

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

State laws require that you have reasonable suspicion that abuse is occurring. That means you do not need proof of abuse to make a good faith report to authorities.

Reasonable suspicion means you have witnessed physical or behavioral signs of maltreatment, either in the child or parent/caregiver, or both. OR, you have received a disclosure from a child about abuse, neglect, or boundary violations toward them.



WHAT INFORMATION DO I NEED TO MAKE A REPORT?

Necessary Information

- Child's name, address and age
- Parents' name and address
- Nature of the abuse

Helpful Information*

- Perpetrator's name
- Details of the abuse

*If the child does not readily supply this information, do not continue to question or investigate. It could interfere later with the investigation.

HOW DO I REPORT?

Report to the police or child protective services, or both. Generally, if the suspected offender is in the home with the child, it is better to contact child protective services.

IF THE CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER CALL 911

A child just disclosed sexual abuse to me. **WHAT DO I DO NOW?**

1. Say, "I believe you," and "It's not your fault."

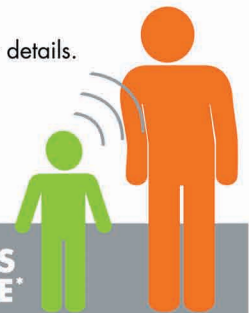
- DO** remain calm.
- DO** ask open-ended questions: "Then what happened?"
- DON'T** make promises. Say, "We're going to get the help we need."

2. Conduct a "minimal fact" interview.

- DO** let them use their own words.
- DON'T** ask leading questions or probe for details.

3. Report immediately.

- DO** tell law enforcement and/or child protective services.



FALSE SEXUAL ABUSE REPORTS MADE BY CHILDREN ARE RARE*

Source: D2L.org/Statistics

Do not ask the child leading questions or try to draw out information.

Asking too many questions about abuse may cause distress in the child, and can interfere with prosecution of the alleged offender.

Some guidelines for reporting abuse:

- Do not investigate on your own - Especially do not investigate physical signs beyond those that can be seen in daily interactions.
- It is best not to contact parents about your report, especially if a parent or household member is the suspected abuser. This could put the child at further risk or lead to the destruction of evidence.
- Even though your report may not result in legal action, the investigation may cause other services to take place, like counseling or the provision of necessities for the child.

Sometimes the investigating professionals may not be able to gather enough evidence to act on your report. Still, your report may become part of a series of reports that can lead to action later.

When talking with children about **SIGNS OR DISCLOSURES:**

When talking with children about signs or disclosures:

- Find a private place.
- Drop to eye level, or sit next to the child.
- Remain calm; keep a pace that is patient and slow.
- Ask the child about the sign in a simple, open-ended style. "I'm worried about you. What happened to your cheek?" Or, "Tell me about your arm?"
- Listen to the response. Repeat what the child just said with a question inflection. "Your daddy pinched your arm?"
- Listen to the response. Let them use their own words and repeat their words exactly again, followed by, "Is there anything else?"
- Reassure the child that he or she has done nothing wrong.
- Tell the child, "I care about you."
- When you are completing the conversation, tell the child, "This took a lot of courage. I'm proud of you for telling me."

Refrain from behaviors that will frighten the child, put him or her on the defensive, or cause him or her to relive the abusive events.

- Don't ask questions that begin with "W" like "who, where, when" or "why."
- Don't overreact or make negative statements about the abuser.
- Don't make judgments or conclusions about the child or the abuser.
- Don't interrogate, investigate, or delve deeply into the events.
- Don't ask leading questions or make suggestions about what happened. For example, ask, "How did you get hurt?" rather than asking, "Did someone do that to you?"
- Don't make promises that the information will be kept confidential.
- Don't make any broad promises about the future.

Make your report immediately and include:

- Name of the alleged child victim.
- Age of the child.
- Address where the child can be located.
- Contact information for the child's parents or caregivers, if known.
- Types of suspected abuse or neglect.
- Reason for making the report, including specific signs of maltreatment and whether it is part of an ongoing pattern.
- If the type of maltreatment is neglect, it is important to share the negative impacts on the child.
- Other children in the home, if known.
- Name of the alleged perpetrator, if known.
- The emergency nature of the report and whether the child is in imminent danger.
- Name, phone number, and address of the reporter.

When known, the following should also be shared with child protective services:

- Exact time the child disclosed abuse, if there was a disclosure.
- Whether the perpetrator is aware of the report.
- Whether the non-offending parent was notified of the report.
- Last occurrence of the offense.

Report immediately. But first, take a few moments to jot down some notes in two categories.

Category 1: What is the action, or failure to act, on the part of the parents or caregivers?

Category 2: How are these actions or failures to act affecting and hurting this child?