

# Reporting Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

## Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

If you have reason to suspect that a child may have been abused or neglected, please report your suspicions immediately to your local **Family Services District Office**.

- **How Do I Report?**

Call or visit your local **Family Services District Office** during regular business hours: Monday through Friday, from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Do not leave a report on someone's voice mail).

After-hours, on weekends, or on state holidays, you can report by calling our Emergency Services Program at 1-800-649-5285.

- **What Information Should I Have On Hand?**

Try to have as much information on hand as possible, including the names of the child's parents/caretakers; the child's name, date of birth, and school or childcare facility; and the nature and extent of the injuries or allegations of abuse.

- **What Happens When I Report?**

A social worker will question you about the child's situation, record the information you provide, ask you to complete a **written report**, and, in some cases, ask you to gather more information.

- **What If I Am Not Sure That What I Suspect Is Abuse?**

Please call us for advice if you are not sure whether a report is warranted. Remember, you do not have to prove that a child has been abused. That is our responsibility.

- **What Happens Next?**

We will determine whether to accept your report for investigation. To be accepted, it must allege **abuse or neglect as defined by state law**.

- **What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?**

Vermont's child protection law defines an *abused or neglected child* as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development, or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person (including another child).

Harm can occur by:

- Abandonment of the child.
- Emotional maltreatment, physical injury, or sexual abuse.
- Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care.

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*Child* means an individual under age 18.

*Emotional maltreatment* means a pattern of malicious behavior that results in impaired psychological growth and development.

*Physical injury* means death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

*Sexual abuse* consists of any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including, but not limited to, incest, rape, prostitution, sodomy, child pornography, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child.

*Risk of harm* means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means.

- **What Happens If It's Accepted?**

We will typically begin an investigation within 72 hours; however, we will start sooner if a child is in immediate danger.

- **Will My Report Be Kept Confidential?**

We will not divulge your identity unless you give us your permission to do so; however, you should be aware that your identity could become known if the case goes to court.

- **Can I Be Sued?**

Vermont law provides you with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as your report was made in good faith.

- **Where Can I Get More Information?**

For more information about reporting child abuse/neglect, please contact your local **Family Services District Office**.

## **Who Are Mandated Reporters?**

People who work in the following professions are *mandated reporters*:

- Chiropractor, dentist, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, mental health professional, osteopath, physician, physician's assistant, psychologist, registered nurse, surgeon, or any other health care professional.
- Hospital administrator, intern, or resident physician in any hospital in the state.
- School guidance counselor, librarian, principal, superintendent, or teacher.
- Childcare worker.
- Police officer or probation worker.
- Social worker.
- Member of the clergy.

- Residential and non-residential camp administrator, counselor, or owner.

*Mandated reporters* are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to Family Services--within 24 hours. To find out more about the responsibilities of mandated reporters, please [click here](#).

### **Three Good Reasons To Report:**

- 1. Children can't protect themselves; they need you to act for them.**
- 2. People who hurt children need help. Reporting gives DCF the chance to help them.**
- 3. Your report may provide a key piece of missing information that allows us to open an investigation.**

This information comes from the website for the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Family Services Division

<http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/fsd/reporting/index.html>