

## Mandatory Reporting in Plain English

### What is Mandatory Reporting?

Mandatory reporting is when the law requires people who are engaged in certain types of work to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect. *Mandatory* means there is no discretion or choice given to the person to decide whether or not to report. Essentially, if a mandatory reporter knows or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, that person *must* report the possible child abuse or neglect to the local authorities.

### Am I a Mandatory Reporter?

**Not everyone is a mandatory reporter.** However, in most cases if you work directly with children, or provide direct services in education, health care, mental health, or law enforcement, you will be classified as a mandatory reporter. Check your [state mandatory reporting laws](#) to determine if your profession is a mandated reporter:

### What exactly is child abuse or neglect?

Each state provides its own definitions of child abuse and neglect. However, most states recognize four major types of maltreatment: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Additionally, many states also recognize abandonment, parental substance use, and human trafficking as abuse or neglect too.

### What if I'm not sure whether to report?

If you are not sure whether to report, it's best to speak with your supervisor immediately. Although you probably won't get into trouble for making a report of possible child abuse in good faith, mandatory reporting can be devastating for a family, and is not something to be taken lightly. It is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse. Reporting your concerns is not making an allegation, it is a request for an investigation or assessment.

## How would I discover possible child abuse or neglect?

There are a number of ways a reporter may discover possible child abuse. A reporter could directly observe signs of child abuse or neglect such as bruises, burns, etc. A child could directly disclose child abuse or neglect by making a statement to the mandatory reporter (e.g., *My father hit me with a shovel*). A child could also make a statement about the *risk* of physical harm when a child discusses future, or conditional conduct (e.g., *If I am late, my father will throw me against the wall*).

## Where can I find additional resources?

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's factsheet [What Is Child Traumatic Stress?](#) defines child traumatic stress and provides an overview of trauma, trauma signs and symptoms, and how trauma can impact children.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web section, [Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: Consequences](#), provides information on the prevalence, effects, and physical and mental consequences of child abuse and neglect as well as additional resources and a comprehensive reference list.

[Stop It Now!](#) is a website that provides parents and other adults with resources to help prevent child sexual abuse. The site offers direct help to those with questions or concerns about child abuse, prevention advocacy, prevention education, and technical assistance and training.

[The American Academy of Pediatrics' The Resilience Project](#) gives pediatricians and other health-care providers the resources they need to more effectively identify, treat, and refer children and youth who have been maltreated as well as promotes the importance of resilience in how a child deals with traumatic stress.

The CDC produced [Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect](#), which defines the many types of maltreatment and the CDC's approach to prevention.

[Prevent Child Abuse America](#) is a national organization dedicated to providing information on child maltreatment and its prevention.

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