

Reporting Child Abuse and Other Maltreatment of Children

Your legal obligation... Current law requires that professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, or child daycare workers must make a verbal report within 48 hours. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment of up to 180 days and/or a fine of up to \$2,000 (Texas Family Code, Chapter 261).

Reporting suspected child abuse to your principal, school counselor or superintendent will NOT satisfy your obligation under this law. Local school district policy cannot conflict with or supersede the state law requiring you to report child abuse to a law enforcement agency or TDFPS.

Your legal Protection. Your report of child abuse or neglect is confidential and immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made "in good faith" and "without malice."

"In good faith" means that the person making the report took reasonable steps to learn facts that were readily available and at hand. "Without malice" means that the person did not intend to injure or violate the rights of another person. Provided these two conditions are met, you will also be immune from liability if you are asked to participate in any judicial proceedings that might result from your report.

DON'T try to investigate

DON'T confront the abuser

DO report your reasonable suspicions

It is not up to you to determine whether your suspicions are true. A trained investigator will evaluate the child's situation. Even if your report does not bring decisive action, it may help establish a pattern that will eventually be clear enough to help the child.

For situations that do not require a response within 24 hours you may report through the secure web site: <https://www.txabusehotline.org>

More Information at...

[http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child Protection/About ChildProtectiveServices/reportChildAbuse.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child%20Protection/About%20ChildProtectiveServices/reportChildAbuse.asp)

If you have reason to suspect child abuse, but are not positive, make the report. If you have any doubts about whether or not it is abuse, call the hotline. They can advise you on whether the signs you have observed are abuse.

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http://helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm

The problem of shame and guilt in child sexual abuse

Aside from the physical damage that sexual abuse can cause, the emotional component is powerful and far-reaching. Sexually abused children are tormented by shame and guilt. They may feel that they are responsible for the abuse or somehow brought it upon themselves. This can lead to self-loathing and sexual problems as they grow older—often either excessive promiscuity or an inability to have intimate relations.

The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward. They may worry that others won't believe them, will be angry with them, or that it will split their family apart. Because of these difficulties, false accusations of sexual abuse are not common, so if a child confides in you, take him or her seriously. Don't turn a blind eye!

Warning signs of child abuse and neglect

The earlier child abuse is caught, the better the chance of recovery and appropriate treatment for the child. Child abuse is not always obvious. By learning some of the common warning signs of child abuse and neglect, you can catch the problem as early as possible and get both the child and the abuser the help that they need.

Of course, just because you see a warning sign doesn't automatically mean a child is being abused. It's important to dig deeper, looking for a pattern of abusive behavior and warning signs, if you notice something off.

Warning signs of emotional abuse in children

- Excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong.
- Shows extremes in behavior (extremely compliant or extremely demanding; extremely passive or extremely aggressive).
- Doesn't seem to be attached to the parent or caregiver.
- Acts either inappropriately adult (taking care of other children) or inappropriately infantile (rocking, thumb-sucking, tantruming).

Warning signs of physical abuse in children

- Frequent injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cuts.
- Is always watchful and "on alert," as if waiting for something bad to happen.
- Injuries appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt.
- Shies away from touch, flinches at sudden movements, or seems afraid to go home.
- Wears inappropriate clothing to cover up injuries, such as long-sleeved shirts on hot days.

Warning signs of neglect in children

- Clothes are ill-fitting, filthy, or inappropriate for the weather.
- Hygiene is consistently bad (unbathed, matted and unwashed hair, noticeable body odor).
- Untreated illnesses and physical injuries.
- Is frequently unsupervised or left alone or allowed to play in unsafe situations and environments.
- Is frequently late or missing from school.

Warning signs of sexual abuse in children

- Trouble walking or sitting.
- Displays knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to his or her age, or even seductive behavior.
- Makes strong efforts to avoid a specific person, without an obvious reason.
- Doesn't want to change clothes in front of others or participate in physical activities.
- An STD or pregnancy, especially under the age of 14.
- Runs away from home.