



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: REPORTING CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT AND ABANDONMENT

WHAT IS ABUSE?

"**Abuse**" means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.

WHAT IS NEGLECT?

"**Neglect**" occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or in danger of being significantly impaired.

What should I do if I suspect a child is being abused or neglected?

Everyone, including professionally mandatory reporters, must contact the Florida Abuse Hotline when they know or have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused, abandoned or neglected. The Abuse Hotline Counselor will determine if the information provided meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation.

When should I call?

Any person must contact the Florida Abuse Hotline when they know or have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused, abandoned or neglected. The Hotline has counselors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

HOW DO I MAKE A REPORT?

There are four ways to make a report:

1. **By Telephone: 1-800-96ABUSE (800-962-2873)**
2. **By Fax: 1-800-914-0004**
3. **Florida Relay 711**
4. **By TDD: 1-800-453-5145**
5. **Web Reporting <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>**

What should I expect when I contact the Hotline?

Reporters contacting the Hotline should expect to be asked for the following information:

- Demographical information of the person's involved in the situation being reported. This includes the names, ages, dates of birth (if known), race, gender, social security number (if known).
- A means to locate the subjects of the report. Some common means to locate may include:
 - Home Address
 - Phone number
 - School Name, Address, and Phone Number
 - Parents/Caregivers Work Location, Address, Phone Number
 - Directions to the Home
- Specifics of the incident being reported. Some common questions asked by the Hotline Counselor include:
 - What happened to the victim?
 - Who caused the harm?
 - What were the affects to the victim?
 - Any known history, frequency, etc. of the same or similar incidents.
- Hotline counselors accept reports on the basis of specific criteria from Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes. Each call acceptance decision is based only on information provided during the call.

What kind of information do I need to have ready when I call?

When contacting the Florida Abuse Hotline, please have as much of the information listed below before you call, fax or report online. If you are unable to obtain some of the information below, you should still call the Hotline and a counselor will assess the information to see if it meets statutory criteria for DCF to investigate

- Reporter name (this is required for professionally mandated reporters but not otherwise).
- Victim name, possible responsible person, or alleged perpetrator name(s).
- Name, date of birth (or approximate age), race, and gender, for all adults and children involved.
- Complete addresses for subjects, including a numbered street address, apartment or lot number, city, state, and zip code and/or directions to their location. If addresses are unknown, then provide any other means to locate the subjects of the report, including current location
- Information regarding disabilities and/or limitations of the victims.
- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child victim(s).
- Telephone numbers, including area code.
- Social Security numbers, if available.
- Names of other residents and their relationship to the victim(s), if available.
- Specific descriptions of the incident or the circumstances, including who was involved, what occurred, when and where it occurred, why it happened, the extent of any injuries sustained (including physical, mental or sexual injuries), what the victim(s) said happened.
- Other relevant information that would expedite an investigation, such as potential risks to the investigator.

What if I don't have an address for the victim(s)?

If you do not have an address, please go ahead and call the hotline and provide the information you do have. We do need to have a means to locate the subject of an abuse report, but there are many other ways we can find them such as phone numbers, school names/locations, parent/caregiver work location, auto tag numbers or directions to the home

Will the person(s) know I reported him or her?

All reports are confidential. Access to these reports is limited by specific criteria in Chapters 39 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.).

Florida Abuse Hotline Counselors will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular caller, nor will they release any information provided by a caller or any information contained in a report. No reports are released by the Abuse Hotline other than to those persons specifically authorized under Chapters 39, F.S. Any person with a statutory right to a report copy must contact the local investigative office.

Do I have to give my name?

No. You do not have to give your name in order to make a report. Providing your name, however, is helpful in the event a protective investigator needs to ask you more questions or seek clarification about the information you provided to the Hotline Counselor.

The names of reporters are held confidential, and under Florida Statutory requirements, should not be released to the individuals the report is about.

Although every person is required to report suspected abuse or neglect, some occupations are specified in Florida law as required to do so. These occupations are considered "professionally mandatory reporters". A professionally mandatory reporter of child abuse/neglect is required by Florida Statute to provide his or her name to the Hotline Counselor when reporting. A professionally mandatory reporter's name is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential (§ 39.202, F.S.)

Are your calls recorded?

Yes, all calls made to the Florida Abuse Hotline are recorded. Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes mandate that the Hotline records all incoming or outgoing calls.

How do I report on-line?

Web reporting should not be used for situations requiring immediate attention. Please contact the Hotline's toll free reporting number if you believe a child is at imminent risk of harm.

To make a report via the Florida Abuse Hotline's web reporting option, please gather all of your information in advance, review the Guide for Reporting on-line, and then make a report.

How do I follow up to find out what happened to the information I reported?

All reports are confidential. Access to these reports is limited by specific criteria in Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes. The Hotline counselor will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular caller, nor will they release any information provided by a caller or any information contained in a report.

Any person with a statutory right to a report copy must contact the local investigative office.

Why would the counselor tell me they could not accept my report?

The Florida Abuse Hotline is committed to providing a clear understanding of services available to customers whether from the Department of Children and Families or other state and community agencies.

Prior to concluding each call, the Hotline counselor is required to inform each caller if a report was accepted or not. When a report is not accepted, the Hotline Counselor may provide appropriate referral information to the caller so their concerns can be addressed by the appropriate entity.

What happens with the information I give you if a report is not taken?

The Hotline counselor is required to document information for all information received, in the Hotline's system of record database. This database is maintained for all contacts in compliance with Florida Statutes and for quality assurance and training purposes.

If the report is not accepted, it may be considered for referral to the county office as a prevention referral. If the information is not sent as a prevention referral, then it is maintained in the Hotline's database.

What if they find out I called in a report on them?

All reporters' information is confidential. The name of any person reporting child abuse, neglect or abandonment may not be released to any person other than those allowed to have access to this information according to Florida Statute.

If you believe someone you made a report about has obtained reporter information inappropriately, then please contact the protective investigations office where the investigation is being handled and ask to speak to a Protective Investigations Supervisor or contact the Client Relations Coordinator in your county.

Who has access to the reporter's information?

Access to reporter information is available to those professionals directly involved in child protective investigations. A list of those individuals with access to this information can be found in Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes.

I called in a report, and the investigator told them my name, what can I do?

If you believe someone you made a report about has obtained reporter information inappropriately, then please contact the protective investigations office where the investigation is being handled and ask to speak to a Protective Investigations Supervisor or you may contact the Client Relations Coordinator in your county to file a complaint.

What happens after the Hotline accepts a report from the information I provided?

The Hotline counselor sends a typed report of the allegations to the local investigation office where the victim is located. After the report is sent to the local office the report is assigned to a Child Protective Investigator (CPI). The CPI is then responsible for conducting an investigation on the allegations that meet statutory criteria for the Department of Children and Families to investigate.

How soon does DCF respond to the home?

The Florida Abuse Hotline strives to submit all reports to the appropriate investigative office within one hour after the call to the Hotline ends. Once the report arrives at the investigative office and is assigned to an investigator, the investigator has up to 24 hours to initiate contact with the subjects of the report. In situations in which it is believed the victim is at imminent risk of harm, the investigator will respond as quickly as possible.

How old does a child have to be to be left home alone?

Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandates that the Hotline be contacted when any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child of **any age** is being left home alone without adult supervision or arrangements appropriate for the child's age or mental or physical condition, so that the child is unable to care for the child's own needs or another's basic needs or is unable to exercise good judgment in responding to any kind of physical or emotional crisis.

The Hotline Counselor will assess the information provided in the call and make a determination of report acceptance or non-acceptance based on statutory criteria.

Who do I contact if I have a complaint about the way an investigation was handled?

The best practice is to contact Department of Children and Families child protective investigative office in the county where the investigation occurred. In addition, investigative complaints can be processed through our Client Relations Coordinator.

How can I get a copy of the report made against me?

Any person with a statutory right to a copy of a report must contact the local Department of Children and Families child investigative office in the county where the investigation occurred.

How can I get a copy of the report that I made?

Florida Statutes determine who is entitled to a copy of a report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a. If you meet the statutory criteria for who is entitled to a copy of the abuse report, then you can receive a copy by contacting the Department of Children and Families child investigative office in the county where the investigation occurred.

I made a report, why didn't anyone contact me?

The reporter may or may not be contacted by the protective investigator handling the case. If you have not been contacted and wish to speak to the investigator handling the case you reported, then you should contact the local protective investigations office.

Will the children be removed from the home?

This decision is made by a dependency court judge based on the identified risks to the children's well-being. DCF does everything possible to keep families together but sometimes the children are removed if they are deemed unsafe. DCF's mission is to ensure the children are in a safe environment.

Will the children go straight into foster care?

When placement is needed for a child at risk of harm, DCF makes every effort to arrange for appropriate and safe placement for the child. In some cases, the child can be placed with approved relatives or other individuals the child may know personally, in other cases, the child may be placed in foster care