

# Reporting Child Abuse

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Recognize the Signs of Child Abuse

Child abuse can take various forms, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Recognizing the signs is the first step in reporting:

- **Physical Abuse:** Frequent or unexplained bruises, burns, or fractures; fear of going home; aggressive behavior.
- **Emotional Abuse:** Extreme withdrawal, anxiety, or depression; lack of attachment to the parent; severe emotional outbursts.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts; difficulty walking or sitting; sudden changes in behavior.
- **Neglect:** Poor hygiene; untreated medical issues; consistent lack of supervision; frequently missed school.

Immediate Actions in Emergencies

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or your local law enforcement agency immediately.

Report to Child Protective Services

If the situation is not an immediate emergency but you suspect child abuse, report it to the local child protective services (CPS) agency.

Calling child protective services is a significant decision with serious implications for the children and families involved. Whenever possible, try to have an open conversation with the caregiver about your concerns. Partnering with them to take

protective action can be even more effective. Often, what appears to be maltreatment is actually a struggle with basic needs. In such cases, you can support children and families by connecting them to local resources and services.

### **Contact the County Department of Human Services:**

- In Wisconsin, each county has a Department of Human Services (DHS) or Department of Social Services (DSS) responsible for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. Contact information for county departments can be found on the [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families \(DCF\) website](#) or through local government websites. Contact the county where the parents reside.
- You can also call the National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). This hotline is available 24/7.

### **Provide Detailed Information:**

- When making a report, provide as much information as possible, including:
  - The child's name, age, address, and race
  - School the child attends
  - Details of suspected abuse or neglect - current and past
  - Injury or condition as a result of abuse or neglect
  - Names and addresses of the child's parents or guardians
- Unless you are a mandated reporter, you can choose to make the report without giving your name.
- Document who you spoke to when you called and the time and date.

### **Mandatory Reporting Requirements**

Certain professionals are legally required to report suspected child abuse. These mandatory reporters include:

- Teachers and school personnel
- Health care professionals (doctors, nurses, dentists)
- Social workers and mental health professionals
- Child care providers
- Law enforcement officers

Legal Protections for Reporters

## **Confidentiality:**

Reports of child abuse and neglect are confidential. The identity of the person making the report is kept confidential and is not disclosed to the family or subject of the report.

## **Anonymity:**

While anonymous reports are accepted, providing your name and contact information can be helpful for investigators if they need additional information. Your identity will still be kept confidential.

## **Immunity:**

Wisconsin law provides protections for individuals who report child abuse in good faith. You cannot be held liable for making a report, even if it turns out to be unsubstantiated, as long as you acted in good faith.

## Follow-Up Actions

After you report suspected child abuse, the local CPS agency will:

- **Investigate:** A social worker or investigator will assess the situation to determine if abuse or neglect has occurred.
- **Provide Services:** If abuse or neglect is confirmed, CPS may provide services to the child and family, such as counseling, in-home services, mental health and alcohol or drug abuse services, assistance or training in home and financial management, parent education and self-help groups.
- **Action:** In severe cases, CPS may work with law enforcement to remove the child from the home and initiate legal proceedings to protect the child.

[Child Abuse & Neglect Safety Family Law](#)

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