



FAQ

Assessing Safety in a Virtual Environment: Information for Educators

1. Has my role as a mandated reporter changed now that we are operating remotely?

No. As a mandated reporter, you are required to report any suspected child maltreatment whether you receive information in person or via telephone, video call, social media, or any other mode of communication. Reports can be made to CFSA's Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline 24 hours/day by calling (202) 671-SAFE.

2. Am I still responsible for assessing safety when teaching remotely?

Yes. In many cases, distance learning may be the only contact a child has with anyone outside of their immediate family. This means distance learning provides an especially important opportunity to assess students' physical and emotional safety.

Be on the lookout for the following markers:

- direct signs of physical abuse such as bruises or marks;
- symptoms of mental health concerns;
- changes in participation/children who "go silent;"
- deterioration in appearance; or
- background chaos.

3. What do I do if I notice something during a group class?

If you see or hear something concerning during a group class, look for an opportunity to have one-on-one contact with the student to ask probing questions and learn more.

Keep these tips in mind for the conversation:

- Avoid your own denial;
- Provide a safe environment for the student to share;
- Reassure the student;
- Listen and don't make assumptions; and
- Don't interrogate the student.

If you are concerned about possible abuse, try to ask questions like these to gather basic information from the child:

- What happened?
- Where did it happen?

- When did it happen?
- Who did it?
- How do you know them?

If you are concerned about possible neglect, try to ask questions such as:

- When did you last eat?
- How often are you home alone?
- Why do you think you are feeling so tired?
- It looks like you have been wearing the same clothes for the past few days, do you have other clothes?

Once you have gathered responses to your questions, call CFSA's 24-hour Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at (202) 671-SAFE.

4. What if I can't reach the child one-on-one?

If the student does not have their own phone, or when you call the household you are not able to speak to the child alone, call 9-1-1 and request that MPD conduct a welfare check, and also report the safety concern to the CFSA Hotline.

5. Is parental consent required for me to speak with children one-to-one? What if they say no?

Familiarize yourself with your school's policy regarding speaking with a child alone by phone or video chat. Building collaborative relationships from the outset is important. Let parents and children know that from time to time you will want to speak with the child alone to best support their learning and well-being. If parents seem hesitant, be prepared to explore and normalize their feelings.

If a parent declines to allow one-to-one contact with a child and you have any concerns about the child's safety or well-being, call 9-1-1 for a welfare check, and report the safety concern to the CFSA Hotline.

6. Once I talk with the child, how do I decide whether to report suspicions of child abuse?

Once you have talked to the child, if you have any concerns that they face imminent danger (immediate threat) or are at risk of danger in the future, you should make a report to the CFSA Hotline.

7. What about neglect?

Child neglect is defined as not providing basic age-appropriate care, when the lack of care is not due to financial constraints. In addition to inadequate physical care, child neglect can include a lack of medical care, inadequate shelter, or a lack of supervision. Neglect is usually characterized by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care. Educators should watch for signs of neglect (such as an unkempt or deteriorating appearance) during distance learning.

8. What if I make a mistake?

This is ok -- if you have a suspicion or concern it is always better to report it, and CFSA will make a final determination. As a mandated reporter, you are not required to have proof that a child was abused or neglected. Once you report your concern, a subsequent investigation may find that there has been no abuse or neglect. Please be assured that mandated reporters are granted immunity from criminal or civil liability when reports are made in good faith.

9. What happens after I make a report?

Once you call in your concerns, the CFSA Hotline social worker will enter a report, and the report will be reviewed by a clinical supervisor who will determine whether the information provided meets CFSA's standards for investigation.

If the report meets the standards for investigation, it will be assigned to a Child Protection Services Investigative Social Worker for response. The social worker will contact you (as the reporter) to gather any additional information and ask any clarifying questions.

You will not hear about the outcome of the investigation, due to the family's legal rights to privacy. You should continue to engage the student and family and offer your support and guidance, as you would with any of your other students.

10. If there is domestic violence when there is a child in the home, is this reportable as child abuse?

Yes. Exposure to domestic violence is harmful to children and should be reported.

11. If I suspect abuse of a child with disabilities in a home, is it reportable as child abuse?

Yes. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable due to their limited self-protective capacity. If you observe signs of neglect or abuse of a child with disabilities you should report your concerns to the CFSA Hotline and 9-1-1, if the danger is immediate.

12. If I suspect that a child is being abused because of their LGBTQ+ status, am I required to report?

Yes. In some cases, families reject, neglect, or abuse young people when they learn that they identify as LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning). According to one [study](#), 30% of LGBTQ youth reported physical violence at the hands of a family member after coming out as LGBTQ.

13. If I am concerned that a child in the household other than my student is in danger or at risk, am I required to report it?

Yes. As a mandated reporter, you are required to report child maltreatment involving any child, including children who you do not personally know. Gather as much information as possible and make a report.

14. As a mandated reporter, can I make reports anonymously?

No. As a mandated reporter, you are required to provide your name, position, and contact information. If your report results in an investigation, the CFSA investigator will keep your name, position, and contact information confidential while discussing the concerns or allegations with the family.

Keep in mind that if you are the only person to have been in contact with the family, they may be able to determine on their own that you were the source of the report. However, as a mandated reporter, this cannot stop you from reporting. Remember that your report can help protect a child and ensure needed supports are put in place for the family.

15. What if I observe (or learn of) abuse or neglect, but I have been told that it has already been reported?

As a mandated reporter, you are required to make a report of abuse or neglect even if you are told that someone else has already reported the information to CFSA. CFSA will make the determination as to how to link this to any previously reported concerns.

16. If I learn of abuse on a Friday, or during the evening, should I wait until Monday or the next business day to make the report?

No. Once you gather the information you should report your concerns immediately; the CFSA Hotline operates 24/7. Any delay may result in your student remaining in a potentially harmful situation or being exposed to further harm.

17. If I am witnessing abuse or concerning behavior while in the virtual environment when should I make the call?

If you witness abuse or concerning behavior during an online learning session, report your concerns immediately. If the student is in danger of physical harm, first dial 9-1-1 and request a welfare check, then call CFSA Hotline.

18. If I don't report, what could happen to me?

A mandated reporter's failure to report can result in a fine up to \$1,000 or up to 180 days imprisonment. There may also be ramifications for your employment, as determined by your employer.

Questions?

For questions about the information presented in this document, please contact Samira Haaker, Program Manager for CPS Hotline and Support Services at (202) 727-2220 or samira.haaker@dc.gov.

For technical questions on the "Assessing Child Safety in a Virtual Environment" webinar, contact cwta.training@dc.gov.