

How to Identify Child Abuse & Neglect in Delaware

All suspected child abuse and neglect of any minor in the State of Delaware must be reported to the 24 Hour **Division of Family Services (DFS) Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line at 1-800-292-9582**. The police may also be contacted but not in lieu of contacting DFS.

What should you do if you suspect child abuse or neglect?

- If you observe physical or behavioral indicators, ask Minimal Fact Questions, such as:
 - ✓ What happened?
 - ✓ When did that happen?
 - ✓ Where did that happen?
 - ✓ Did you tell anyone what happened?
- Write down child's exact words if you must speak to child.
- Avoid expressing disbelief, shock or anger, etc.
- Avoid value judgments and accusatory statements.
- Thank the child for telling you and tell child it is not his/her fault.
- Tell the child you have to report the abuse to a professional.
- Make a report to the Child Abuse and Neglect Report Line above.

What information can DFS share if the school initiated the report?

- That a response was made, and whether the child is safe or the child is placed out of the home;
- Who is allowed to have contact with the child;
- Explain if there is something the school should be doing;
- Who the school should call if something else happens; and
- When the child's placement changes if the child was placed out of the home.

Please also see the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF) located at: www.doe.k12.de.us/DDOEDSCYFMOU.pdf
Additional resources available at: kids.delaware.gov/information/school.shtml

Physical Abuse vs. Accidental Injury:

- Cuts and bruises caused from accidents normally occur in bony areas of the body.
- Reoccurring injuries likely indicate abuse.
- If a series of injuries appear in a pattern or resemble an object, the injury may have been inflicted.
- If the child's or caregiver's explanation for the injury is inconsistent with the facts, the injury would be suspect.
- Suspect abuse if there was a delay in seeking medical treatment.

At what age can a child be left alone?

- Delaware law does not specify an age when a child may be left alone.
- DFS policy states a child must be age 12 or older.
- For any aged child, DFS considers factors such as the child's level of functioning, maturity, physical and mental health, disabilities, length of time left alone, and the time of day.

Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Human bite marks
- Bald spots
- Unexplained burns on arms, legs, neck or torso
- Unexplained fractures
- Unexplained bruising, lacerations or abrasions

Behavioral Indicators:

- Wary of adult contact
- Apprehensive when other children cry
- Behavioral extremes: aggressiveness or withdrawal
- Overly compliant
- Reports injury by parents
- Exhibits anxiety about normal behavior (i.e. napping)
- Complains of soreness & moves awkwardly
- Destructive to self & others
- Early to school or stays late as if afraid to go home
- Accident prone
- Wears clothing that covers body when not appropriate
- Chronic runaway
- Cannot tolerate physical contact or touch

Parent/Caretaker Indicators:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child

Neglect

Physical Indicators:

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress
- Consistent lack of supervision, especially in dangerous activities or long periods
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- Chronic lice
- Distended stomach, emaciated

Behavioral Indicators:

- Begging or stealing food
- Consistent fatigue, listlessness or falling asleep
- States there is no caretaker at home
- Frequent school absences or tardiness
- Destructive
- School dropout
- Early emancipation from family

Parent/Caretaker Indicators:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- Difficulty in walking or sitting
- Torn, stained or bloody clothing
- Pain or itching in the genital area
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitals, vaginal or anal areas
- Frequent urinary or yeast infections
- Frequent unexplained sore throat
- Pregnancies
- Sexually transmitted infections

Behavioral Indicators:

- Unwilling to participate in certain physical activities
- Sudden drop in school performance/attendance
- Crying with no provocation
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
- Anorexia
- Sexually provocative
- Poor peer relationships
- Reports sexual abuse by caretaker
- Fear of or seductiveness toward males
- Suicide attempts
- Chronic runaways

Parent/Caretaker Indicators:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

Emotional Maltreatment

Physical Indicators:

- Speech disorders
- Lags in physical development
- Failure to thrive
- Asthma, severe allergies or ulcers
- Substance abuse

Behavioral Indicators:

- Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking, etc.)
- Conduct disorders
- Neurotic traits
- Behavior extremes
- Compliant, passive
- Aggressive, demanding
- Overly adaptive behavior

Parent/Caretaker Indicators:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers for help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child