considerations associated with specific people involved in a child sexual abuse case.

- The Referral Source

- The Alleged Child Victim and Other Children in the Home
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- The Non-Offending Parent

- The Alleged Perpetrator