



Florida —

Recognizing, Reporting and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

WHERE TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE

Call the Florida's Abuse Hotline at
1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

Or, if a child is in immediate danger,
call your local police or sheriff.

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM

Get free and anonymous help 365
days a year, 24 hours a day.



Childhelp® National Child Abuse
Hotline: 800-4-A-Child (800-422-4453)

Quick Reference Guide



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A service of LawRoom in support
of the Safe Environment for
Children Program

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT ABUSE?

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE

What To Teach Children

- ▶ how to say "no" to abuse
- ▶ how to run away from abusers
- ▶ how to recognize potential abusers
- ▶ how to report suspicious people
- ▶ how to seek help from safe adults
- ▶ not to accept gifts without their parents' knowledge



What to Warn Them About Online Usage

- ▶ clarify permitted and forbidden websites
- ▶ be aware of the dangers of online predators
- ▶ do not reveal personal information online
- ▶ do not engage in "private chats" online
- ▶ do not meet online friends in person without parent's permission
- ▶ alert parent if they're contacted online by a stranger
- ▶ people on the Internet can lie about themselves

What to Watch Out For

- ▶ adults more interested in youth activities than adult activities
- ▶ adults giving gifts to unrelated children
- ▶ changes in the child's behavior

What You Should Do

- ▶ participate in their lives daily
- ▶ know where they are at all times and with whom
- ▶ enhance their confidence
- ▶ listen to what they say
- ▶ discourage them from being alone with unrelated adults
- ▶ consult Florida's sex offender list
- ▶ ensure multiple adult supervisors at youth events
- ▶ keep computer in family room

- ▶ monitor the websites they visit
- ▶ join them online
- ▶ learn about or meet their online friends
- ▶ be the "administrator" on the computer
- ▶ insist on having their account passwords
- ▶ install software to limit website access



Physical Abuse

Is an act that causes or threatens to cause non-accidental and unnecessary harm to a child.

It does **not** include:

- parents disciplining their child using reasonable, age appropriate, physical force that does not expose the child to serious injury.
- a "mutual fight" between minors.
- necessary force used by peace officers.
- necessary force used by public school staff to obtain a weapon from a student, or to control a violent or dangerous situation.

Sexual Abuse

- **Sexual Assault:** sex acts and attempts, incest, touching a child – even over clothing - for purposes of sexual gratification, or having a child sexually touch another person.
- **Sexual Exploitation:** preparing, selling or distributing child pornography, using a child for the sexual gratification of others, or child prostitution.

Emotional abuse

Occurs when a parent, guardian, or other significant adult withholds affection from a child and instead inflicts intentional and unjustifiable mental harm.

Neglect

Refers to a parent or guardian not meeting the child's basic physical, medical, educational, or emotional needs.

How Can I Recognize Child Abuse?

Any of the following physical, behavioral, parental, or environmental clues, alone or in combination, may give you cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected. **Suspicion is enough** to make a report!

PHYSICAL CLUES

- facial injuries (black eyes or swollen lips)
- multiple injuries in different stages of healing
- unattended medical problems or infections
- bite marks (animal or human)
- bruises or trauma on back, buttocks, or thighs
- repeated series of bruises or broken bones
- burns from objects, rope, or liquid
- pain or injury around genital area
- urinary tract infection
- sexually transmitted disease
- significant increase in physical complaints
- painful urination or defecation
- self-inflicted injuries (cuts or burns)
- signs of malnutrition (thin, fainting, hunger)
- extremely offensive body odor



BEHAVIORAL CLUES

- extreme anxiety, guilt, or shame
- unexplained crying
- difficulty sleeping or recurrent nightmares
- regressive behavior (acting much younger)
- clinginess or acting excessively responsible
- fear of certain adults
- extreme dependency on other adults
- increasing isolation and withdrawal
- running away from home
- depression or passivity
- increasing aggressiveness
- extreme anger and verbal abuse
- inappropriate sexual behavior
- dramatic change in school performance
- suicidal ideas
- substance abuse
- failure to bathe regularly
- excessive bathing
- inappropriate clothes for the weather
- filthy or unkempt clothes
- bedwetting

PARENTAL CLUES

- unwilling to provide for child's needs
- indifferent to child's condition or safety
- unable to explain child's injury
- gives improbable explanation for child's injury
- cannot describe anything positive about child
- constantly and angrily criticizes child
- states destructive thoughts about hurting child
- uses belt, or other object to discipline child
- discipline of child is impulsive or out-of-control
- expects child to serve or fulfill adult's needs
- describes child as "evil"
- has unrealistic expectations about child's development

ENVIRONMENTAL CLUES

- broken windows
- lack of utilities (heat, water, electricity)
- faulty electrical fixtures
- insects, mice, or rats
- spoiled food
- unsanitary kitchen
- garbage or hazards in the yard
- yelling or crying heard from outside





Why Make a Report?

In 2005, an estimated 899,000 children in the United States were found to be victims of child abuse or neglect. And by most estimates, this is a small percentage of the actual child abuse/neglect cases.

In Florida, everyone has the responsibility to prevent the abuse or neglect of children.

Who are Mandatory Reporters?

Everyone is a mandatory reporter. Workers in certain occupations are professionally mandated reporters who must provide their names when they report.

Reporters :

- ▶ Must make a report to the Florida Abuse Hotline (preferably by phone call).
- ▶ Must report when they have – or should have – “reasonable suspicion” that a child is being abused by a caregiver or other person who is responsible for their welfare.



LEGAL DUTY TO REPORT

Reporters:

Liability ...

A reporter who **fails to report** suspected abuse/neglect:

- **is guilty** of a misdemeanor, and faces one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine.
- **is guilty** of a felony if the person who failed to report is over 18 and lives in the same house as the abused/neglected child, unless there are mitigating circumstances, and faces five years in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Immunity ...

A reporter who **makes a report** of suspected abuse/neglect:

- **cannot be held liable** for making a report, even if it's wrong. The reporter has complete immunity.
- **cannot be** prevented from, or penalized for, reporting by the reporter's employer.

HOW DO I MAKE A REPORT?

- ▶ Once you suspect abuse, you must **immediately** call Florida's Department of Children & Families (DCF) Abuse Hotline for abuse committed by someone **responsible for the child's welfare**.
 - ****Don't worry** about calling the wrong agency. Each agency is required to transfer the report to the correct agency if you got it wrong. So, **make the call**. For the child's sake, it's always better to err on the side of reporting than not reporting.
- ▶ You may agree with other mandatory reporters that only one person will contact the authorities and make the report. However, if the designated person fails to contact the authorities, the mandatory reporter must make the report.
- ▶ Certain professionals (“professionally mandated”) must provide their names when reporting, including doctors, health care professionals and school teachers; other reporters may report abuse/neglect anonymously. Names of reporters are confidential and will not be released, except to government officials.
- ▶ Reporters may be asked to provide information about **who** was involved in the abuse, including all names, addresses and ages of those involved; **what** occurred, and **when** and **where** the abuse occurred.
- ▶ A written form may be completed and faxed, or electronically transmitted (see attached) for reporting purposes, and for making a record of your oral report.

WHAT WILL DCF DO?

If DCF accepts the report, it will **perform an investigation** after receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect.

Its response time will depend on its assessment of the danger to the child. Its goal is to **ensure the safety of the child** and to begin providing services and resources to the family.

However, if a child is in danger at home, the child will be removed to safety.

You may request that the Department of Children & Families notify you whether an investigation was conducted or not. Professional mandated reporters may also request a written summary of the investigation results.



FLORIDA ABUSE HOTLINE Fax Transmittal Form
To Report Abuse/Abandonment/Neglect/Threatened Harm/Exploitation
 Fax Number: 1-800-914-0004
TO LEARN MORE ABOUT REPORTING ABUSE, READ THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
BROCHURE:
REPORTING ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS.

REPORTER INFORMATION

This information is required for professionally mandated reporters - Please refer to Chapters 39 and 415, Florida Statutes.

Your Last Name: _____ Your First Name: _____ Today's Date: _____
 Your Occupation: _____ Agency: _____ Fax #: _____ Phone #: _____
 Work Address: _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____ County: _____ State: _____
 Alternate Contact Person: _____ Title: _____ Phone #: _____

➤ Would you like to be notified as to whether or not an abuse report was accepted based on the information provided? Yes No
 If yes, please indicate your preferred method of notification. Telephone U. S. Mail

VICTIM INFORMATION

If the victim is a child, list other children and adult household members in the home. If any household members have a disability, describe the disability in the DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT section on page 2; if the victim is an adult, include how his/her ability to care for or protect self is impaired.

Current Location/Address: _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____ County: _____ State: _____
 Home Address: _____ Apt/Lot# _____ City: _____ Zip Code: _____ County: _____ State: _____
 Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	DOB	SEX	RACE	SSN	IS THIS PERSON A VICTIM?
(1)						<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(2)						<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(3)						<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(4)						<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
(5)						<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE FOR ALLEGED ABUSE, NEGLECT, ABANDONMENT, THREATENED HARM OR EXPLOITATION

NAME	DOB	SEX	RACE	SSN	RELATIONSHIP TO VICTIM
(1)					
(2)					
(3)					

DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENT

Please describe what happened, when and where the incident occurred, the frequency of occurrence, and a description of injuries and/or threat of harm.

WHAT happened?

Description of injuries/threat of harm:

WHEN and WHERE did the incident occur?

Additional Addresses (e.g. day-care, school)

Where will the victim be for the next 24 hours?

Does anyone in the household have any disabilities?

Are there any dangers to a protective investigator?

FOR ADULT VICTIMS ONLY: Describe how the adult victim's ability to care for or protect self is impaired.

OTHER INDIVIDUALS

Please list others who might be aware of the abuse/abandonment/neglect/threatened harm/exploitation of the victim.

NAME	RELATIONSHIP TO THE VICTIM	ADDRESS	HOME PHONE	WORK PHONE

DO NOT SEND COPIES OF MEDICAL NOTES, CASE FILES, ARREST REPORTS, OR SIMILAR DOCUMENTS.