

CHILD ABUSE

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A. Mandated Reporters

Florida Statutes, [Chapter 39](#), mandates that any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare shall report immediately such knowledge or suspicion to the central abuse hotline of the Department of Children and Families. Child safety is of paramount importance. It is a community responsibility.

As educators we are mandated by law to report **suspected** abuse and neglect. We are required to provide our name to the hotline staff. The name of the reporter shall be entered into the record of the report but shall be held confidential as provided in Florida Statutes, [Section 39.202](#). The name of the reporter may not be released to any person other than employees of the department responsible for child protective services, the central abuse hotline, law enforcement, or the appropriate state attorney, without written consent of the person reporting. Reporters of known or suspected abuse and neglect are immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in “good faith.” It is illegal *not* to report suspected child abuse or neglect, and it is a first-degree misdemeanor.

Refer to the Florida Department of Children and Families [Reporting Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults](#) (2009-2010) Florida Abuse Hotline manual.

B. Ways of Reporting

There are four ways to make a child abuse/neglect report:

- **FAX:** send a written report/information with your name and phone number to **1-800-914-0004** (this method takes the longest to process)
- **Telephone:** call **1-800-96Abuse** (1-800-962-2873) and speak to a counselor
for TDD (Telephone Device for the Deaf) call 1-800-453-5145
- **Voicemail:** leave a message at **1-800-770-0953** (this method will take about five minutes)

- **Website:** after clicking on the website link below, read the important information/instructions carefully, and then click on the "Complete a Florida Abuse Hotline Report" box located at the bottom of the web page – www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/

C. Making a Report

To make a report, the reporter must be prepared to give the specific information listed below to the hotline staff member:

- CrossPointe Demographics/Enrollment webpage (student name, DOB, Social Security number, race, gender, phone numbers, address, parents' or guardians' names)
- Names and ages of siblings, if possible
- What the student said happened, if applicable
- Five "Ws" (Who, What, When, Where, Why)
- Signs or indicators of harm or injury, including a physical description, if applicable
- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the victim, if applicable
- Potential risks that the investigator may encounter

Note: If the alleged perpetrator's relationship is unknown, a report will still be taken if other reporting criteria are met.

D. Summary of Investigation

A written summary of the outcome of the investigation may be requested *at the time of the abuse call*. The summary will be mailed to you approximately 10 days upon the completion of the child protective investigation.

E. Abuse Hotline Counselors

Florida Abuse Hotline Counselors will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular caller, nor will they release any information provided by a caller or any information contained in a report.

The Abuse Hotline Counselor will determine if the information provided by the caller meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation. Telephone reporters, prior to concluding their conversations, will always be told whether the information meets the statutory requirements for a report and whether a report has been accepted. During the call, the counselor is required to provide you with his/her first name and ID number.

Hotline counselors accept reports on the basis of specific criteria. Counselors must ask questions to gather information, but may not ask leading questions of the caller. Each call is accepted or refused as a report based only on information provided during the call. If the counselor indicates a report will not be accepted and you disagree with the decision, you may ask to speak to a supervisor. The counselor will briefly summarize the situation to the supervisor who will then speak with you regarding your concerns.

The supervisor will make a determination of whether the counselor's decision was appropriate and will provide you with further explanation about the decision.

F. Resources

Further information regarding child abuse and neglect can be obtained from the following sources:

- [*Reporting Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults*](#) (2009-2010) prepared by the Florida Abuse Hotline
- [*Child Abuse Source Book for Florida School Personnel*](#) (2011) produced by the Department of Education, Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
- Florida State website, citing [**Florida Statutes, Chapter 39**](#)
- VCS Professional Development – Guided Study Modules (GSMs): [**Other Academic Area Guided Study Modules – Guidance/Student Services**](#) “Child Abuse Prevention Education Program” (GSM 5801) and “When Children Are Abused” (GSM 5802)
- VCS presentation: [*Child Abuse Identification and Reporting*](#) (.pdf document)

The School Social Services Department has a child abuse prevention and education training presentation titled “*Child Abuse Education: Facts, Prevention, and Intervention*,” which includes questions and answers. In addition, there is a child abuse videotape presentation titled “*Protecting Florida’s Children*.” These presentations are available for checkout in each satellite office.