

# **A Guide to the Children's Services Act for Children and Families**



Developed by the State and Local Advisory Team

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The Children's Services Act (CSA) is a planning and funding process to help meet the needs of children and families in Virginia. This document provides parents and families information on eligibility for CSA and other aspects of the CSA process.

For your quick reference, here's where you can find the following information:

What is the Children's Services Act (CSA)?.....	3
CSA Believes.....	3
Why would I need the CSA? .....	4
Who is eligible for services through the CSA? .....	4
How can I find out if my child is eligible? .....	5
How is the Local CSA Program Administered? .....	6
The Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT).....	6
What does a FAPT meeting look like? .....	6
Who attends FAPT meetings? .....	8
How should I prepare for FAPT? .....	8
What should I do while at FAPT? .....	9
What is my role throughout the CSA process?.....	9
How is my information shared? .....	9
What if I do not agree with a funding or service decision? .....	9
Will I have to contribute to the payment for services provided by CSA?.....	10
The Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) .....	10
CSA Rights and Responsibilities to Families.....	10
What if I have additional questions?.....	11
Acronyms Used at CSA .....	12

## **What is the Children's Services Act (CSA)?**

The Children's Services Act is a Virginia law created to develop and fund various services and supports for eligible children and their families. Services are approved through a multi-disciplinary team process and monitored by the local CSA program. Funding is a shared responsibility of local and state governments. These services should be child and family-focused. The goal is to provide appropriate services to a child while keeping them safely in their home and community. If a child needs an out-of-home placement, the intention is to return them to their home as quickly as possible.

While there are State laws and policies that direct the work of CSA, the "State Supervised, Locally Administered" CSA system means local CPMTs teams must develop policies and procedures for how their program operates. While they share many common elements, local CSA programs are not localities are identical! In addition to some operational differences, service recommendations may also be a reflection of the services available in your locality.

Each locality has a CSA Coordinator who is the point of contact for the local CSA program. You can find your local CSA Coordinator's contact information by clicking directly on this link: [CSA Local Government Contacts](http://csa.virginia.gov) on the state CSA website ([csa.virginia.gov](http://csa.virginia.gov)).



### **CSA Believes...**

- All families have strengths
- Families are the experts on themselves
- Families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- Families can, when supported, make well-informed decisions about keeping their children safe
- Outcomes improve when families are involved in decision-making
- A team is often more capable of creative and high-quality decision-making than an individual

## Why would I need the CSA?

Assistance through the CSA might be appropriate if your child needs mental health, behavioral supports, or other resources not funded through private insurance or Medicaid. CSA may also be able to provide parent support and education. Your CSA team will provide individualized service recommendations based on your child and family's needs and services available in the community. CSA provides an opportunity to interact with child-serving agencies in your community. Meeting with your local CSA office can provide information about local community resources and services.

## Who is eligible for services through the CSA?

Services through the CSA *may* be available to a child who meets at least one of the following descriptions as noted in the Code of Virginia [§2.2-5212](#) and described below:

### **§2.2-5212. Eligibility for state pool of funds.**

A. In order to be eligible for funding for services through the state pool of funds, a child, or family with a child, shall meet one or more of the criteria specified in subdivisions 1 through 4 and shall be determined through the use of a uniform assessment instrument and process and by policies of the community policy and management team to have access to these funds.

1. The child or child has emotional or behavior problems that:

- a. Have persisted over a significant period of time or, though only in evidence for a short period of time, are of such a critical nature that intervention is warranted;
- b. Are significantly disabling and are present in several community settings, such as at home, in school or with peers; and
- c. Require services or resources that are unavailable or inaccessible, or that are beyond the normal agency services or routine collaborative processes across agencies, or require coordinated interventions by at least two agencies.

2. The child or child has emotional or behavior problems, or both, and currently is in, or is at imminent risk of entering, purchased residential care. In addition, the child or child requires services or resources that are beyond normal agency services or routine collaborative processes across agencies, and requires coordinated services by at least two agencies.

3. The child or child requires placement for purposes of special education in approved private school educational programs or for transitional services as set forth in subdivision B 6 of § [2.2-5211](#).

4. The child or child requires foster care services as defined in § [63.2-905](#).

B. For purposes of determining eligibility for the state pool of funds, "child" or "child" means (i) a person younger than 18 years of age or (ii) any individual through 21 years of age who is otherwise eligible for mandated services of the participating state agencies including special education and foster care services.

### **How can I find out if my child is eligible?**

If you have questions about whether your child may be eligible for CSA funding, **contact your local CSA Coordinator.**

### **How do I access the CSA process?**

Often, a child is referred to CSA through a local agency such as the Department of Social Services (DSS), the school system, the Community Services Board (CSB)\*, the Court Services Unit (CSU)\*\* or the juvenile and domestic relations court. All localities must also have a direct parent referral process. This means you don't have to wait for an agency to suggest CSA. You can take the initiative! If you are not already involved with one of these agencies, you may be referred to one of them to "get the ball rolling." When a referring agency requests a review for services with your family through CSA, the person working with you (often referred to as a case manager) can help explain the process to you. If you are interested in pursuing services through CSA, contact your agency Case Manager or the local CSA Coordinator and ask them to explain the local process in detail. Keep in mind that timelines for initiating CSA reviews may vary between localities, the urgency of your situation, or be dependent on the number of cases waiting to be considered. Some localities have information about the local CSA program on their websites, typically under the human services or social services section.

\*A (CSB) is your locality's publicly funded agency providing mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance use disorder services.

\*\*The CSU is affiliated with the juvenile court and provides a variety of services.

## **How is the Local CSA Program Administered?**

There are two different local CSA teams, the Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) and the Community Policy Management Team (CPMT).



### **The Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT)**

The FAPT is the multi-disciplinary process responsible for determining eligibility for CSA, exploring the strengths and needs of individual children and families, and recommending services. Together with the child and family, the FAPT prepares an individual family service plan (IFSP). FAPT members include representatives from DSS, schools, CSU, CSB, and a parent representative. FAPT may also include other members such as the health department or a service provider.

The FAPT process includes completing a standardized assessment called the CANS or the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths. Your assigned Case Manager typically completes the CANS before the FAPT meeting to provide important information to the team. A CANS is required for all children and families receiving CSA-funded services.

### **What happens at a FAPT meeting?**

The parent (and child, if appropriate) should attend the FAPT meeting. If you are referred to FAPT by a local agency (DSS, schools, CSB, or CSU), your Case Manager from that agency attends the FAPT with you. They will be in touch with you ahead of the FAPT meeting to provide you with its date, time, and location. If your locality allows parents to refer themselves to FAPT, your local CSA Coordinator will provide you with the necessary details about FAPT. If you self-refer to FAPT and your child is found eligible for CSA, a Case Manager will be assigned (likely at FAPT). The Case

Manager is responsible for coordinating services, completing paperwork, and keeping in touch with you regarding those services and future FAPT meetings.

A FAPT meeting can feel intimidating. Often, multiple (approximately 4-7) people attend who represent the agencies mentioned above. They bring different perspectives and potential resources and help ensure coordinated planning for your child and family. Everyone at the meeting should introduce themselves to you, and they should clearly explain their role.

At FAPT, you should have the opportunity to discuss your experience and the challenges that are currently happening within your family. The discussion at times may feel negative (talk about all the things not going well). However, this is to determine the appropriate services and resources your child and family may need and determine eligibility for the Children's Services Act. The FAPT should ask for your input on its recommendations.

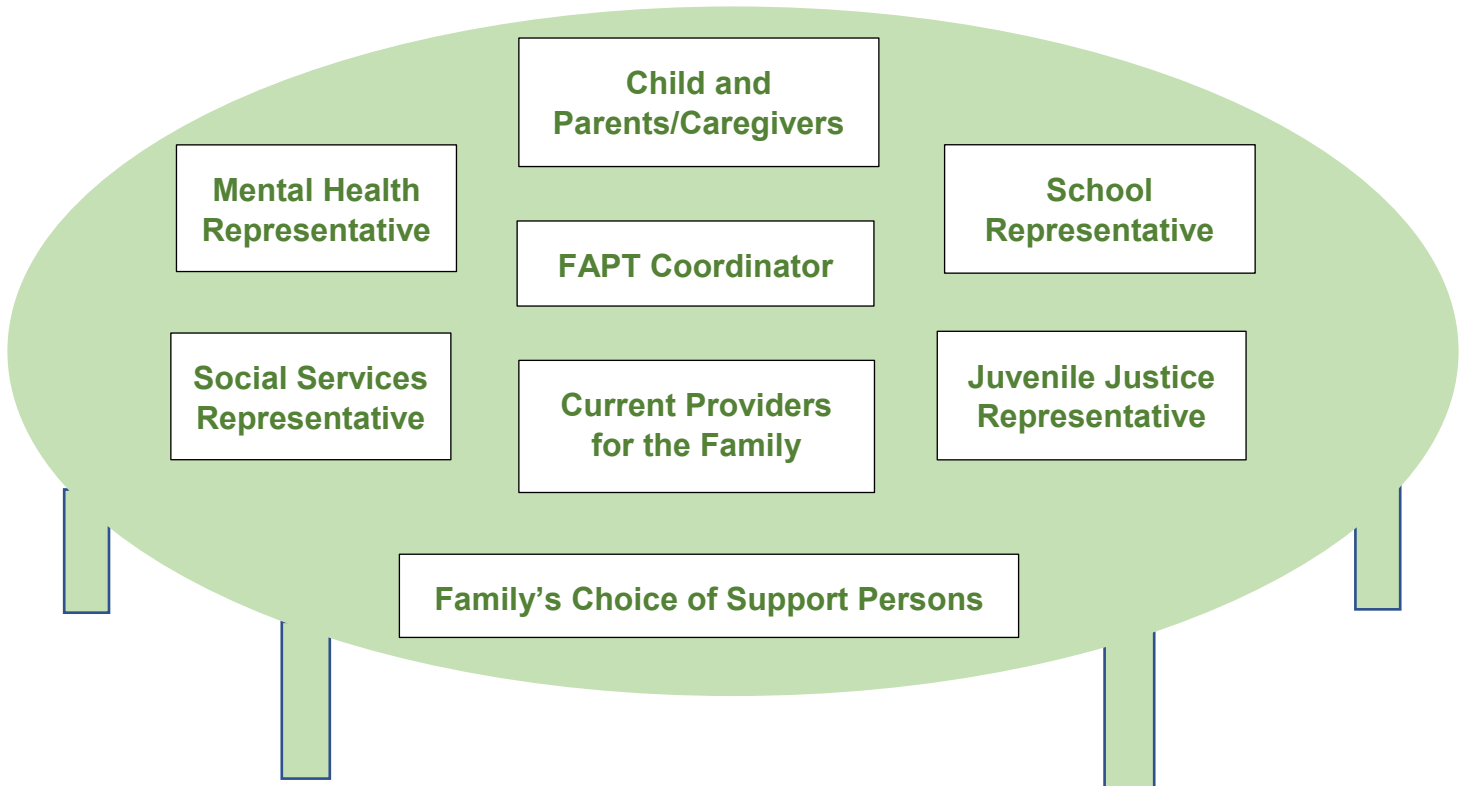
If eligible for CSA, FAPT utilizes the information discussed to develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for your child. The IFSP includes long-term goals and short-term objectives and services and supports to meet those objectives. Service recommendations are based upon the needs shared. FAPT members should also take into account your family's strengths and preferences. While the FAPT recommends services to meet needs, it should also be building upon the strengths and interests of your family. The FAPT will ask you to sign documents to allow confidential information sharing among providers related to the agreed-on services and supports. You will be asked to sign the IFSP and should receive a copy.

It is important to note that some services, like residential treatment, have specific eligibility requirements, and the FAPT makes recommendations that align with these requirements. If a residential placement is being considered and your child is a Medicaid member, an independent assessment called an IACCT would be necessary. If you don't understand a suggested recommendation, please speak up! FAPT members are there to support you and your family and should answer any questions you have.

If the FAPT recommends services, you will return to a FAPT meeting from time to time. There should be discussions around your family's needs and how things are

going with the services in place during subsequent meetings. FAPT evaluates the need to continue the services, and if the services are not effective, the team may suggest other services or resources.

### Who attends FAPT meetings?



### How should I prepare for FAPT?

In preparation for FAPT, it is essential to gather records regarding your child's needs and why you're coming to the FAPT. This information may include treatment reports and assessments, both current and from the past. Organizing these documents and bringing them to FAPT helps the team to understand your child and family's history and current needs. If you have questions about the types of documents to bring, speak with the CSA Coordinator or your Case Manager.



### **What should I do while at FAPT?**

You have an important voice in decisions regarding your child. The FAPT members bring expertise to evaluate situations like yours and the services and resources available in the community. You also bring expertise about your child and family and your unique needs. During the FAPT meeting, you should:

- Share important information with team members regarding your child and family
- Ask questions and receive as much information as possible about services, programs, and resources for your child and your family
- Ask for an explanation of new or unfamiliar words and phrases.

### **What is my role throughout the CSA process?**

- Stay in contact with your CSA Case Manager.
- Actively participate in the services being provided to your child and family.
- Inform your Case Manager of any significant changes with your child or family, especially anything that may impact the provided services.
- Provide timely feedback to the service provider(s), Case Manager, and FAPT members about what is and isn't working for your family.

### **How is my information shared?**

- FAPT participants must keep information obtained about a child and family confidential except as permitted or required by law. If you have any questions about this, speak with your Case Manager or CSA Coordinator.

### **What if I disagree with a funding or service decision?**

The Code of Virginia ([§2.2-5206](#)) requires all local CSA programs to have an appeal policy. If you disagree with a decision by the local FAPT, you should consult with your CSA Coordinator to request information on their appeals process.

## **Will I have to contribute to the payment for services provided by CSA?**

You could potentially have a co-payment assessed by the CSA program. Parental contributions are based on a sliding scale established by your locality or by referral for child support in certain instances.

- The Code of Virginia ([§2.2-5206](#)) requires that each CPMT has a local policy for assessing parental contribution for services provided. The CSA Coordinator in your community can explain the local parental co-pay policy.
- If the services you are receiving are outlined on your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or funded through Medicaid, you cannot be required to pay a co-pay for these services. Additional services recommended by FAPT may be subject to a co-payment.

## **The Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT)**

The two primary roles of the CPMT are to manage the CSA funds and establish local CSA policies and procedures. The team consists of directors from DSS, schools, CSU, and the CSB. CPMT also has a parent representative, a representative from the health department, and a service provider.

## **CSA Rights and Responsibilities to Families**

- You have the right to receive information on the local CSA process
- You have a right to understand the information that you receive and have it delivered in your preferred language
- Your Case Manager is responsible for assisting you throughout the FAPT process
- You have the right to review the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and to agree or disagree in writing with the identified services. All FAPT services are voluntary unless ordered by the court.
- You have the right to receive a copy of your IFSP as soon as possible following the meeting
- You have the opportunity to participate in all FAPT meetings. You have the right to participate and be present for the entire meeting. You have the opportunity to discuss your child and family's situation as well as participate in decisions that apply to you and your family
- You have the right to appeal IFSP decisions according to local policy.

## What if I have additional questions?



Because your county or city is responsible for managing CSA, the process is specific to where you live. There may be some differences in how each program operates. Your CSA Coordinator should be your point of contact for questions or concerns. The CSA website ([www.csa.virginia.gov](http://www.csa.virginia.gov)) provides more detailed information about state CSA law and operations.

If there are questions regarding policies or operations in the area where you live, your local CPMT Chair may offer further assistance. You may find the CPMT Chair from your area on the CSA website, under the Contacts tab by clicking [here](#).

## **Acronyms Used at CSA**

CANS – Child and Adolescent Strengths and Needs Assessment

CHINS – Child in Need of Services

CPMT – Community Policy and Management Team

CSA – Children's Services Act

CSB – Community Services Board

CSU – Court Services Unit

DJJ – Department of Juvenile Justice

DMAS – Department of Medical Assistance Services

DSS – Department of Social Services

FAPT – Family Assessment and Planning Team

IACCT – Independent Assessment, Certification, and Coordination Team

IEP – Individualized Education Program

IFSP – Individual and Family Services Plan

OCS – Office of Children's Services