

# **DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES (DCS)**

## **CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE**

### **What is the Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline?**

The Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline is a call center accepting all reports of suspected child abuse and neglect for the state of Tennessee. Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline is open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

### **How do I contact the Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline?**

Phone: 1-855-209-4226 (free call)

Fax: 1-615-361-7041 – Non-emergency situations only

**Do NOT make reporting calls to DCS caseworkers. Call the Child Abuse Hotline.**

**There is no record of a report when contacting caseworkers.**

### **Who is a “Mandated” reporter of child abuse and neglect?**

Tennessee Code Annotated 37-1-403(i) (1) requires all persons to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. “Any person who has knowledge of or is called upon to render aid to any child who is suffering from or has sustained any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition, shall report such harm immediately if the harm is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect or that, on basis of available information, reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect.”

### **Failure to report**

Tennessee Code Annotated 37-1-412 (a) states any person who knowingly fails to make a report of suspected child abuse commits a class A misdemeanor, carrying a sentence of up to three months imprisonment, fine or both.

### **Is my information confidential? Do I have to give my name?**

Tennessee laws protect persons who report abuse or neglect. Tennessee Code Annotated 37-1-410 provides immunity from civil and criminal liability. Reporters do have the right to remain anonymous.

### **What information is important when I make a report? What questions will I be asked?**

- Child(ren) names, ages, address, phone numbers, race, and school/daycare information
- Parent(s), Legal Guardian(s), or caretakers information
- Other household members information
- Nature of the harm or specific incident(s) that precipitated the report
- Specific allegation(s), date(s), and description(s) of the injuries or dangers
- Identities of alleged perpetrator(s) and their relationships to the victim
- Witnesses to the incident(s) and how to reach those witnesses

- Details of any physical evidence available
- Perpetrator's current access to the child
- Present condition of the child (alone, in need of medical attention, etc.)
- The location of the child and directions to that location
- Any statements from the child
- Parent's or perpetrator's explanation of the alleged child victim's condition or the incident
- Parent's current emotional, physical or mental state, especially feelings about the child and reactions to the report
- How the reporter came to know the information and the report's thoughts about the likelihood of further harm to the child

### **What if I don't know the answer to all of the questions I'm being asked?**

Don't be concerned if you don't know the answer to every question that the intake case manager is asking of you. Provide all of the information that you have at the time of the report.

### **What is child abuse and neglect?**

**Physical Abuse** – Non-accidental physical trauma or injury inflicted by a parent or caretaker on a child. It also includes a parent's or a caretaker's failure to protect a child from another person who perpetrated physical abuse on a child. In its most severe form, physical abuse is likely to cause great bodily harm or death.

**Neglect** – Failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm to the child's health or safety. This may include, but is not limited to abandonment, lack of supervision, life-endangering physical hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition that places the child below the normal growth curve, lack of shelter, lack of medical or dental that results in health-threatening conditions, and the inability to meet basic clothing needs of a child. In its most severe form, physical neglect may result in great bodily harm or death.

**Sexual Abuse** – Includes penetration or external touching of a child's intimate parts, oral sex with a child, indecent exposure or any other sexual act performed in a child's presence for sexual gratification, sexual use of a child for prostitution, and the manufacturing of child pornography. Child sexual abuse is also the willful failure of the parent or the child's caretaker to make reasonable effort to stop child sexual abuse by another person.

**Psychological Harm** – A repeated pattern of caregiver behavior or extreme incident(s) that convey to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only value in meeting another's needs and may include both abusive acts against a child and failure to act. Neglectful behavior when age-appropriate action is required for a child's health development (e.g.. child is shown no affection) includes verbal assaults, ignoring and indifference or constant family conflict. If a child is degraded enough, the child will begin to live up to the image communicated by the abusing parent or caretaker.

### **Will I be notified of what happened to my report?**

The reporter can receive a notification letter letting them know whether or not their report has

been assigned for investigation or assessment by the Tennessee Department of Children's Services. In order to receive this letter the intake case manager will gather your contact information, including your name, mailing address and phone number. DCS has and confidential email option that is appropriate for receiving a response regarding the report.

### **Who is taking my report?**

All case managers at the Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree. Case managers are also trained in Tennessee Code Annotated regarding child abuse neglect and confidentiality.

### **Special Notes For School Administrators on Child Abuse**

1. Each school shall post the toll-free number operated by DCS to receive reports of child abuse or neglect in a highly visible public area that is readily accessible to students.
2. Department of Children Services is a state agency with legal responsibilities and should collaboratively work with schools. ***Based on this the schools should do the following:***
  - Annual training for staff on mandatory reporting procedures
  - Use the DCS educator hotline: 1-855-209-4226 (free call)); the person who suspects the abuse **MUST** make the call.
  - Provide DCS staff with space to conduct interviews with children.
  - Make available to DCS the child who is the subject of the referral and the child's siblings.
  - Allow DCS to interview collateral child witnesses with authorization of the child's parent/guardian.
  - Ensure Principal or designee remains at the school during interviews with children until the DCS caseworker has completed his/her interview, if it goes beyond the regular school hours.
  - Upon commencement of the DCS investigation, share with DCS information necessary for assuring the safety and well-being of children and youth (ex; allergies, extenuating medical issues, etc.)
2. By law, DCS may see students and/or witnesses to abuse or neglect. The Administrator should ask to see the **IDENTIFICATION** of any person requesting an interview with a student and *can* also ask for the DCS worker's supervisor and phone number to verify this person as a DCS worker. Schools should make a copy of the identification document.
3. If asked by a DCS worker, principal or designee may give copies of **grades, attendance, and any demographic information.**
4. If a DCS caseworker needs to take pictures of the student in question and does not have an additional caseworker with them, they may ask a school counselor or administrator to "witness" the taking of the photo. This merely serves as a witness to the taking of the photo **ONLY**.
5. School staff should never ask parent and/or student volunteers to get students from class for purposes of interviews with DCS, as this should be done in a confidential

manner.

6. Korrie White and Zoe Bozeman are available to address any concerns you may have concerning the law, DCS, or the handling of a case referred to DCS, in a confidential manner.

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202-0855, Ext. 2227

[zbozeman@bartlettschools.org](mailto:zbozeman@bartlettschools.org)

202-0855, Ext. 2256

7. The law makes no distinction between professionals and non-professionals on the issue of reporting. All Tennessee citizens are mandated to report abuse of a child to DCS.