

# A Texas School Employee Guide to Reporting Suspected Abuse & Neglect



## How You Can Help Protect Children

Teachers, administrators, and other school employees are all in a position to make a direct and positive difference in a child's life by learning how to recognize and report child abuse and neglect. You play an important role in a child's life and often represent a safe place for child victims to disclose abuse, particularly when the abuse occurs in the home. It is important to understand the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to report it. If you see something or suspect abuse, report it.

*It is important to know the law in Texas.*

Teachers and all school employees are considered professional reporters in Texas and are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect **immediately**, but no later than 48 hours after the initial suspicions of abuse or neglect. You cannot delegate to or rely on another person to make the report (Texas Family Code §261.101(b)). Failure to report suspected child abuse and neglect is a crime (Texas Family Code §261.109).

**If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.**

**For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse and neglect hotline 24/7 at 800.252.5400.**

**For more information visit [txabusehotline.org](http://txabusehotline.org).**

## Faculty & Staff Rights & Responsibilities

- You have the right and responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect free of fear, intimidation, or regret (Texas Family Code §261.110).
- 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 (Texas Family Code §261.106).
- Teachers and school employees making reports of suspected abuse or neglect are not required by law to first report the suspicion to a peer, colleague, or supervisor.
- Teachers and school employees may not delegate the duty to report suspected abuse or neglect to any other person (Texas Family Code §261.101(b)).
- When making a report, answer all questions as thoroughly as possible and provide detailed and descriptive information about the situation you are reporting to allow the Texas Abuse Hotline to accurately assess the need for investigation.
- If you request that your identity be kept confidential, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) may not reveal your identity to the child's parents, to alleged perpetrators, or to others without your consent or a court order. However, DFPS may disclose your identity to the district attorney or law enforcement if the case requires further investigation.
- When responding to an outcry, let the child use his or her own words to tell you what happened, but leave the detailed questioning to DFPS and law enforcement. This is critical to ensuring the integrity of any investigation and minimizing additional trauma to the child.

## Administration Rights & Responsibilities

- You have the same rights and responsibilities as faculty and staff.
- Ensure all new personnel are formally trained on how to recognize and report child abuse and neglect in accordance with Texas Education Code §38.0041.
- Ensure training opportunities related to recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect are available for all personnel on an annual basis.
- DFPS or law enforcement may visit your campus during the course of an investigation. Avoid the use of public media (e.g., intercoms) to notify the appropriate staff or students.
- Establish a known, private location within your campus where both reporters and/or students can confidentially meet with DFPS or law enforcement.
- Take steps to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the report by not discussing the report or reporter. You are not required to disclose knowledge of a report to a parent or caregiver. If asked, you may choose to deny any knowledge of the report.
- Avoid implementing policies that require faculty and staff to consult with administration or other staff before they make a report of child abuse or neglect. Leave the detailed questioning and investigation to DFPS and law enforcement.

## What to Expect after Making a Report

- It is the responsibility of school employees to report suspected child abuse and neglect. It is the responsibility of DFPS to investigate suspected abuse or neglect.
- You will get a Call Identification Number (Call ID) each time you make a report to the Texas Abuse Hotline, unless you report anonymously.
- Not all reports of child abuse and neglect will be assigned for investigation by DFPS because some will not meet the statutory definition of abuse or neglect or because the allegation of abuse or neglect is not within DFPS' jurisdiction to investigate.
- If the report is assigned for investigation, a DFPS caseworker must initiate an investigation within 24 to 72 hours depending upon the priority assigned to the case. Upon completion of the investigation, a reporter will receive a notification of findings letter.
- All reports made to the Texas Abuse Hotline or website are also sent to the appropriate law enforcement agency for possible criminal investigation.
- If you have concerns about the investigation, you can file a complaint with the Office of Consumer Affairs by calling 800.720.7777 or emailing [oca@dfps.state.tx.us](mailto:oca@dfps.state.tx.us).



## How to Respond If a Child Reveals Abuse or Neglect

### DO

- ▶ Remain calm.
- ▶ Believe the child.
- ▶ Allow the child to talk.
- ▶ Show interest and concern.
- ▶ Reassure and support the child's feelings.
- ▶ Take action. It could save the child's life.

### DON'T

- ▶ Panic or overreact.
- ▶ Press the child to talk.
- ▶ Promise anything you can't control.
- ▶ Confront the offender.
- ▶ Blame or minimize the child's feelings.
- ▶ Overwhelm the child with questions.

**Take action and report abuse to DFPS or law enforcement within 48 hours. It could save a child's life.**



There are more than 70 children's advocacy centers (CACs) throughout Texas offering a child-friendly environment where children and their families can begin the healing process. It is the goal of all local CACs to reduce trauma to child abuse victims and their families by offering six core services: joint investigation coordination, forensic interviews, medical evaluations, multidisciplinary team case review with investigative entities, trauma-focused therapy, and family advocacy and victim support.

Your local CAC also provides training opportunities for educators, schools, local community members, and others interested in learning how they can recognize and report child abuse and neglect and make a difference for child victims of abuse.

## Signs of Child Abuse

1. Unexplained injuries.
2. Changes in behavior.
3. Returning to earlier behaviors.
4. Fear of certain places or people.
5. Changes in eating.
6. Changes in sleeping.
7. Changes in school performance and attendance.
8. Lack of personal care or hygiene.
9. Risk-taking behaviors.
10. Inappropriate sexual behaviors.

**Remember, you are obligated by law  
to report suspected child abuse.**

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hotline at 800.252.5400.



*This is a resource of*  
Children's Advocacy Centers™ of Texas

[www.cactx.org](http://www.cactx.org)