Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
Resource Bundle

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Handling Disclosures & Reporting Abuse
Resource

Teachers are required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect if they have reason to believe that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed (Sinanan, 2011). The following is a list of guidelines to ensure that your response to suspected incidents of child abuse fulfills your responsibilities as a mandated reporter.

### Guidelines for Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect

1. **Learn your state, district, and school reporting policies for suspected cases of abuse or neglect.**
   - Learn the name and contact information of the child welfare agency that handles suspected cases of abuse in your city or state.¹
   - Most schools have internal policies for handling reports of abuse. Usually these policies require teachers to notify another professional (e.g. social worker, psychologist, nurse, principal), who will then contact the appropriate child welfare agency.
   - Teachers are held to state laws for reporting abuse. This means that you may have to personally follow up to ensure that a report was made, or make the report yourself.

2. **Report suspected abuse immediately.**
   - “Immediately” means as soon as you develop a reasonable belief or suspicion² that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed.
   - If you have any doubt as to whether a report should be made, consult with a qualified professional at your school or call the child welfare agency’s information hotline.
   - When you make a report, it should include:
     - The names, addresses, and contact information of the child, the child’s caregiver(s), and the reporter
     - Specific information surrounding the event being reported, including: physical and behavioral signs of abuse or neglect, statements made by the child or caregiver, and a description of the nature and extent of the child’s injuries (if applicable)
     - Actions taken so far by the reporter (e.g. questions he/she asked the child), and any other information that can explain the reasons for the suspicion or that will be helpful to authorities when conducting the investigation

3. **Work with other professionals to develop a plan for supporting the child at school.**
   - A child who has been abused may feel scared, ashamed, or angry, and the knowledge that the situation has been reported may make the child feel anxious and powerless.³
   - Reach out to your school psychologist and/or social worker. They have specialized training on interventions that can assist children who are in crisis or distress. Work with these professionals to develop a plan for supporting the child both in and out of class.


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¹ These agencies are called by different names in different states. Examples include: Department of Child Safety, Child Protective Services, Department of Child and Family Services, etc.

² A reasonable belief might arise from: 1) observing the abuse yourself; 2) observing physical and behavioral signs associated with abuse or neglect; 3) a child’s direct or indirect disclosure that he or she is being abused or neglected. The proper handling of disclosures is addressed on the following page.

³ A significant reason why many children do not disclose abuse is that they fear losing control over what will happen next, and that reporting the abuse will make the situation worse for them.
### Communicating With Children During Disclosures of Abuse or Neglect

*In a direct disclosure, the child tells a trusted adult (e.g. teacher, counselor) what is happening. In an indirect disclosure the child will offer “hints” that there is a problem so that the adult asks further questions*.  

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things to Do</th>
<th>Things to Avoid Doing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe environment. Ensure that the setting is comfortable and confidential. Give the child your full attention.</td>
<td>Have the conversation in a public place where there are other students around. Interrupt the child while he or she is talking.</td>
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<td>Maintain a calm demeanor.</td>
<td>React with shock, horror, or anger.5</td>
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<td>Take what the child is saying seriously.</td>
<td>Minimize what the child is saying, or suggest that it’s not serious. “Well, sometimes parents get mad at their kids.”</td>
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<td>Reassure the child that he or she did nothing wrong, and that he or she did the right thing by coming to you.</td>
<td>Scold the child, or say things that imply he or she is somehow at fault. “Why didn’t you tell me earlier?”</td>
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<td>Ask open-ended questions. “Tell me what happened.”</td>
<td>Interrogate the child by asking leading questions. “Did he touch you inappropriately?”</td>
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<td>Let the child explain what happened in his or her own words.</td>
<td>Put words in the child’s mouth, or respond with information that he or she did not give you. “So, you’re saying he molested you?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give the child an idea of what you are going to do next, and what will happen next.6</td>
<td>Make promises that can’t be kept.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect the child’s privacy.</td>
<td>Share information from the disclosure with people who are not directly involved in helping the child.</td>
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<td>Document exact quotes from the conversation.</td>
<td>Provide a general summary of what the child shared.</td>
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4 For example: telling a friend, who then tells a teacher; alluding to abuse in journal entries; disclosing abuse in the guise of “My friend told me...”; making veiled references without giving specific details (e.g. “Sometimes my mom keeps me up at night”). Older children may also engage in risk-taking or self-harm as an indirect cry for help.

5 A child can interpret such a reaction as being directed toward him or her, thus increasing his or her shame or guilt.

6 E.g. Telling the child who you need to share this information with, and what will likely happen as a result. Being as transparent as possible helps children regain some sense of control that can feel lost when they make the decision to disclose.

7 E.g. Promising that you won’t tell anyone, or that nothing bad will happen.
How does the state define child abuse and neglect?

"When a parent, guardian or custodian inflicts or allows the infliction of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation or abandonment" (A.R.S. §8-201).

- **Physical abuse** - Any non-accidental physical injury inflicted on a child by a parent, caregiver, or custodian
- **Sexual abuse** – Sexual involvement imposed upon a child by a parent or caregiver
- **Neglect** – Failure to provide for a child’s basic needs; also includes leaving children unsupervised or alone, or failing to provide care for a child’s illness or injury
- **Exploitation** – Using a child for personal or monetary gain (e.g. prostitution, forced labor)
- **Abandonment** – Failure by a parent or caregiver to provide support or maintain contact with a child

When must abuse or neglect be reported?

A report must be made when an individual develops a **reasonable belief or suspicion** that a child has been abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned. A report is not an accusation; it is merely a request for an investigation. A reporter is not required to prove abuse has occurred when making a report (A.R.S. § 13-3620).

Who must report child abuse and neglect?

In the state of Arizona, **any person** who believes that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed must immediately report this information (or cause a report to be made) to a peace officer, the Department of Child Safety, tribal law enforcement, or tribal social services (A.R.S. § 13-3620).

"Any person" includes anyone who has responsibility for the treatment or care of a minor. These individuals include:

- Any physician, physician's assistant, optometrist, dentist, osteopath, chiropractor, podiatrist, behavioral health professional, nurse, psychologist, counselor, social worker, or sexual assault victim advocate who develops a reasonable suspicion of harm in the course of treating a patient.
- Any peace officer, child welfare investigator, child safety worker, member of the clergy, priest or Christian Science practitioner.
- The parent, stepparent or guardian of the minor.
- School personnel (teachers, administrators, nurses, paraprofessionals) or domestic violence victim advocates who develop a reasonable suspicion of harm in the course of their employment.

How should the report be made?

Call the Arizona Department of Child Safety Child Abuse Hotline at 1-888-767-2445 (1-888-SOS-CHILD), any law enforcement office (state, local, or tribal), or tribal social services. Electronic reporting can be made to the Arizona Department of Child Safety. The following information will be requested with report, if available:

- Name, age, and gender of the child
- Child’s address and home phone number
- A description of the suspected abuse or neglect
- Current condition (physical, mental, emotional) of the child

For additional resources, visit the Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network.


