



# CLUB



## Florida 4-H Volunteer Guide to Reporting Child Abuse\*

### What is child abuse?

Child Abuse is defined by Florida Statute (827.03) as:

- Intentional infliction of physical or mental injury upon a child;
- An intentional act that could reasonably be expected to result in physical or mental injury to a child;
- Active encouragement of any person to commit an act that results or could reasonably be expected to result in physical or mental injury to a child

### Who reports child abuse in Florida?

Everyone must report abuse in Florida. Reporting child abuse is no longer limited to teachers, law enforcement, and health care professionals. Since Gov. Scott signed Florida House Bill 1355 in April 2012, all citizens of Florida are mandatory reporters. Those individuals who do not report suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, commit a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in FL Statute 775.082, 775.083, and/or 775.084.

### What do I do if I suspect child abuse?

If you suspect child abuse, you should report it to the proper authorities immediately. Remember, it is not your responsibility to investigate or to determine if abuse is actually occurring. Your job is to protect the child by reporting your suspicions. Report only what the child tells you, whether you believe him/her or not. The authorities will determine the nature of the situation and take necessary action.

### How do I report suspected child abuse?

Choose one of the following:

**Central Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

**TDD number:** 1-800-453-5145

**Internet:** <http://dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/>

**Fax:** 1-800-914-0004

**Fax transmittal form:** <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/abuse/docs/faxreport.pdf>

## Things to Know Before You Report

- The child's name, age, address, and phone number
- The day you first noticed the abuse or neglect
- Any marks on the child and location of the marks
- Any other notable symptoms
- Any other information
- You may want to use the fax transmittal form to help you gather pertinent information before report, regardless which method of reporting you choose
- Do not be concerned if you do not know all of the information. Report what you do know.

## Types of Child Abuse

There are three main types of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Additional forms of abuse may include emotional abuse, educational neglect, or child-on-child abuse.

## What is Physical Abuse?

Physical child abuse is the intentional harming of a child by an adult. This harm may include excessive shaking, bruising, beating, or burning.

A common myth classifies child abuse as a problem of the poor. Another common myth is that most child abusers were abused as a child. However, this is not always the case. Child abusers may be from any socioeconomic class, race, educational background, or religion. Child abusers may or may not have been abused as a child.

## Signs of Physical Abuse

- Cuts, bruises, or broken bones in different stages of healing
- Burns
- Unrealistic explanations for how injuries occurred
- Aggressive or disruptive behaviors
- Excessively passive, such as shrinking at the approach of adults
- Fear of going home or of certain people

## What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse is sexual contact with a child by another person who may use force or threats, or exploits a position of authority. Like physical abuse, sexual abuse is not linked to any particular class, cultural group, or even age.

\*Child-on-child sexual abuse needs to be reported the same way as other forms of abuse. Make sure to note the age of the child perpetrator if possible, as a case involving a child 12-years-old or younger will be handled differently than a child age 13 or older.

## Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Inappropriate sex play with peers or sexual knowledge unusual for age (may be revealed in drawings or stories)
- Inappropriate focus on genitals of self or others
- Reversion to more childlike behaviors (such as crying for no apparent reason)
- Withdrawal, depression, or change in personality

## What is Child Neglect?

Child neglect is a condition in which a child's basic needs for food, shelter, safety, clothing, prompt medical attention, education, and/or emotional support are not met. Unlike physical and sexual abuse, child neglect is a result of what parents or guardians fail to do for their children, not what they do to their children. Neglect may be one single incident or repeated acts. This is the most common form of child abuse, representing 78.5% of all child abuse cases (USDSHHS, 2011).

Similar to physical and sexual abuse, child neglect can occur among persons from any socioeconomic class, race, sex, religion, or educational background.

## Signs of Child Neglect

- Child is inappropriately dressed for weather
- Extreme hunger indicated by child
- Unkempt appearance of a child
- A child has not seen a physician in a timely manner for an illness
- Extreme misbehavior of a child
- A child gives excessive attention to others (for example, very "clingy" behavior)
- Excessive absenteeism from school

## Summary

Abuse and neglect may happen to any child at any time by anyone. Contact your local Children and Family Services office for more information, training, and special local programs that protect children and strengthen families. By recognizing some common symptoms of abuse and neglect, you can bring about early intervention to alleviate a child's suffering and provide treatment for an abusive person.

\*Adapted in August 2014 from Save a Child: How to Identify and Report Child Abuse by Andrew E. Toelle and Kate Fogarty. EDIS Document FCS2119. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.