

The Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) shares an important responsibility with all Vermonters: keeping children safe from abuse.

Who must report child abuse?

If you work in one of the professions listed below, you are a *mandated reporter*. This means that once you suspect a child may have been abused or neglected, you are required by law to report your suspicions to the Family Services Division of DCF—within 24 hours.

- Chiropractor, dentist, emergency medical personnel, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, mental health professional, osteopath, pharmacist, physician, physician's assistant, psychologist, registered nurse, surgeon, or any other health care provider;
- Hospital administrator, intern, or resident physician in any hospital in the state;
- School guidance counselor, librarian, principal, superintendent, teacher, or any other individual regularly employed by a school district, or contracted and paid by a school district to provide student services for five or more hours a week during the school year;
- Child care worker, police officer, probation officer, social worker, or member of the clergy;
- Residential and non-residential camp administrator, counselor, or owner; and
- Employee, contractor, or grantee of the Agency of Human Services who has contact with clients.

As a mandated reporter, *you alone* are legally responsible for making sure a report is made within 24 hours.

Who else may report?

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

How do I make a report?

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call 1-800-649-5285 — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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

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, home address, school or child care facility; and
- The nature and extent of the injuries or allegations of abuse/neglect.

What if I am not sure whether what I suspect is abuse?

If you are not sure whether a report is warranted, please call us for advice. You may also want to seek our advice if you are thinking about telling the parents about your report; in some cases, this could endanger the child and hinder the response.

If a child is in immediate danger, dial 911 or call your local police. Follow up by making a report.

What happens to reports received?

A supervisor reviews the reports — often the same day they are received. For each report, the supervisor must determine whether it alleges abuse or neglect as defined by state law.

According to Vermont law, a report will be *accepted* if it indicates:

- A person responsible for a child's welfare has harmed or is harming the child by physical injury, neglect, medical neglect, emotional maltreatment, or abandonment;
- A person responsible for a child's welfare has placed the child at significant risk of serious physical harm;
- Anyone has placed a child at significant risk of sexual abuse; or
- Anyone has sexually abused a child.

What happens to accepted reports?

For each report, a supervisor must determine whether to a) open an assessment or b) open an investigation. While an investigation may be opened for any accepted report, unless there is a compelling reason to do so, assessment is the preferred child safety intervention.

The following factors will be considered:

- The nature of the abuse and extent of a child's injury, if any.
- The alleged perpetrator's prior history of child abuse or neglect.
- To the extent known by the reporter, the alleged perpetrator's willingness and capacity to accept responsibility for the conduct and engage in services.
- Strengths, supports, and resources available within the family and community.

An investigation or assessment will typically begin within 72 hours—sooner if a child is in immediate danger.

A. Assessment Response

Assessments focus on identifying:

- The strengths and support needs of children and their families; and
- Any services the family may need to improve their well-being and reduce the risk of future harm to the children.

An investigation will begin immediately if, at any time during an assessment, it appears one is appropriate.

B. Investigation Response

Family Services *will* conduct an investigation when a report alleges substantial child endangerment, including:

- Any adult sexually abused a child.
- The acts or omissions of a caregiver resulted in a child's death.
- A person responsible for a child's welfare:
 - Abandoned a child;
 - Maliciously punished a child;
 - Physically abused a child under 3;
 - Physically abused a non-verbal or non-ambulatory child of any age; or
 - Allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

Additionally, the department may investigate any report deemed appropriate.

What happens at the end of an assessment or investigation?

- An assessment results in a determination of the family's need for ongoing services.
- An investigation results in a determination (or *substantiation*) of whether the reported abuse or neglect has occurred.

What information may be shared with me?

If you are a mandated reporter, we will share the following information with you:

- Whether your report was accepted for investigation or assessment;
- If an investigation was conducted, whether it was substantiated; and
- If an assessment was conducted, whether a need for services was found.

Non-mandated reporters may not find out the outcomes of their reports.

What about HIPAA?

The HIPAA privacy rule allows covered entities to disclose protected health information to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect — if the report is made to a government authority authorized by law to receive such reports.

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.

Is my report confidential?

We will not divulge your identity unless:

- You give us your permission to do so;
- Your report leads to a court or human services board proceeding;
- A court finds probable cause to believe your report was not made in good faith and orders DCF to divulge your identity; or
- The person substantiated for abuse requests a review of the decision, and we determine that identifying information about you can be provided without compromising your safety.

Where can I get more information?

- Read the statute (Chapter 49, Title 33).
- Visit Family Services' website for up-to-date information and links to resources.

Help Prevent Child Abuse

Preventing child abuse helps ensure the safety, health, and optimal development of our children.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call Vermont's Child Protection Hotline to report it.

1-800-649-5285
(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

dcf.vermont.gov/fsd

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. An abused or neglected child also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by:

1. Abandonment of the child,
2. Emotional maltreatment,
3. Neglect, or
4. Physical injury.

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.

Risk of Harm: a significant danger 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.



How to Report Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect

 **VERMONT**
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Family Services Division