

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

If you suspect abuse, reporting it can protect the child and get help for the family. Each State identifies mandatory reporters (groups of people who are required to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect). However, any concerned person can and should report suspected child abuse. A report is not an accusation; it is an expression of concern and a request for an investigation or evaluation of the child's situation. If you suspect a child is in a dangerous situation, take immediate action. Your suspicion of child abuse or neglect is enough to make a report. You are not required to provide proof. Investigators in your community will make the determination of whether abuse or neglect has occurred. Almost every State has a law to protect people who make good-faith reports of child abuse from prosecution or liability.

How do I report child abuse or neglect?

If you suspect a child is being harmed, contact your State Child Abuse Hotline, local child protective services (CPS), or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. For more information about where and how to file a report, call Childhelp USA®, National Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-4-A-CHILD®).

When calling to report child abuse, you will be asked for specific information, which may include:

- ☆ The child's name and location
- ☆ The suspected perpetrator's name and relationship to the child (if known)
- ☆ A description of what you have seen or heard regarding the abuse or neglect
- ☆ The names of any other people having knowledge of the abuse
- ☆ Your name and phone number

The names of reporters are not given out to families reported for child abuse or neglect; however, sometimes by the nature of the information reported, your identity may become evident to the family. You may request to make your report anonymously, but your report may be considered more credible and can be more helpful to CPS if you give your name.

What will happen when I make a report?

Your report of possible child maltreatment will first be screened by hotline staff or a CPS worker. If the worker feels there is enough credible information to indicate that maltreatment may have occurred or is at risk of occurring, your report will be referred to staff who will conduct an investigation. Investigators respond within a particular time period (anywhere from a few hours to a few days), depending on the potential severity of the situation. They may speak with the child, the parents, and other people in contact with the child (such as doctors, teachers, or childcare providers). Their purpose is to determine if abuse or neglect has occurred and if it may happen again.

If the investigator finds that no abuse or neglect occurred, or what happened does not meet the State's definition of abuse or neglect, the case will be closed and the family may or may not be referred elsewhere for services. If the investigator feels the children are at risk of harm, the family may be referred to services to reduce the risk of future maltreatment. These may include mental health care, medical care, parenting skills classes, employment assistance, and concrete support such as financial or housing assistance. In rare cases where the child's safety cannot be ensured, the child may be removed from the home.

