

Child Abuse Reporting Steps for Teachers

When should you suspect Child abuse or neglect? Some examples include:

- A child has repeated unexplained injuries
- It is apparent that the child's basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter) are not regularly met
- Child exhibits sexual behavior that is not age appropriate
- Child experiences a sudden drop in grades or participation in activities
- The child behaves erratically, ranging from aggressive and disruptive to passive.

These signs could indicate child abuse or neglect or could be signs of other problems. How do I know if it is appropriate for me to make a report?

Tennessee law, TCA 37-1-403(a)(1), states that any person who has knowledge of suspected abuse should make a report. You are not required to have proof of child abuse/neglect in order to report your concerns.

How do I report?

You can call the Department of Children's Services toll free Central Intake Reporting line at 1-877-237-0004. This line is open 24/7 and a trained case manager will take your information. The case manager will ask you for basic demographic information like names, addresses, names of siblings and other family members, in addition to details of your concerns. Please do not be alarmed if you do not know the answers to all of these questions. With regard to the details of the report, be prepared to describe the child's injuries or condition and to relay information the child told you. Also, give names of other persons who have knowledge of this situation. Explain why the child's situation is concerning you.

If you are unable to call the reporting line, you may fax your information to 615-361-7041. Please see the attached form that you can complete for your fax.

What will happen next?

Screening - First, the central intake staff will screen your information to determine if it meets the criteria for DCS involvement. This is called the screening decision. Many people call in legitimate concerns that are not necessarily appropriate for state intervention. The case manager who takes your call will ask if you want to receive notification of the screening decision and you will receive this by mail.

Assignment and Priority- If DCS investigates your report, the central intake staff will determine the timeframe for that response.

Priority 1 situations indicate imminent threat of serious harm or death and require an immediate response to within 24 hours.

Priority 2 situation indicate risk of injuries that are not life threatening and do not require immediate medical care. These cases require a 48-hour response.

Priority 3 cases involve a lower risk of harm and DCS responds within 3 business days.

What if I have a situation where I am uncomfortable in allowing a child to go home after school?

If you have called in a report and need to know if and when DCS will respond, then you should follow up with the local DCS office. They can help you work through the current situation. If you continue to have concerns about the child going home, you may also report the situation to your local Law Enforcement Agency or Juvenile Court.

What happens after the report?

If DCS initiates an investigation or assessment, they will talk to and observe the victim, his/her siblings, the parents/caretakers, and any other persons who have knowledge about the situation. You may be contacted by DCS to provide further information. You will also receive a letter from the investigating Case Manager prior to case closure.

Will I know the outcome of the investigation? The actual investigative file is confidential so you will not be able to find out if the report was considered to be "indicated" (or substantiated) and DCS's next steps in regard to the case. DCS makes every attempt to keep children safe in the most familiar environment, preserving connections with family, school, and community. They will look for ways to make the child safe in the home or with relatives, if that is possible.

Will DCS tell the parents that I called in the report? By law, DCS and Juvenile Courts preserve the confidentiality of the name of the reporter. However, it is common for some parents to guess at the name of the reporter and to claim that DCS told the name. You should work with your local school system to determine how you should respond in the event a parent comes to school to challenge you or other school staff about the report. If you should make your initial report to law enforcement, you should know that police reports do not have the same protections as Juvenile Court and DCS files.