

Child Abuse and Neglect in Vermont



2007 Report



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Dear Fellow Vermonter:

I am pleased to present the Agency of Human Services' Department for Children and Families (DCF) 2007 Child Abuse and Neglect Report. This report highlights how important the work of DCF's Family Services Division is as they compassionately assume responsibility for protecting and keeping safe Vermont's youngest and most vulnerable residents.

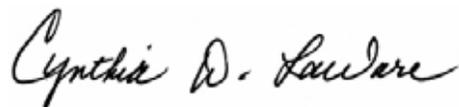
While Vermont has been ranked first in the nation in overall child well-being and early childhood health in nationwide reports, this report demonstrates that we are not immune to the unfortunate reality of child abuse and neglect. Although we have the lowest rate of child abuse fatalities in the country, and an overall low rate of child abuse, even one child being subject to abuse is one child too many. While we can be very proud of what we have accomplished, we can never be satisfied until each and every child in Vermont is able to live a safe, secure, and happy life.

The Agency of Human Services' mission is "To improve the conditions and well-being of Vermonters today and tomorrow and protect those who cannot protect themselves." We take this responsibility very seriously, as our work impacts Vermonters of every age and all walks of life. Guided by our values of respect, integrity, and a commitment to excellence, we are committed to upholding our four key practices of delivering excellent customer service, emphasizing the holistic service delivery, fostering strengths-based relationships, and focusing on results-based practices. Nowhere are these goals more important than when we are supporting our youngest and most vulnerable residents.

Within this report, you will find comprehensive information detailing the Agency's--and other community partners'-- responsibilities for keeping our children safe, how the Agency responds to reports of child abuse or neglect, statewide trends, and statistics that illustrate the challenges involved in protecting our youth.

As the enclosed message from DCF Commissioner Steve Dale explains, the Agency is in the process of rethinking, revitalizing, and reforming how we deliver these critically important services to our youngest Vermonters. We are confident that our efforts will ensure the service delivery model the Agency employs will remain efficient, comprehensive and compassionate well into the 21st century.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cynthia D. LaWare".

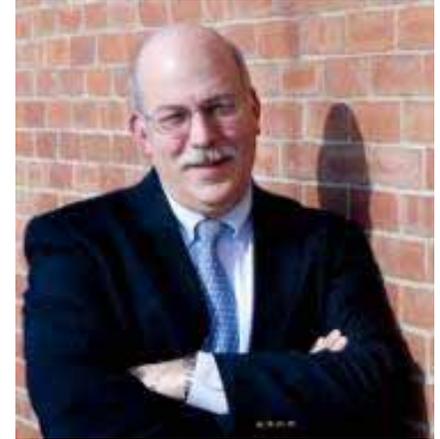
Cynthia D. LaWare, Secretary
Agency of Human Services

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Message from the Commissioner

Child abuse and neglect is quietly present in communities throughout Vermont. The Agency of Human Services' Department for Children and Families and the courts manage this societal problem as a confidential matter to help ensure child victims are not further stigmatized and families are open to receiving help. The unintended consequence of this privacy approach is that many Vermonters are unaware of the seriousness of this problem—for our state and for our nation.



The 2007 Report on Child Abuse and Neglect in Vermont calls attention to this very important issue. The effects of child abuse and neglect on children are serious and long lasting—affecting their development, their ability to learn, and their future. It can also have an impact on future generations. Many people who have serious life issues as adults can trace the beginnings of their troubles to abuse and neglect as a child.

Vermont takes this issue very seriously. While Vermont law identifies a broad spectrum of professions as mandated reporters, all Vermonters are encouraged to report their concerns to DCF Family Services. If child abuse is occurring, it is important that we are aware of it. We are committed to investigating abuse, taking action to stop it, and providing services that support healthier family functioning and address the impact of trauma on the children.

A number of actions are currently being taken to strengthen Vermont's practice around addressing this important issue. All human services agencies are committed to paying close attention to child protection issues. The legislature has just adopted a new child protection statute that will increase the options for responding to child abuse and neglect. And, DCF Family Services will be implementing centralized intake to increase consistency in practice around accepting reports.

Over the next six months, strong efforts will be made to meet with all of the key partners in the child protection arena to affirm our commitment to this effort and train everyone in the new protocols and procedures.

The first step in addressing serious social issues is to understand and accept that the problem exists. It is my hope that this report helps us all to focus on the safety and needs of our children.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Stephen R. Dale".

Stephen R. Dale, Commissioner
Department for Children and Families

Who is responsible for keeping Vermont's children safe?

The Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families has a major role in protecting children and keeping them safe. We cannot, however, do it alone. *Child protection is everyone's business.*

Working in partnership with family members, community organizations, other divisions within DCF, and other departments within the Agency of Human Services, Family Services:

- Responds to reports of child abuse and neglect;
- Provides child protective services;
- Oversees the out-of-home placement of children when necessary;
- Provides ongoing services to families at risk;
- Supports youth who are transitioning from foster care to independent living;
- Promotes permanent connections for children who cannot safely return home; and
- Provides post-adoption assistance to children with special needs.

Our ultimate goal is for children to live in safe, supportive, and healthy environments where they can grow and thrive. Every year, Family Services works with approximately 3,000 of Vermont's most vulnerable children and families; about 1,400 are children in DCF custody. These families are struggling, and they need help to keep their children safe.

Our first responsibility is to plan for safety within the child's own family when it is safe to do so. Family Services offers help to strengthen families so the children can be safe at home. These services are intended to improve parental capacities and may include teaching parenting skills, teaching conflict resolution, and linking the family to broad-based community resources.

When Family Services determines that it is not safe for a child to live with his or her family, the department asks the state's attorney to request a court hearing to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision and out-of-home placement.

If the court determines that a child cannot remain safely at home, she or he may be placed in foster care while the parents work on changes that will allow their child to return home safely.

What is child abuse and neglect?

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an *abused or neglected child* as one whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by:

1. Abandonment;
2. Emotional maltreatment;
3. Neglect;
4. Physical injury; or
5. Sexual abuse.

Risk of Harm means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.

Definitions:

Child:

An individual under age 18.

Person Responsible for a Child's Welfare:

Includes the child's parent; guardian; foster parent; any other adult residing in the home who serves in a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

Emotional Maltreatment:

A pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Neglect:

Failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

Physical Injury:

Death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual Abuse:

Any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

Who must report child abuse and neglect?

Certain people are required by Vermont law (33 V.S.A. 49, §4913) to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

Called *mandated reporters*, these individuals are legally required to report their suspicions to the Family Services Division of DCF – within 24 hours.

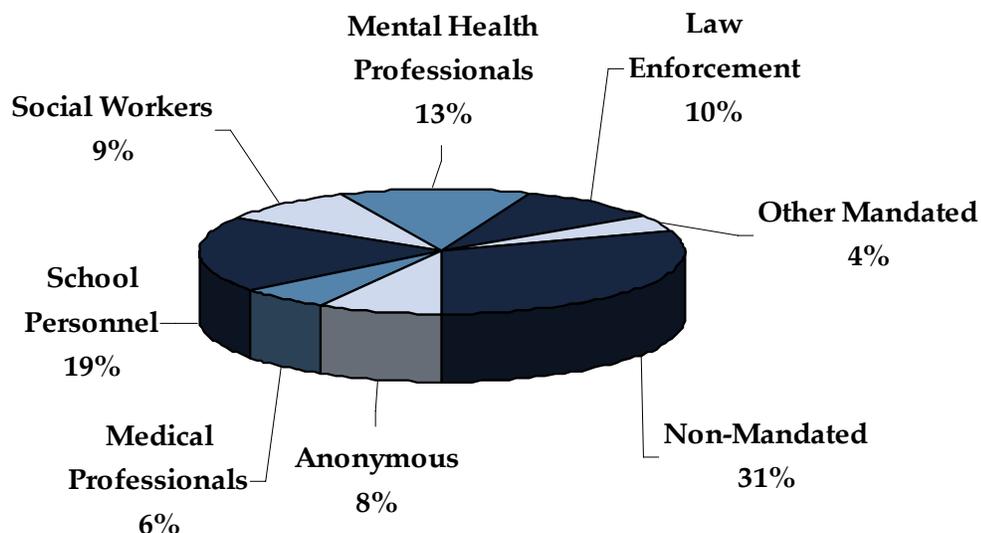
In addition, any other person who has reason to believe that a child may have been abused or neglected may make a report to Family Services.

The following chart show the per cent of reports received alleging child abuse or neglect for 2007, by type of reporter.

Mandated Reporters

- Chiropractor, dentist, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, mental health professional, osteopath, physician, physician's assistant, psychologist, registered nurse, surgeon, or any other health care professional;
- Hospital administrator, intern, or resident physician in any hospital in the state;
- School guidance counselor, librarian, principal, superintendent, or teacher;
- Childcare worker, police officer, probation worker, or social worker;
- Member of the clergy; or
- Residential and non-residential camp administrator, counselor, or owner.

Reports Alleging Child Abuse or Neglect, by type of Reporter



What happens to the reports received?

Intake workers located statewide are the central point of contact for all information regarding potential child abuse and neglect. Workers are available—by phone or in person—in all 12 Family Services District Offices as well as the Central Office in Waterbury. After hours, on weekends, and on state holidays, intake is covered by the Emergency Services Program (ESP).

Sometimes, people contact Family Services with general concerns they have about children or to consult about “hypothetical” situations. Other times, people report specific allegations of child abuse and neglect. Frequently, more than one report is received about the same incident or child.

Here’s what happens to reports alleging child abuse or neglect:

1. A Family Services supervisor reviews the reports — often the same day they are received.
2. For each report, a supervisor determines whether it alleges child abuse or neglect as defined by state law.
 - a. If it does, it is accepted for a child abuse/neglect investigation under Chapter 49 of the Vermont Statutes.
 - b. If it does not, the supervisor may have the option of initiating a family assessment (known as *Chapter 55 Assessments*) to determine whether the child is in need of care and supervision.

Under Chapter 55, Title 33 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, Family Services is authorized to assess whether a child is “in need of care and supervision” (also known as *CHINS*) for one of the following reasons:

- The child has been abandoned or abused by his or her parents.
- The child is without proper parental care or subsistence, education, medical, or other care necessary for his or her well-being.
- The child is without or beyond the control of the child’s parents, guardian, or other custodian. Or, being subject to compulsory school attendance, is habitually and without justification truant from school.

Family assessments are typically initiated when there is a pattern of concerns that do not allege child abuse or neglect as defined by statute, but is of sufficient concern to warrant some type of assessment and potential intervention.

As issues such as substance abuse have become more prevalent in Vermont, the use of *Chapter 55 Assessments* has become more common. They offer opportunities to intervene and support parents and their children in many circumstances not the least of which is prenatal substance exposure.

What are the trends statewide?

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total Contacts Received Regarding Potential Child Abuse and Neglect	12,873	12,746	12,635	12,829
Reports Accepted for Chapter 49 Child Abuse & Neglect Investigations ¹	2,631	2,371	2,528	2,633
Reports Accepted for Chapter 55 Family Assessments ²	115	176	244	305

¹ We may receive more than one report about the same incident or child. Additionally, a report may be about more than one child in a family.

² These numbers of Reports Accepted for Chapter 55 Assessments do not include those conducted because a child may be without or beyond the control of his/her parents, guardian, or other custodian or is habitually and without justification truant from school.



How many reports are accepted for investigation or assessment?

2007 Reports Accepted, by District Office		
District Office	Chapter 49 Reports Accepted For Investigation	Chapter 55 Reports Accepted For Assessment
Barre	299	42
Bennington	147	20
Brattleboro	71	15
Burlington	599	63
Hartford	177	13
Middlebury	130	12
Morrisville	144	24
Newport	101	12
Rutland	230	23
Springfield	158	21
St. Albans	327	47
St. Johnsbury	215	12
Central Office	35	1
Total Statewide	2,633	305

How does Family Services determine whether a child has been abused or neglected?

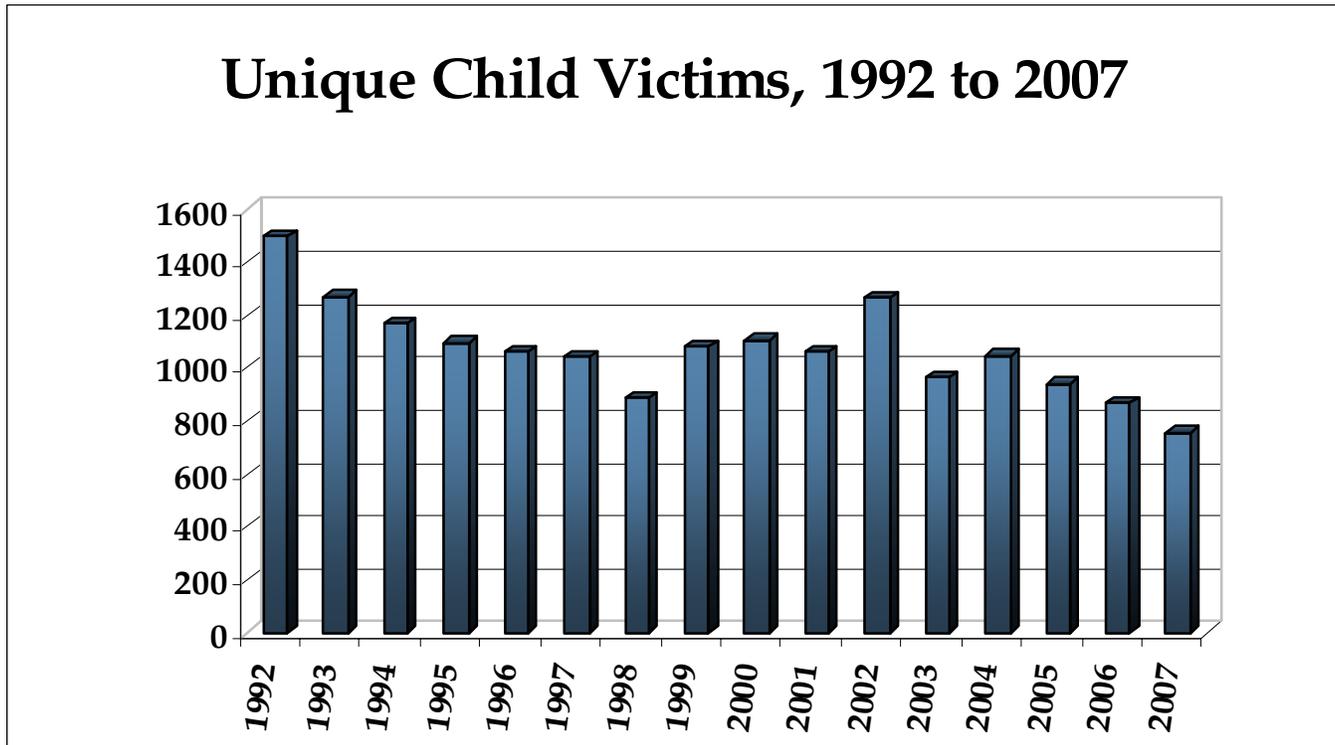
Once a report of child abuse or neglect is accepted for a Chapter 49 investigation, a social worker interviews or observes the child—typically within 72 hours. At the conclusion of a child abuse investigation, the supervisor reviews the results of the investigation to determine whether the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child has been abused or neglected. If so, the report will be *substantiated*.

In 2007, Family Services conducted 2,633 child abuse or neglect investigations. Of those, 687 were substantiated for child abuse or neglect.

District Office	# of Child Abuse or Neglect Investigations	Substantiated Investigations	Unsubstantiated Investigations	Pending ³ Investigations
Barre	299	77	217	5
Bennington	147	41	101	5
Brattleboro	71	24	45	2
Burlington	599	136	456	7
Hartford	177	63	114	0
Middlebury	130	48	82	0
Morrisville	144	26	116	2
Newport	101	22	78	1
Rutland	230	49	175	6
Springfield	158	49	103	6
St. Albans	327	91	233	3
St. Johnsbury	215	54	157	4
Central Office	35	7	24	4
Total Statewide	2,633	687	1,901	45

³ The tables that follow do not include information from the 45 investigations that are pending.

Who are the victims of child abuse and neglect?



* These tables do not include information from the 45 investigations that are pending.

Victims of Child Abuse/Neglect, by Age and Gender – 2007		
Age	Boys	Girls
0-1	5.8%	5.4%
2-5	11.2%	9.1%
6-9	11.1%	11.1%
10-13	6.2%	16.8%
14-18	4.5%	18.8%
Total	38.8%	61.2%

What type of abuse did the children experience?

Incidents of Child Abuse/Neglect, by Type of Abuse and District Office				
District Office	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Emotional/Neglect
Barre	18	28	43	9
Bennington	6	21	15	1
Brattleboro	6	20	1	1
Burlington	36	49	81	15
Hartford	12	39	19	6
Middlebury	11	19	21	6
Morrisville	8	6	18	6
Newport	6	13	4	3
Rutland	13	24	20	3
Springfield	12	25	17	3
St. Albans	17	49	45	3
St. Johnsbury	5	25	37	1
Central Office	3	4	3	0
Total Statewide	153	322	324	57

* This table does not include information from the 45 investigations that are pending.

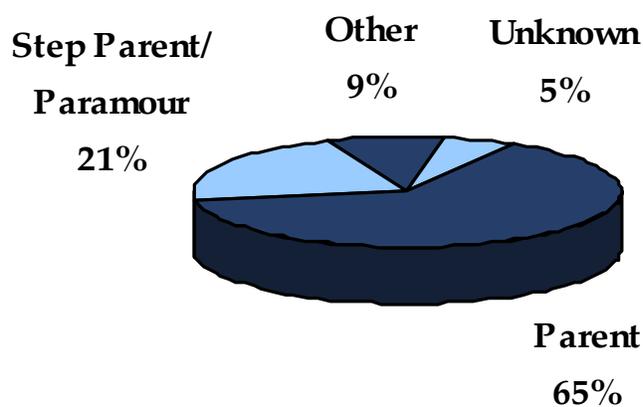
Each type of abuse experienced by a victim in a substantiated report counts as one incident of child abuse/neglect. The number of incidents is larger than the number of victims because:

- 1) victims may have suffered more than one type of abuse; and
- 2) victims may have been involved in more than one substantiated report during the year.

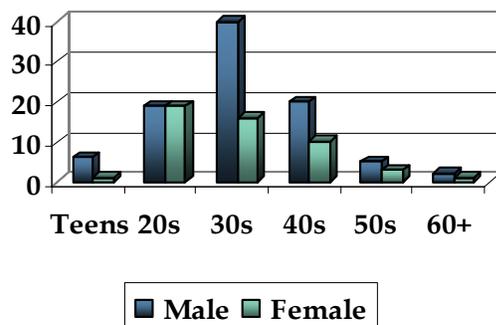
Physical Abuse

In 2007, there were 153 incidents of physical abuse. (This number does not include any incidents from the 45 investigations that are pending.)

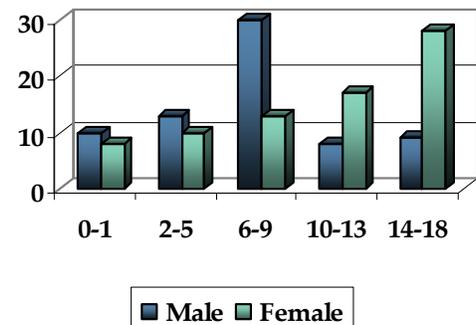
Relationship of Person who Perpetrated Physical Abuse to Victim



Incidents of Physical Abuse, by Perpetrator Age and Gender



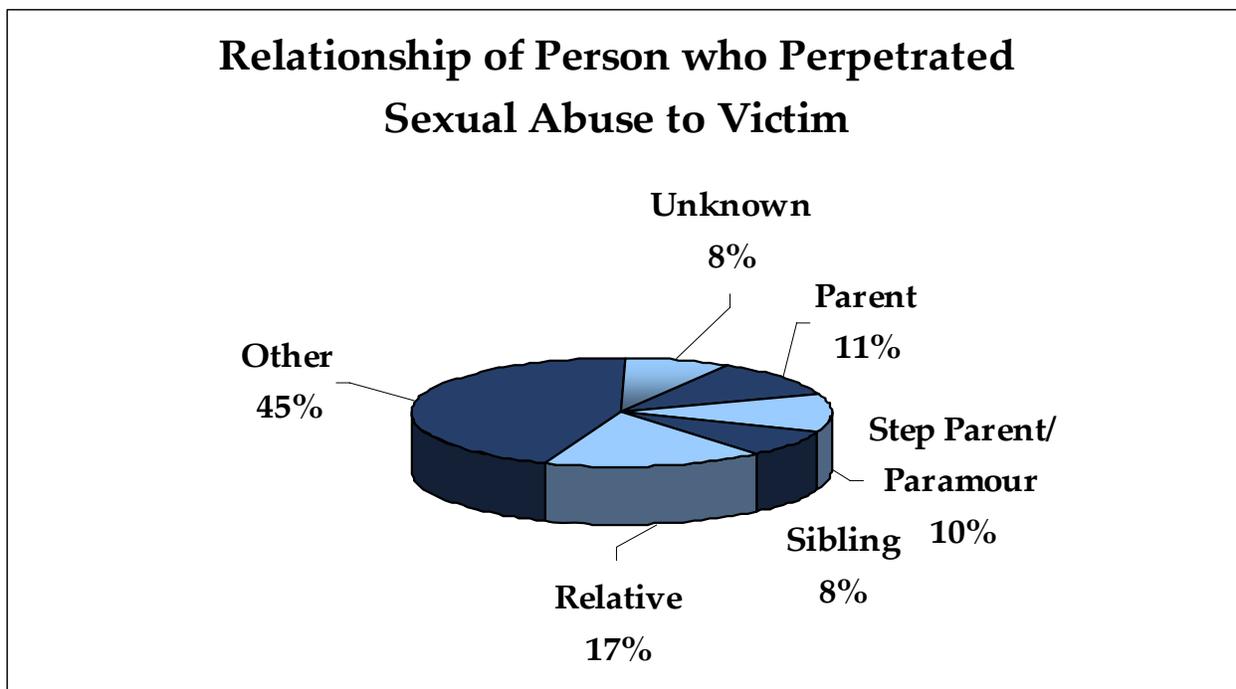
Incidents of Physical Abuse, by Victim Age and Gender



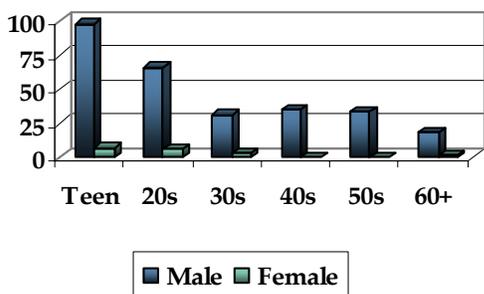
Sexual Abuse

In 2007, there were 322 incidents of sexual abuse. (This number does not include any incidents from the 45 investigations that are pending.)

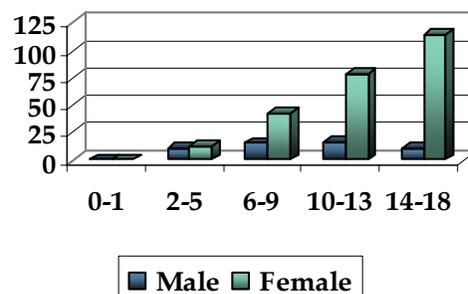
In Vermont, allegations of child sexual abuse *by any person* results in a joint investigation by the Family Services Division and law enforcement.



Incidents of Sexual Abuse, by Perpetrator Age and Gender



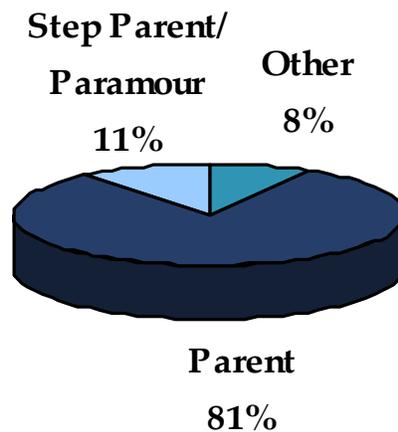
Incidents of Sexual Abuse, by Victim Age and Gender



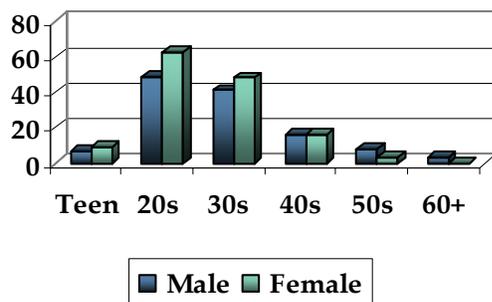
Risk of Harm

In 2007, there were 324 incidents of risk of harm. (This number does not include any incidents from the 45 investigations that are pending.)

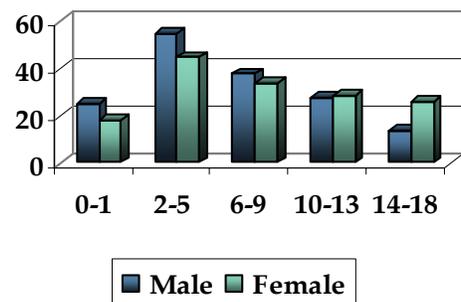
Relationship of Person who Perpetrated Risk of Harm to Victim



Incidents of Risk of Harm, by Perpetrator Age and Gender



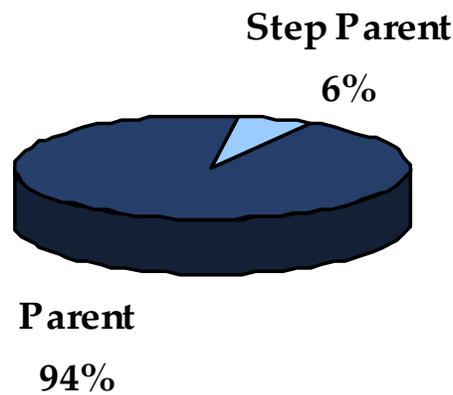
Incidents of Risk of Harm, by Victim Age and Gender



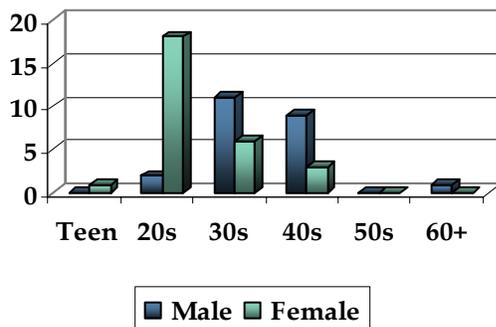
Neglect/Emotional Abuse

In 2007, there were 57 incidents of neglect and emotional abuse. (This number does not include any incidents from the 45 investigations that are pending.)

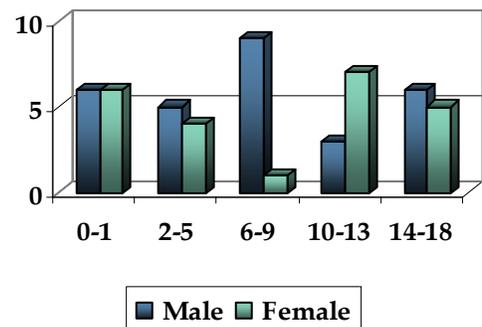
Relationship of Person who Perpetrated Neglect/Emotional Abuse to Victim



Incidents of Neglect/Emotional Abuse, by Perpetrator Age and Gender



Incidents of Neglect/Emotional Abuse, by Victim Age and Gender



How do I report child abuse and neglect?

Mandated reporters are legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to the Family Services Division of DCF—within 24 hours. (See the list of mandated reporters on page 5.)

Any other person who has reason to believe that a child may have been abused or neglected may make a report to Family Services, at any time.

How do I make a Report?

Call or visit your local Family Services District Office during regular business hours: Monday through Friday, from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (See the list of district offices on the back.) *Do not leave a report on someone's voice mail.*

After-hours, on weekends, or on state holidays, you can make a report by calling the Emergency Services Program at 1-800-649-5285.

What Information Should I Have On Hand?

Try to have as much information on hand as possible, including the names of the child's parents/caretakers; the child's name, date of birth, and school or childcare facility; and the nature and extent of the injuries or allegations of abuse.

What Happens When I Report?

A social worker will question you about the child's situation, record the information you provide, ask you to complete a written report and, in some cases, ask you to gather more information.

What If I Am Not Sure That What I Suspect Is Abuse?

Please call us for advice if you are not sure whether a report is warranted. Remember, you do not have to prove that a child has been abused. That is our responsibility.

Will My Report Be Kept Confidential?

We will not divulge your identity unless you give us your permission to do so; however, you should be aware that your identity could become known if the case goes to court.

Can I Be Sued?

Vermont law provides you with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as your report was made in good faith.

What Information Will Be Shared With Me?

If your report was accepted for investigation AND you are a mandated reporter, you can contact us to find out whether your report was substantiated. Other reporters cannot find out the outcome of an investigation.

Family Services District Offices

BARRE - (802) 479-4260

255 North Main Street, Suite 7
Barre, VT 05641-4189

BENNINGTON - (802) 442-8138

150 Veterans Memorial Drive, Suite 14
Bennington, VT 05201-1932

BRATTLEBORO - (802) 257-2888

232 Main Street, 2nd Floor
Brattleboro, VT 05301-2879

BURLINGTON - (802) 863-7370

426 Industrial Ave. Ste. 130
Williston, Vermont 05495

HARTFORD - (802) 295-8840

226 Holiday Drive, Suite 32
White River Junction, VT 05001-2024

MIDDLEBURY - (802) 388-4660

700 Exchange Street, Suite 105
Middlebury, VT 05753-1529

MORRISVILLE - (802) 888-4576

63 Professional Drive, Suite 3
Morrisville, VT 05661-8522

NEWPORT - (802) 334-6723

100 Main Street, Suite 230
Newport, VT 05855-4898

RUTLAND - (802) 786-5817

220 Asa Bloomer Bldg, 88 Merchants Row
Rutland, VT 05701-3449

ST. ALBANS - (802) 527-7741

20 Houghton Street, Suite 211
St. Albans, VT 05478-2247

ST. JOHNSBURY - (802) 748-8374

67 Eastern Avenue, Suite 4
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819-5603

SPRINGFIELD - (802) 885-8900

100 Mineral Street, Suite 101
Springfield, VT 05156-3166

After hours, on weekends, or on
state holidays, call the Emergency
Services Program at 1-800-649-5285.

dcf.vermont.gov