

THE REPORTING PROCESS

The Florida Abuse Hotline is committed to providing quality assessments of reports and a clear understanding of services available. Callers will be clearly told whether the information provided is being accepted as a report for investigation. If it is not accepted, the Hotline counselor will suggest other steps the caller can take to assist the student.

If the Hotline counselor does not tell you before the call ends whether it is being accepted as a report for investigation, you should request that information *before* ending the call.

All reports of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect are confidential and access to these reports is limited as specified in section 39.202, F.S. Abuse Hotline counselors cannot acknowledge the existence of any report, acknowledge that they have spoken to a caller on a previous occasion, or release any information provided by a caller or contained in a report. The Abuse Hotline does not release reports. Any person with a statutory right to a report must contact the local investigative office. In other words, to learn whether your call has been accepted as a report for investigation, ask the question **before** the initial phone call ends.

The Abuse Hotline only investigates reports of abuse or neglect of a child by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare. If the person who is suspected of abusing the child is not a caregiver (for example, if the person is a neighbor or a person the child does not know), the Abuse Hotline counselor will transfer the call to the local sheriff's office. Again, callers do not need to be concerned about *who* will investigate the report. **If you suspect that a child is being abused, call the Abuse Hotline—no matter who seems to be abusing the child.** The Hotline staff will redirect the call if necessary.

What does Florida Law Require?

F.S. 39.201 (1) (A): Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, or that a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately know and available to provide supervision and are shall report such knowledge or suspicion....."

What if I'm not sure whether a concern rises to the level of suspected child maltreatment?

You may want to speak discreetly with other teachers or staff who have contact with this student. Ask whether they have observed any changes or have any concerns. You also might wish to discuss your concerns with the child abuse designee at your school, who has had additional training and experience regarding child abuse. Remember, though, that you cannot pass your legal obligation to another person. If a group of people decides that a report should be made be very clear as to who will actually make the report and follow-up to be sure that it's done.

How do I make a report to the Abuse Registry?

F.S 39.201 (2) (a): "Each report of known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect....shall be made immediately to the department's central abuse hotline on the single statewide toll-free telephone number." 1-800-96-ABUSE".

Af.s.39201 (2) (b): "If the report is of an instance of known or suspected child abuse by someone other than a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare....., the call shall be immediately to the Department of Children and Families central abuse hotline.

What necessary document would you complete related to my Hotline report?

The Child Abuse and Neglect Form (4002B) which may be obtained from the child abuse designee at your school or on the Child Abuse webpage. The Form must be filled out completely providing fictitious information for the Hotline section (counselor's name, I.D#, time and date of your call, whether the report was accepted for investigation or not), using the case study that you choose. Incomplete forms will be returned. Send the completed form to the:

Child Abuse Services Program Manager

Fort Lauderdale Manors Early Learning and Family Resource Center

1400 NW 14th Court Room 1715

Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33311

Does the Hotline have to accept my report?

As long as your report meets the statutory definition of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, the report shall be accepted for protective investigation. If you are informed that the hotline cannot accept your report, you should consult with the school-based child abuse designee. The designee will either explain how your concerns fail to meet the hotline's statutory definition, or may help you to reframe your concerns in a way that does fit the definition.

Do I have to have prior approval from my principal to make a report or notify my principal that I have made a report?

No. Board policy does not require that you receive any approval prior to reporting or that you notify the principal, or the child abuse designee, that you made a report. However, you are encourage to provide notification after the report has been made so that administration and the child abuse designee may provide proper support for the student and the investigative process.

If I notify the principal or the child abuse designee that I made a report to the hotline, will the school maintain my confidentiality?

Yes. Board policy states: "Principals and child abuse designees shall maintain the confidentiality of the reporter.

Who will investigate my report?

Currently, the Broward Sheriff's Office, Child Protective Investigations, Section, is the authorized agent of the Florida Department of Children and Families for the Purpose of conducting child abuse investigations in Broward County. Reports involving adult disable students will be investigated by Adult Protective Services, Broward Department of Children and Families.

Am I required to speak with an investigator?

Yes. You are required to cooperate with child abuse investigations. If an investigator wishes to speak with you about a student or family, please share your information or observations in as objective fashion as possible. If you have had contact with the student or family, you may be asked to talk to the investigator, even if you were not the reporter of the suspicions.

Who can take a child into custody?

Under s. 39.401, a child alleged to be dependent may only be taken into custody by a law enforcement Office or an authorized agent of the Florida Department of Children and Families. In Board County, the authorized agent is the Broward Sheriff's Office. There must be cause to support that:

1. The child has been abused, neglected, or abandoned, or is suffering from or in imminent danger of illness or injury as a result of abuse, neglect, or abandonment;
2. The parent or legal custodian of the child has violated a condition of placement imposed by the court; or
3. The child has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care.

Can I be sued for making a report?

No. F.S. 39.203 (1) (a): “Any person...reporting in good faith any instance of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect to the department or any law enforcement agency, shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability which might otherwise result by reason of such action.”

What if I don't report?

There is a legal penalty to failure to report. F.S. 39.205 (1): “ A person who is required to report known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect and who knowingly and willfully fails to do so, or who knowingly and willfully prevents another person from doing so, is guilty of a felony of the third degree....”

Punishment for conviction on a third degree felony charge includes imprisonment of up to five years and/or a fine of up to \$10,000.

Should I write anything about the report in the child's Cumulative record folder?

No. You should never enter anything in the child's educational record concerning the reporting of child abuse.

Does the school have to notify a parent when a report is made to the Abuse Hotline?

No. In fact, the school should not notify the parent or other caregivers of the report.

Who contacts the parent when a child is taken into protective custody?

The person who takes the child into custody has the legal responsibility of notifying the parent or caregiver.

Can the parents find out who made a report?

The identity of the reporter is confidential. However, sometimes children identify the person at school with whom they discussed their problems and parents assume that person made the report.

What do I do if I've made a report to the Abuse Hotline and the investigator hasn't come by the end of the school day?

If dismissal is approaching and no contact has been made, you may contact your local child protective investigations office **(954) 797-5299**, and determine whether they have received the report and whether an investigator is en route to the school. If not, and if you have grave concerns about the safety of the child, call your local law enforcement agency and request immediate assistance from an officer.

What Happens after You Make a Report?

Counselors answering the Abuse Hotline ask for relevant information about the child and the situation. It is their job to make an immediate assessment of your report. Generally, the younger the child and the clearer the indications of abuse or neglect, the more likely they will be able to accept the report and institute a child protective investigation.

If you make a report but the Hotline staff determines that an investigation is not justified, ask for suggestions about what you can do next. Consult with the child abuse designee or the District's Child Abuse Services Program Manager for additional assistance.

“Stand up for children, there is no excuse for child abuse”