

Reporting Child Abuse

Apart from the anger, dread, and anxiety the reporter of abuse/neglect experiences, there is usually a lot of confusion about what to do or where to report the suspected abuse/neglect. There are a number of steps one can take that may make this unsavory experience a little less daunting.

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

Deciding whether or not to report suspected child abuse can be a difficult and confusing process, yet it is the important first step toward protecting a child who might be in danger. Professionals who work with children are required by law to report suspected neglect and abuse.

CALL 1-800-252-5400 TO REPORT SUSPECTED ABUSE/NEGLECT.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I MAKE THE DECISION TO REPORT SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE?

Several events take place after the initial complaint is filed. First of all, depending on where you live, you might report suspected abuse and/or neglect to your local child protective agency. The person responding to the call may ask you several questions about what you are reporting. This is done to ensure that enough information is available for the investigative team to be able to make decisions concerning whether or not abuse/neglect has occurred. You might be asked to give names of the family and child, your reasons for suspecting abuse, the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other witnesses, your relationship to the alleged victim, any other previous suspicious injury to the child, or for your name address and telephone number.

WHO INVESTIGATES COMPLAINTS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

The state or county agency that provides protective services has the legal authority granted by law or charter which gives them an obligation to provide services when needed. This also grants them the right to explore, study and evaluate the facts. Child welfare workers then base their decision on whether or not to remove a child from the family on two issues: 1. What is the immediate danger or risk to the child? 2. What is the motivation, capacity and intent of the alleged perpetrator?

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHILD AND FAMILY?

With the enactment of Public Law 96-272, it is legally mandated that child welfare workers make all "reasonable efforts" to reunite the family whenever possible. If, after a thorough investigation, it is determined that the child is in need of substitute care, then the child is placed in temporary foster care until the immediate danger has passed and services can be provided for the child and family. Sometimes criminal child abuse charges have to be filed depending on the nature and severity of the abuse/neglect.

WILL I BE ABLE TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS TO THE CHILD?

Persons who have reported suspected child maltreatment should be allowed to know whether or not their suspicions were founded and what steps the investigation agency took to protect the child. However, there is a great deal of confusion over whether or not information from the child welfare cases should be shared. Legally, there is no impediment to providing general feedback to the child abuse/neglect reporter. The most difficult confidentially issue is to resolve concerns of the reporting individual's right to know versus the family's right to privacy. The child welfare agency may give feedback that indicates that the reporter was right in making a referral and the agency will be working with the family.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I REPORT AND THE CASE IS UNSUBSTANTIATED?

All states have laws that protect the reporter of suspected abuse or neglect from legal liability as long as the report was made in "good faith" and not maliciously. If you are unsure of what the legal and societal definitions of abuse and neglect are in your community, contact your local child protective service office for information.



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