

DCFS: Child Abuse and Neglect

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected you have a social responsibility to report it to the hotline. Most professionals in education, health care, law enforcement and social work are required by law to report suspected neglect or abuse. These individuals are called mandated reporters.

To help mandated reporters understand their critical role in protecting children, DCFS administers a free online training course entitled Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Training for Mandated Reporters, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
<https://mr.dcfstraining.org/UserAuth/Login!loginPage.action>

DCFS has the primary responsibility of protecting children through the investigation of suspected abuse or neglect by parents and other caregivers in a position of trust or authority over the child.

Call the 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline at **800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873 or TTY 1-800-358-5117)** if you suspect that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed by abuse or neglect. If you believe a child is in immediate danger of harm, call 911 first. Your confidential call will not only make sure the child is safe, but also help provide the child's family the services they need to provide a safe, loving and nurturing home.

What are child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse is the mistreatment of a child under the age of 18 by:

- A parent or their romantic partner;
- An immediate relative or someone living in their home;
- A caretaker such as a babysitter or daycare worker; or
- Any person responsible for the child's welfare, such as a health care provider, educator, coach or youth program volunteer.

The mistreatment can either result in injury or put the child at serious risk of injury. Child abuse can be physical (i.e. bruises or broken bones), sexual (i.e. fondling or incest), or mental (emotional injury or psychological illness).

Neglect is the failure of a parent or caretaker to meet "minimal parenting" standards for providing adequate supervision, food, clothing, medical care, shelter or other basic needs.

What if I'm not absolutely sure abuse is occurring?

Unfortunately, as much as 70 percent of child abuse goes unreported, and a child tells an average of seven adults that they are being abused or neglected before a report is made. Every delay in reporting suspected abuse or neglect increases the likelihood that abuse will become more serious, or even deadly, and that the perpetrator will abuse additional children. By trusting your own senses, common sense and instincts, and calling the hotline whenever you suspect a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, you can ensure a child is safe and that her family is getting the help they need.

To prevent unnecessary investigations, hotline calls are screened by trained social workers to determine whether they warrant investigation for abuse or neglect. Of the more than one million hotline calls received over the past four years, only about one in four resulted in a formal report

and an investigation. Many of the calls that do not lead to investigations are often directed to referrals that connect families with community-based programs aimed at preventing abuse. When formal investigations do occur, only 4% result in children being removed from their homes. In most cases where abuse or neglect are indicated, DCFS is able to provide services to the family that allow the child to remain in the home safely, provided the abuse or neglect is reported to the department soon enough to intervene.

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

If you suspect abuse or neglect you have a social responsibility to report it to the hotline. In addition, state law requires that most professionals in education, health care, law enforcement and social work report suspected neglect or abuse. These individuals are called Mandated Reporters.

Mandated reporters include:

- physicians
- physician assistants
- psychiatrists, surgeons
- residents
- interns
- dentists
- dental hygienists
- medical examiners
- pathologists
- osteopaths
- coroners
- Christian Science practitioners
- chiropractors
- podiatrists
- registered and licensed practical nurses
- emergency medical technicians
- hospital administrators and other personnel involved in the examination care or treatment of patients
- teachers
- school personnel
- educational advocates assigned to a child pursuant to the School Code
- directors and staff assistants of day care centers and nursery schools
- child care workers
- truant officers
- probation officers
- law enforcement officers
- animal control officers
- field personnel of the Departments of Children and Family Services, Public Health, Public Aid, Human Services (acting as successor to the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Rehabilitation Services, or Public Aid), Corrections and Human Rights

The list also includes: supervisors and administrators of general assistance under the Illinois Public Aid Code. Other mandated reporters include social workers, social service administrators, substance abuse treatment personnel, domestic violence program personnel, crisis line or hotline personnel, foster parents, homemakers, recreational program or facility personnel, registered psychologists and assistants working under the direct supervision of a psychologist.

State law protects the confidentiality of all reporters, and your name is never disclosed. You may still choose to make a report anonymously, but the inability of investigators to follow-up with you to obtain additional information may impede the investigation and the child's safety. The law protects you from civil liability for any call made in good faith.