

Child Protection FAQ's

How do I recognize child abuse?

Signs of physical abuse may include unexplained or unreasonable bruises, burns, cuts, abrasions and broken bones. Patterned marks made by objects like belts, cords, teeth, hand prints, and clothes or curling irons can be strongly indicative of physical abuse especially when combined with a child's description of how the injury was inflicted. Another strong indicator of child abuse is an explanation for injuries that would be unusual in a given age group. For example, a broken arm or leg in a four-month old child is blamed on a fall down the stairs.

The best indicator of sexual abuse is a disclosure by the child regarding the sexual activity. Other indicators may be a detailed, age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual acts, changes in established behaviors like sleeping, eating and toileting, complaints of genital pain or irritation, and infection with a sexually transmitted disease.

Neglect can be indicated by a child who is chronically dirty or dressed inappropriately for the weather, a child who is frequently hungry or sleepy and reports being unable to eat or sleep regularly at home, a child who does not attend school regularly or one who has not been enrolled in school, a child who remains untreated or is treated inappropriately for a medical problem or a child who describes being left alone and unable to care for himself.

A good indicator of endangerment is a description by a child of events that may place him in danger such as being involved in a physical, domestic fight between adults in the home, seeing illegal drugs being used or sold, or having access to loaded guns kept in the home.

Why should I report child abuse?

The most important reason to report child abuse is to protect the child from further abuse. Children have few resources for changing the circumstances of their lives, and children who are being hurt by their caretakers rely on the intervention of others to protect them. Reporting abuse is also a way to ensure that parents who need help but are not able to ask for it are offered parenting resources.

I'm not sure if the situation is serious enough to report.

Describe the situation to child protection or Law Enforcement. Remember that often the most serious abuse occurs in private and away from anyone but the children involved. County Child Protection staff is available to answer questions regarding what is reportable.

How do I report suspected child abuse?

Itasca County Health and Human Services and Law Enforcement agencies are charged with receiving reports of child abuse occurring in Itasca County. These agencies are also responsible for the joint investigation of child abuse allegations. You may report suspicions of child abuse to Law Enforcement Departments 24 hours a day by calling 911. The operator will ask you to describe the circumstances. You may also call Itasca County Child Protection Intake Social Worker at: Telephone (218) 327-2941 or 1-800-422-0312 Fax: (218) 327-5535

When reporting suspicions of child abuse, be prepared to provide as much information as you have including the names and addresses of the child and parents and specific data about what happened, who was involved, and when and where the events took place. Other helpful information is what school the child attends, who else might have information about the child's situation, where the child is now, and the names of siblings or other members of the household.

Any report made to the Law Enforcement Department will automatically be cross-reported to Itasca County Health and Human Services, as any report made to Itasca County Health and Human Services will be sent to the Law Enforcement Department. This is included in the Minnesota State Statutes outlining requirements for child abuse investigations.

If you believe a child is in imminent danger of injury, death or sexual abuse, call 911 and describe the situation to the operator with as much detail as you can. Law Enforcement has the ability to remove a child from a dangerous situation while a child protection investigation is completed.

If you believe that a child has injuries that need medical attention, call 911 and provide as much information as possible. The operator may dispatch paramedics and Law Enforcement to ensure that the child receives needed medical care.

If you believe that the child would not be safe returning or remaining at home, call 911. Law Enforcement Department and Child Protection can make arrangements for the temporary care of a child when their home is unsafe.

If a child has disclosed a sexual assault incident that occurred within the last 72 hours, call 911 for Law Enforcement to respond. It is very important to alert Law Enforcement promptly to ensure immediate safety of the child and also, as time passes, the chance of obtaining physical evidence diminishes. In the case of a sexual assault that occurred outside of the 72-hour window, calling 911 for Law Enforcement response is still appropriate as the officers will take the report to begin an investigation.

Who must report child abuse?

Minnesota law requires that any person whose job involves working professionally with children and who knows or has reason to believe that a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused **must** immediately report the suspected incident to local Law Enforcement and/or child protection. The duty to report extends to childcare workers, school personnel, physical and mental health care providers, and law enforcement officers, among others. The report must be made immediately or within 24 hours, followed by a written report within 72 hours. **You can find the Child Abuse/Neglect reporting form below.**

Are there penalties for a mandated reporter who fails to report child abuse?

Minnesota law requires reporting by mandated reporters who know or have reason to believe that a child is being abused or has been abused within the past three years. A mandated reporter who fails to make a report under those circumstances may be found guilty of a misdemeanor.

If the allegation of child abuse cannot be proven, will I get into trouble for making the report?

No, you will not. Anyone reporting in good faith (with a reasonable belief) may not be criminally prosecuted or sued in civil court for libel, slander, defamation, invasion of privacy, or breach of confidentiality. A person who knowingly or recklessly makes a false report is not protected from prosecution or civil suit.

What should I do if a child tells me about abuse?

- Be calm. If you appear to be angry, upset, or very emotional, the child may be frightened.
- Let the child tell you about what happened in their own words and then reassure them that you believe him.
- Tell the child that they are not in trouble and that they did the right thing to tell you about what happened.
- Tell the child that you want to make sure that they will be safe. Let them know that you are going to get help so that this does not happen again.
- Report what the child told you to Law Enforcement or child protection as soon as possible.

As a parent, what can I do to prevent child abuse?

- Practice disciplining your children in a calm, thoughtful way. Give yourself time to cool off rather than punishing in anger. Show your children ways that conflicts can be resolved with words rather than hitting or hurting.
- Talk with your children every day and listen carefully to what they say about their lives. Be alert to changes in their behavior or emotions and talk calmly with them if you are concerned.
- Teach your children that their bodies are their own and that they can say no to touches that feel bad or confusing. Talk with them about privacy to help them learn good boundaries and reassure them that it is ok to say no to things that violate their privacy – even if they are saying no to an adult.
- Teach your children to tell you if they are approached, talked to or touched in a way that hurts, scares, or confuses them. Reassure them that you will not be angry with them, but want to help them stay safe.
- Help your children think about what they would do if something confusing or scary happened to them. Talk about different scenarios or play the “what if” game. This will help them identify ways to help themselves be safe and to think about the adults they can turn to for help in different places such as school, the park, the library, and church.

I don't want to make my children fearful by talking about sexual abuse or I don't want to talk to my children about sexual abuse because they are too young. Is it really necessary?

Unfortunately, sexual abuse is not as uncommon as we would like to think it is. It affects both girls and boys of all ages, from every kind of neighborhood and of all races. Studies have found that about one of every four girls and one of every eight boys has reported incidents of sexual abuse. In 85% of reported sexual abuse cases, the offender is known to the child as a friend, relative, or neighbor.

Talking with children about the privacy of their bodies and what are appropriate kinds of touching is a precaution; like teaching them to cross the street safely, wear seat belts, and not to play with matches. Teaching kids good boundaries helps to keep them safe. Not talking about these issues won't make them go away.

Teaching young children that their bodies are private doesn't have to be about sex. It can be as simple as reminding children that the parts of their bodies covered by a swimsuit are private.