

A Texas School Employee's Guide to Reporting Suspected Abuse & Neglect



HOW YOU CAN HELP PROTECT CHILDREN

Teachers, administrators, and other school employees are positioned to make a direct, positive difference in a child's life by learning how to recognize and report all forms of child abuse and neglect, including human trafficking. You play an important role in a child's life and often represent a safe place for child victims to disclose abuse, particularly when the abuse occurs in the home. You must understand the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to report it. If you see something or suspect abuse, report it.

KNOW THE LAW IN TEXAS

Teachers and all school employees are considered professional reporters in Texas and are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately, but no later than 48 hours after the initial suspicions of abuse or neglect. You cannot delegate to or rely on another person to make the report (Texas Family Code § 261.101(b)). Failure to report suspected child abuse and neglect is a crime (Texas Family Code § 261.109).

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

- As a professional reporter, you are required by law to report suspected abuse within 48 hours of first suspecting that a child has been or may be abused or neglected (Texas Family Code § 261.101(b)).
- You have the right and responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect free of fear of retaliation (Texas Family Code § 261.110).
- Your report of child abuse or neglect is confidential and immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in good faith and without malice (Texas Family Code § 261.106).
- Teachers and school employees making reports of suspected abuse or neglect are not required by law to first report the suspicion to a peer, colleague, or supervisor.
- Teachers and school employees may not delegate the duty to report suspected abuse or neglect to any other person (Texas Family Code § 261.101(b)).

RESPONDING TO AN OUTCRY AND MAKING A REPORT: WHAT TO EXPECT

- When responding to an outcry, let the child use his or her own words to tell you what happened, but leave the questioning to the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) and law enforcement. This is critical to ensure the integrity of any investigation and minimize additional trauma to the child.
- When making a report, be prepared to provide basic information about the child, such as their name, date of birth, and address, as well as the names of their caregivers, siblings, and other household members if possible. Answer all questions as thoroughly as possible and provide detailed and descriptive information about the situation you are reporting, including the facts that caused you to believe the child has been abused and the source of your information, so that hotline staff can accurately assess the need for investigation. You will also be asked to provide your name and contact information at the time you make your report.
- If you request that your identity be kept confidential, DFPS may not reveal your identity to the child's parents, to alleged perpetrators, or to others without your consent or a court order. However, DFPS may disclose your identity to the district attorney or to law enforcement if the case requires further investigation.

HOW TO RESPOND IF A CHILD DISCLOSES ABUSE OR NEGLECT

DO:

- Remain calm
- Believe the child
- Allow the child to talk
- Show interest and concern
- Support the child's feelings
- Act! It could save a child's life

DON'T:

- Panic or overreact
- Press the child to talk
- Promise things you can't control
- Confront the offender
- Minimize the child's feelings
- Overwhelm the child with questions

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911. For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline 24/7 at 800.252.5400.

For more information visit www.TXAbuseHotline.org.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER MAKING A REPORT

- It is the responsibility of school employees to report suspected child abuse and neglect. It is the responsibility of DFPS to investigate suspected abuse or neglect.
- You will get a Call Identification Number (Call ID) each time you make a report to the Texas Abuse Hotline.
- Not all reports of child abuse and neglect will be assigned for investigation by DFPS because some will not meet the statutory definition of abuse or neglect or because the allegation of abuse or neglect is not within DFPS' jurisdiction to investigate.
- If the report is assigned for investigation, a DFPS caseworker must initiate an investigation within 24 to 72 hours (about 3 days) depending upon the priority assigned to the case. Upon completion of the investigation, a reporter will receive a notification of findings letter.
- All reports made to the Texas Abuse Hotline or website are also sent to the appropriate law enforcement agency for possible criminal investigation.

If you have concerns about the investigation, you can file a complaint with the Office of Consumer Affairs by calling 800.720.7777 or emailing oca@dfps.state.tx.us.

GUIDANCE FOR CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

- DFPS or law enforcement may visit your campus during an investigation. Avoid the use of public media (e.g., intercoms) to notify the appropriate staff or students.
- Establish a known, private location within your campus where both reporters and/or students can confidentially meet with DFPS or law enforcement.
- Take steps to protect the confidentiality of the report by not discussing the report or reporter. You are not required to disclose knowledge of a report to a parent or caregiver. If asked, you may choose to deny any knowledge of the report.
- Avoid implementing policies that require faculty and staff to consult with administration or other staff before they make a report of child abuse or neglect. Leave the detailed questioning and investigation to DFPS and law enforcement.



Children's advocacy centers (CACs) provide a safe, child-friendly environment that ensures access to safety, justice, and healing for Texas children impacted by abuse. All local CACs aim to reduce trauma to child abuse victims and their families by offering six core services: joint investigation coordination, forensic interviews, medical evaluations, multidisciplinary team case review with investigative entities, trauma-focused therapy, and family advocacy and victim support.

Your local CAC also provides training opportunities for educators, schools, local community members, and others interested in learning how they can recognize and report child abuse and neglect and make a difference for child victims of abuse. Please use CACs as a resource to support the children you serve.

SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

1. Unexplained injuries
2. Changes in behavior
3. Returning to behaviors from an earlier age
4. Fear of certain places or people
5. Changes in eating
6. Changes in sleeping
7. Changes in school performance and attendance
8. Lack of personal care or hygiene
9. Risk-taking behaviors
10. Inappropriate sexual behaviors

ACT AND REPORT ABUSE TO DFPS OR LAW ENFORCEMENT WITHIN 48 HOURS. IT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE!

Remember, you are obligated by law to report suspected child abuse. Call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1.800.252.5400 to report abuse or neglect. You may also report online at www.txabusehotline.com if the situation is not urgent.

If you suspect the situation involves human trafficking, TEA guidance recommends reporting the case to both the hotline and law enforcement. If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.