

Pennsylvania Child Abuse Reporting Information

Types of Abuse

Physical abuse - A recent act (within the past two years) or failure to act, which causes a non-accidental serious physical injury that causes the child severe pain or significantly impairs the child's functioning, either temporarily or permanently.

Sexual Abuse - An act or failure to act that results in the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage in or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer depicting or filming, of any sexually explicit conduct or the rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault or other form of sexual exploitation of children.

Mental Abuse - An act or failure to act that results in a psychological condition, as diagnosed by a physician or licensed psychologist, including the refusal of appropriate treatment that:

- Renders a child chronically and severely anxious, agitated, depressed socially withdrawn, psychotic, or in reasonable fear that the child's life or safety is threatened; or
- Seriously interferes with the child's ability to accomplish age-appropriate developmental and social tasks.

Serious Physical Neglect - A prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials of life including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's functioning. Other essentials include food, shelter, clothing, dental care, personal care, protection from physical injury and supervision.

Imminent Risk - An act or recent act or failure to act or series of such which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation to a child.

If you suspect a child has been abused, report your suspicion. Each county has a local children and youth agency that is responsible for investigating reports of suspected child abuse. Even if you have reported the abuse before and you still have concerns, keep reporting. The children and youth agency needs to know if the situation hasn't improved. We all must work together with a common goal -- the safety of the child.

Where can I report the abuse?

ChildLine - 1-800-932-0313 - A toll-free, 24-hour, 7-day-a-week hotline established by Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare to receive reports of suspected abuse and

neglect of children. The reports are forwarded to the local children and youth agency for investigation.

Children and Youth Agency - Each children and youth agency is responsible for investigating the reports and providing services to abused and neglected children and their families to prevent further abuse. To locate the phone number of your local children and youth agency view the [regional children and youth directory page](#) or the [county children and youth agency directory page](#) .

If the child is currently in imminent danger, the abuse is occurring right now or the children are home alone and unable to care for themselves, call 911 immediately.

You are protected.

Anyone who makes a report in good faith is protected under the Child Protective Services Law from criminal and civil immunity. You may choose to make a report anonymously; however, providing your name for the children and youth agency assists the agency if they have any questions about the report or need to verify information.

Mandated Reporters:

People, who through the course of their employment, occupation or practice of their profession come into contact with children, are required to report when they suspect the child coming before them has been abused. Mandated reporters include doctors, nurses, school personnel, therapists, day care staff, dentists, police officers and mental health professionals. Although mandated reporters are required to report suspected abuse to ChildLine, anyone may make a report of suspected abuse.

What information do I need?

When you make a report of suspected abuse, you will be asked for identifying information on the child, the child's family and the alleged perpetrator and for information regarding the suspected abuse. The caseworker taking the report is trying to get accurate and complete information. Information the caseworker will ask you includes:

- Names of the child, parents, siblings and alleged perpetrator;
- Birthdates (if unknown, approximate ages);
- Addresses (if unknown, directions to the home);
- Phone numbers;
- Nature of the incident (what happened, when, where, who was involved);
- How did you become aware of incident (witness, told by someone else); and
- Factors that put the child at risk (continuing contact with the alleged perpetrator, disabilities or limitations, history of domestic violence).

You do not need to have all of the above information to make a report. The more accurate information you can provide, the better equipped the children and youth agency will be to assess the child's risk.

What Happens After a Report is made?

The children and youth agency receives reports in two ways; directly to the agency or through ChildLine. The children and youth agency has 24 hours to begin its investigation and see the child. If they cannot determine from the report that the child is safe they must immediately begin the investigation and immediately see the child. After the safety of and risk of harm to the child and any other children in the home is assessed, the children and youth agency will determine if the child was abused according to the definitions previously listed. A trained child protective services caseworker will interview the child, parents and perpetrator. Witnesses to the incident also may be interviewed. The person who made the report may be contacted to verify information or to obtain more information. If appropriate, the child could be examined by a doctor.

During the investigation, the children and youth agency identifies factors associated with the alleged incident and other issues that may exist that have an impact on family functioning. The family's need for services also is assessed. Services are either provided through the children and youth agency or community agencies. The costs for services are either free or based on the family's ability to pay. Services can include counseling, classes to strengthen parenting skills, self-help groups and emergency medical services.

The investigation is completed typically within 30 days and the results are submitted to ChildLine. If the investigation cannot be completed within 30 days, the children and youth agency must document the reasons and complete the investigation within 60 days. The terms used to describe the results of the investigation are listed below:

- **Founded** - There has been a judicial adjudication that the child has been abused.
- **Indicated** - The children and youth agency found that abuse occurred based on medical evidence, the investigation or admission by the perpetrator.
- **Substantiated** - Cases that have been indicated or founded.
- **Unfounded** - Cases where there is a lack of evidence that the child was abused or it was determined that the child was not abused. (An unfounded status does not always mean that the incident did not occur. For example, the child may have received an injury from being struck as alleged, but the injury did not meet the definition of serious physical injury.)

The children and youth agency will work with families where there is a risk of abuse to decrease the risk factors by providing them with counseling, education and other supportive services. Cases where the report is unfounded but a need for services exists are handled in two ways depending upon the risk to the child. Cases where the risk is greater are opened under general protective services and a family service plan that identifies goals and services for the family is developed. Cases where the risk of abuse is low may be closed and the family referred to services within the community for assistance.

At the end of the investigation the risk of harm to the child and other children in the home is again assessed. The resulting information is used to determine whether the case will be opened, closed with referrals for service or closed without referrals.

If the children and youth agency determines that the child is in immediate danger and the only way to assure the child's safety is to remove the child from the home, the agency must seek a court order to remove the child. The first option for placement is with a willing and capable relative. If this is not possible, the child may be placed in an agency-approved foster home or residential facility. The children and youth agency also may petition the court if the family refuses to cooperate with the investigation.

Western Region

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Mandated Reporter Training

To arrange for mandated reporter training on recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse for your agency please contact your local children and youth agency, or contact the Department of Public Welfare on line at [contact DPW](#) or by phone at 717-787-3984. Education Professionals interested in Mandated Reporter Training for School Personnel by Parent's Anonymous® of Pennsylvania www.parentsanonymousofpa.org. Medical Professionals for EPIC-SCAN (Educating Physicians In their Communities- Suspected Child Abuse And Neglect) training [EPIC-SCAN training](#).