



Responding to Suspected Child Abuse: Guidelines for Salem-Keizer School District Volunteers

Last year, over 1,400 children in Marion and Polk Counties were *confirmed* victims of abuse or neglect. Unfortunately, an even larger number went unreported. These children grew up in a variety of socio-economic, cultural and family circumstances. The abusers were often trusted adults in the child's life.

As a volunteer, you may interact with students who have been the victims of abuse or neglect. You may question how you should respond to such concerns. **Below you will find the process to follow if you suspect that a child at school is the victim of abuse.** Please read the information carefully and speak with an administrator if you have questions.

Individuals in certain professions are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse to law enforcement or the Department of Human Services (DHS). All school employees are mandatory reporters. For a complete list of mandatory reporters, see Oregon Revised Statute 419B.005. ***If you become aware of suspected child abuse through your volunteer activities with the District, immediately report your concerns to an administrator, school counselor or teacher as well as to law enforcement or DHS.***

What is child abuse?

There are five main types of child abuse:

Sexual abuse – Sexual contact between an adult and a minor or between minors. This could involve physical contact, exposing a child to pornography or exposing a child to sexual activity.

Physical abuse – Any non-accidental injury to a child. Examples include burns, bruises and broken bones.

Emotional abuse/Mental injury – Harm to a child's ability to think, reason, or have feelings. Examples include repeated ridicule and threats.

Neglect – Negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child which causes actual harm or substantial risk of harm to a child's health, welfare, and safety. Examples include:

- Failure to provide adequate supervision
- Failure to provide life necessities (food, clothing, shelter, etc.)
- Abandonment
- Failure to provide necessary medical care

Threat of Harm – Subjecting a child to a substantial risk of harm to his/her health or welfare. Examples include:

- Exposure to domestic violence
- A child living with a person convicted of child abuse or neglect
- A child living with a person who is involved with child pornography
- Caregiver behavior which is out of control and threatening to a child's safety (e.g., drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness)

<p>What should I do if I suspect abuse?</p>	<p>Avoid questioning the child.</p> <p>If you notice a suspicious injury or concerning behavior, immediately notify the child’s teacher, school counselor or principal.</p> <p>Notify a principal, school counselor or teacher <i>immediately</i> if you observe, or hear about interactions between adults and students (or between students) that do not appear appropriate. This could involve verbal, physical, sexual or neglectful interactions. Volunteers play an important role in ensuring the health and safety of children. Trust your instincts and follow up with the principal if something seems questionable.</p> <p>Remember, if you suspect that a child has been abused or neglected, make a report to the Department of Human Services (503-378-6704) or law enforcement.</p>
<p>How should I respond if a student discloses abuse?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remain calm. This will help create a safe environment for the child. 2. Respond to the child’s disclosure. A statement such as, “I’m glad you told me” affirms that the child did the right thing by talking with you. 3. Avoid questioning the child or making promises. 4. Tell the child that you will find a safe person for him/her to speak with. 5. Immediately notify the school principal, counselor or the child’s teacher.
<p>How should I interact with students?</p>	<p>It is important that all adults maintain appropriate boundaries with students.</p> <p>Be aware of your own interactions with students and avoid situations that could be misconstrued. If you are unsure if something is appropriate or not, speak with the principal. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Avoid physical contact with students – hugging, tickling, wrestling, shoulder rubbing, etc. ○ Avoid discussing personal matters with students ○ Avoid contact with students outside of the school setting ○ Avoid being alone with a student; stay in a group or a public part of the school

If you have questions, contact Debbie Joa, Prevention and Protection Coordinator for the Salem-Keizer School District’s Human Resources Department, at 503-399-3061.

Additional Resources:

Oregon Department of Human Services: <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/abuse/main.shtml>

Oregon Revised Statutes: <http://landru.leg.state.or.us/ors/home.html>

Liberty House: www.libertyhousecenter.com