

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*

Reporting Abuse

Information for Parents and Caregivers

You may be reading this because you believe a child is being abused or neglected and want to know what steps to take to report the situation, or you may be reading this because you have been reported to Child Protective Services due to suspected abuse or neglect of your own child. Below is information about child abuse and neglect including how it is defined, steps in the reporting process, and some helpful resources.

Key Terms/Definitions

According to the **CODE OF MARYLAND REGULATIONS**, (section [07.02.07](#)):

1. **Child abuse** means physical injury, not necessarily visible, of a child, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed.
2. **Child neglect** means the failure to give proper care and attention to a child including the leaving of a child unattended under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or placed at substantial risk of harm.
3. **Sexual abuse** means an act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, whether physical injuries are sustained or not.
4. **Mental injury** means the observable, identifiable, and substantial impairment of a child's mental or psychological ability to function.
5. **Indicated** means a finding that there is credible evidence, which has not been satisfactorily refuted, that physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse did occur.
6. **Unsubstantiated** means a finding that there is an insufficient amount of evidence to support a finding of indicated or ruled out.
7. **Ruled Out** means a finding that abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse did not occur.

Children who are abused or neglected often show fear or anxiety around other adults. Abused children may not want to leave school because they worry about being abused at home. In addition to physical injuries, abused or neglected children may have poor grades at school and appear unhealthy compared to other children their age (i.e., tooth decay or gum disease, skin rashes, weight problems, etc).

The Role of Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services is a specialized social service for children who are believed to be neglected or abused, and to their parents or other adults having permanent or temporary care, custody, or parental responsibility, or to household or family members, to decrease the risk of continuing physical, sexual or mental abuse or neglect. In instances where a child can be safely protected in his or her own home through the provision of services or other assistance to the child's family, such an alternative is preferable to foster care placement.

What are the goals of the Child Protective Services?

1. To protect the child and assist the parents in providing proper care and attention to the child and to remedy and decrease the risk of continuing abuse and neglect; and
2. To provide an alternate plan of care for the child when parents are unable to provide proper care and attention to the child.

3. Child Protective Services are not designed to address all issues related to family dysfunction nor the whole range of parent-child problems. The focus is on protecting children from abuse and neglect. Protecting children is a community responsibility. Resources should be coordinated through team efforts. The community has an obligation to ensure that the required services are available for prevention, intervention, and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

If you suspect abuse or neglect of a child:

1. Immediately report suspected child abuse or neglect to the local department of social services, or report the suspected incident to a local law enforcement agency.

See <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/where.htm> for Where to Report

2. A report shall include:
 - a. The name and home address of the child and the parent or other individual responsible for the care of the child;
 - b. The present location of the child;
 - c. The age of the child;
 - d. The names and ages of other children in the home;
 - e. The nature and extent of injuries or sexual abuse or neglect of the child, including any information known to the individual making the report of previous possible physical or sexual abuse or neglect;
 - f. If available, information about the cause of injury/neglect and information about the person(s) responsible for abuse/neglect.

If a report has been made about the abuse or neglect of your child:

- After a report is made to Child Protective Services, the local department must make an investigation to protect the welfare of the child or children. This investigation must include:
 - a determination of the nature, extent and cause of the neglect or abuse;
 - a determination of the identity of the individual(s) responsible for the neglect or abuse; and
 - the name, age and condition of every other child in the household, and any other pertinent information.
- Most likely, this investigation will be done by a police officer and/or a social worker from the local department of social services.
- Based on the findings, the local department of social services will decide on the appropriate service in the best interest of the child.
- Children should have a home environment that is free of physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment. However, no substitute can adequately replace the child's family and it should not be assumed that the most appropriate action in all or most instances is the removal of the child.
- The investigation function, while an important component, is only part of the process of Child Protective Services. If needed, various services may be offered to your

family including: day care, emergency food, or shelter, parenting classes, therapeutic counseling, parent aide or homemaker services, and assistance with housing.

Some things to remember about abuse/neglect reports

- A report of suspected abuse or neglect is not an accusation. It is a link to services.
- Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect do not have to give their names when making a report. Therefore, you may not be told who made a report.
- Many people (including teachers, mental health providers, and police officers) are required to make a report to Child Protective Services, even if they only suspect abuse or neglect.

Key Resources/Links

- AACAP Facts for Families, Abuse (physical):
 - *Child Abuse:* <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/chldabus.htm>
 - *Child Sexual Abuse:* <http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/sexabuse.htm>
 - *Responding to Child Sexual Abuse:*
<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/rspdabus.htm>
- Maryland Child Protective Services:
 - <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/pdf/form180.pdf> (report form)
 - <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/cps/where.htm> (where to report)
- **Child Welfare Information Gateway:** Child Abuse and Neglect
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/can/>

**Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.*