

# Maryland School Mental Health Alliance\*

## *Reporting Abuse Information for School Clinicians*

### Mandated Reporters

Mental Health providers and educators are MANDATED REPORTERS of child abuse and neglect. Reporting abuse does NOT require PROOF that abuse or neglect has occurred. Incidents are to be reported as soon as they are suspected.

### Definition of Child Abuse and Child Neglect

#### 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.

Students suffering from abuse or neglect display a variety of physical and emotional symptoms. Students who endure abuse or neglect may appear fearful or withdrawn; act reluctant to leave school; have inconsistent or poor academic performance; present with physical injuries with unknown causes; and have untreated medical conditions (i.e., torn rotator cuff, dislocated shoulders, tooth decay, etc). Caregivers who abuse or neglect their children may show little concern for their child's well-being and evade responsibility for the child's current condition.

### 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.

### **What can we do about it?**

- **Become a more active observer of student behavior.** Be aware of warning signs for child abuse and neglect, and inquire about past and current abuse and neglect when meeting with students and families.
- **Call caregivers to learn more about the situation at home.** When reporting abuse or neglect, it may be helpful to involve parents and family members in the process in order to better understand the situation at home, provide education to the family about the process of reporting, and help to maintain the therapeutic alliance.
- **Remember to consider problems related to abuse/neglect when developing treatment goals.** If the student suffers from abuse or neglect, they may also display symptoms of depression, anorexia, substance abuse, etc. Tailor a treatment plan that addresses both short-term and long-term needs.
- **Learn how to report abuse or neglect.** See below for steps to reporting child abuse or neglect.

**CODE OF MARYLAND REGULATIONS**, Section [07.02.07](#) Requires reporting child abuse or neglect in the following manner:

1. An individual shall 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.
2. Health practitioners, educators, human service workers, and police officers are required to report, both orally and in writing, any suspected child abuse or neglect, with oral report being made immediately and the written report being made within 48 hours of the contact which disclosed the suspected abuse or neglect.
3. 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. The information available to the individual reporting;

- i. Which might aid in establishing the cause of the injury or neglect;
    - ii. About the identity of the individual or individuals responsible for abuse or neglect; and
  - g. If reporting abuse or neglect of a child involving mental injury, a description of the substantial impairment of the child's mental or psychological ability to function that was observed and identified, and why it is believed to be attributable to an act of maltreatment or omission of proper care and attention.
4. Reports of abuse shall be made to the local departments of social services or the appropriate law enforcement agency. Reports of neglect shall be made to local departments of social services.
  5. An employee of a local department of social services who receives a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, shall report the information to the protective services unit within the local department at once so as to initiate prompt handling of the report of suspected child abuse or neglect.

### **Key Resources/Links**

- 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/>
- 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>

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