



**Recognizing and
Reporting
Child Abuse in
Pennsylvania**

*A Guide for
Mandated Reporters*

Protecting Our Children, Protecting Our Future

Pennsylvania's future rests in the hands of its most vulnerable citizens - our children. Yet each day in communities across Pennsylvania, children are suffering a nightmare of abuse and neglect. Some will die at the hands of their abusers, while others will grow up with physical and emotional scars to contend with as adults.

These are children we know personally and professionally. They are our neighbors, our students and our kids' teammates. But they are helpless unless we open our eyes to the signs of abuse and accept our individual responsibility to do something about it.



To report suspected child abuse, call:

ChildLine: 1-800-932-0313

Mandated Reporters

Protecting our children is the responsibility of us all. But certain professionals, due to their contact with children, have special responsibilities. These people are called *mandated reporters* and are of critical importance to the child abuse prevention effort. This booklet was printed to help mandated reporters understand their role in order to act on behalf of these children.

Mandated reporters consistently have provided the most accurate and reliable information on abused and neglected children. Mandated reporters have made more than 70% of the reports of suspected child abuse in recent years.

Mandated reporters *are required* by law to report suspected child abuse immediately to Pennsylvania's ChildLine based on their medical or professional training or other experience. They also must make a written follow-up report to the Investigating County Children and Youth Agency within 48 hours. Mandated reporters who make a report in good faith have immunity from civil and criminal liability that might otherwise result from their actions.

Mandated reporters include:

- Health Care Professionals - physicians, medical examiners, dentists, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, psychiatrists, psychologists, interns, nurses, public health department personnel, funeral directors and hospital personnel.
- Law Enforcement Officials - police officers, sheriffs, county detectives, coroners and court officials.
- Social Services Professionals - social services workers, child care workers and clergy.
- Education Professionals - teachers, principals, school nurses, school administrators and counselors.
- Anyone who as a part of his or her job has contact with children.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call ChildLine immediately at 1-800-932-0313. A professional will step in to ensure the safety and well-being of the child.

Where to report:

- ChildLine Abuse Registry (for abuse that occurs in Pennsylvania) 1-800-932-0313. ChildLine is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- If it is an emergency or if the abuse is occurring right now, call 911.

When referrals will be made:

Referrals will be made to local law enforcement officials when:

- Sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or serious bodily injury are caused by persons - whether they are related to the child or not.
- Child abuse is caused by persons who are not family members.
- Serious physical injury is caused involving extensive and severe bruising, burns, broken bones, lacerations, internal bleeding, shaken baby syndrome or choking, or an injury that significantly impairs a child's physical functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

What mandated reporters are entitled to know after reporting abuse:

- Findings of the investigation.
- Services provided to protect the child.



Recognizing Child Abuse

Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law defines abuse as non-accidental serious physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, or serious physical neglect caused by the acts or omissions of the parent or caretaker.

Types of Abuse

Child abuse takes many forms, and the warning signs vary. Abuse can be physical, mental, sexual, or happen through neglect. Below are some typical signs of abuse. It's important to recognize that some of these signs by themselves don't necessarily mean that abuse is occurring. But if these signs are part of a pattern or seem to be continually present, there could be reason for suspicion.

Physical Abuse

This is when a child is purposely hurt through hitting, kicking, shaking, biting or similar actions.

- Physical signs include unusual or unexplained bruises, welts, cuts or other injuries; broken bones and burns.
- Behavioral signs may include wearing clothing that is inappropriate for the weather to hide injuries; seeming withdrawn or depressed; seeming afraid to go home; shying away from physical contact and showing aggression.

Mental Abuse (also known as emotional or verbal abuse)

This is when there are repeated threats or insults that are intended to scare or embarrass children or crush their self-esteem.

- Physical signs include speech disorders and/or slowed physical development.
- Behavioral signs may include the child acting too mature or too childish for his or her age; having difficulty making or keeping friends and having extreme behavioral changes.

Sexual Abuse

This is when there is any inappropriate sexual activity with a child. Inappropriate touching is the most frequent form of sexual abuse. Others include using a child for sexual films or prostitution, or exposing a child to adult sexual activity (through photographs, videos, etc.)

- Physical signs include torn, stained or bloody underwear; trouble walking or sitting; pain or itching in the genital area; bruises or bleeding in the genital area; or a sexually transmitted disease.
- Behavioral signs are an unusual knowledge of sex; fear of a particular person; seeming to be withdrawn or depressed; sudden weight gain or loss; or shying away from physical contact.¹

Neglect

Child neglect is a repeated failure to provide a child with needed care, protection and attention. More than one million cases are reported each year.

- Physical signs of neglect include poor hygiene; slowed physical development or appearing underweight; unattended medical needs or little or no supervision at home.
- Behavioral signs include arriving at school very early or late, or missing school often; being frequently tired or hungry; stealing food or dressing inappropriately for the weather.²

Types of Neglect:

- Physical neglect includes abandonment or rejection; lack of supervision; failure to provide food, clothing, or proper hygiene and the failure to seek medical care.
- Medical neglect includes refusing to obtain medical treatment.³

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¹ Reporting child abuse: it's everyone's responsibility
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² Reporting child abuse: it's everyone's responsibility
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³ Help prevent child neglect: you can make a difference
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Imminent Risk

This is the act or failure to act that is likely to cause non-accidental serious injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child. Failure to act means that a caregiver knew or should have understood the risk for the child. It can also mean that an adult failed to exercise reasonable judgement in protecting a child involved in an abusive situation.

Examples of Imminent Risk of Serious Physical Injury:

- Perpetrator fires a gun toward the child; however, the child was not harmed.
- Perpetrator leaves a young child unsupervised in the home and a house fire occurs; however, child is saved by a third party before the child is harmed.

Examples of Imminent Risk of Sexual Abuse/Exploitation:

- Perpetrator knowingly allows a child in the unsupervised care of a known sex offender.
- Perpetrator attempts to sexually abuse the child; however, an interruption of some sort prevents the act from occurring.

Student Abuse

Student abuse is the sexual abuse or serious bodily injury of a child committed by a school employee. School employees are individuals employed by a public or private school, intermediate unit or vocational-technical school. They include independent contractors, employees and student interns.

School employees are required to report suspected student abuse to the school administrator who must report it to law enforcement officials without screening. If law enforcement officials have reasonable cause to suspect student abuse, they must notify the local children and youth agency. The agency then registers a suspected student abuse report with ChildLine and conducts an investigation.

Reporting Child Abuse

If you think a child has been abused:

- **Stay calm.** Fear and anger are normal reactions, but they can frighten a child. Be sure not to blame, punish or embarrass the child.
- **Give emotional support.** Tell the child that he or she is right to tell and is not to blame. Reassure the child that he or she is safe and that no harm will come from reporting the incident.
- **Believe the child,** no matter how hard it may be. Never assume the child is making it up.
- **Get medical help.** For the child who needs medical attention, call 911 or the County Children and Youth Agency.
- **Contact ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313.** ChildLine is Pennsylvania's toll-free number for reporting suspected child abuse. All reports are confidential and referred for investigation.



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ChildLine: 1-800-932-0313

When making a report, it is helpful to have as much of the following information as possible without delaying the phone call:

About the child:

- Name or physical description if the name is not known.
- Age or approximate age range.

About the parent or legal guardian:

- Name, home address and telephone number.

The suspected abuser:

- Name or physical description or license plate number if the name is not known.
- Home address and telephone number.
- Relationship to the child - whether the suspected abuser is a parent, neighbor, babysitter or teacher.

The type of abuse that is suspected:

- A description of the suspected injury or impairment of bodily function.
- Where the incident took place and when it occurred.
- Any concern for the child's immediate safety.

The reporter:

- What is your (the reporter's) relationship with the child?
- What actions have you taken - talking to the parent, reporting to the police, obtaining medical care for the child?
- You may report an incident anonymously; however, it is helpful for the agency to be able to contact you for additional information if necessary.

You may be asked for additional information to help assess the urgency or seriousness of the situation. This information may include knowledge of substance abuse, domestic violence or other physical or behavioral concerns.

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Did You Know?

- Child abusers are found among all socio-economic, religious and ethnic groups and most often are ordinary people trapped in a stressful life situation they can't cope with.
- Caregivers and birth parents of a child younger than one year are the most common perpetrators of fatal abuse.
- Every 10 seconds in America a child is abused.
- More than three children in the United States die each day as a result of parental abuse.
- Child molestation is most often perpetrated by relatives and acquaintances rather than strangers.
- Videos and booklets explaining the differences between good and bad touches are available from most public libraries and pediatricians.
- Children who are abused are at a higher risk for crime, substance abuse, school drop-out, teen pregnancy and a host of other social ills.
- Homicide is the leading cause of injury deaths among infants in the US.
- Abused children are 25 times more likely to repeat a grade.
- Eighty-five percent of long-term prisoners were abused children.





PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE
Improving the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians

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Estelle B. Richman, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare
www.dpw.state.pa.us