

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Reporting

**Q: I don't want to cause trouble, but what do I do if I know of a family that doesn't take good care for their children?**

A: If you're concerned about a child's safety or well being, please call the hotline. You may be seeing signs that a family is struggling. CFSA has many ways to help families, and stepping in early may prevent abuse or neglect.

**Q: Some children in my neighborhood miss school regularly. Is this serious enough to report as neglect?**

A: Yes. Truancy from school may be a sign of deeper family issues. Under law, schools must report chronic truancy to CFSA, and we have a unit of investigators assigned to look into reports of educational neglect. We work with parents to identify issues and find solutions that get children back in the classroom.

**Q: What will happen when I call the hotline to report child abuse and neglect?**

A: You talk to a worker trained to gather as much information as possible. Expect a substantive conversation that will allow CFSA to decide how best to handle your report.

Based on your conversation, the hotline worker makes a preliminary assessment of the child's safety and how CFSA should respond. When a child is in danger, a Child Protective Services social worker responds promptly. Otherwise, a multidisciplinary team meets three times a day to review all other reports and make the final decision about how CFSA will respond. The team directs reports along one of two pathways—family assessment or investigation. Occasionally, the team determines that a report does not meet legal criteria for CFSA intervention.

**Q: Who will know I made the child abuse/neglect report?**

A: By law, we can't disclose the identity of people who call the hotline to anyone who isn't directly involved in working on the situation. CFSA staff and other professionals who are directly involved (such as police) do need to know in order to work the case. If a case proceeds to a trial, you may be called to testify as a witness.

**Q: When I call the hotline, will CFSA automatically investigate the family?**

A: CFSA does not respond "automatically" but carefully considers how best to handle each report of abuse or neglect. When a child is in danger, a Child Protective Services social worker responds promptly. Otherwise, a multidisciplinary team meets three times a day to review all other reports and make the final decision about how CFSA will respond. The team directs reports along one of two pathways—family assessment or investigation. Occasionally, the team determines that a report does not meet legal

criteria for CFSA intervention.

**Q: How soon will someone from CFSA respond when I make a report?**

A: If the child is in danger, CFSA responds right away. When the multidisciplinary team decides CFSA should investigate, Child Protective Services workers have 24 to 48 hours to start the process. When the team decides on the family assessment approach, CPS workers have 3 to 5 days to start that process.

**Q: Does a report of child abuse and neglect always end up with children being separated from their families?**

A: Not at all. CFSA takes a positive approach with families, working to identify needs, provide helping services, and keep children safely at home. Removing a child from home is a last resort.

**Q: When CFSA does remove children, where do they go?**

A: We like to keep families together whenever possible, so the first place we look is for relatives. Most children in CFSA care are in licensed family foster homes. A very small number of older youth are in group homes or in apartments with supervision.

**Q: How long can CFSA work with a family?**

A: That varies. CFSA's mission is to ensure the safety, permanence, and well-being of abused and neglected children and those at risk, in the District of Columbia. To do that, CFSA supports troubled families in their efforts to create a stable and safe home for their children. If parents are unable to achieve this goal, CFSA and Family Court may decide that it's time to find a permanent home for the children with an alternate family.

**Q: As a mandated reporter, can I get a copy of the investigation report?**

A: Sorry, no. These documents are confidential.

**Q: What happens if my report turns out NOT to be child abuse and/or neglect? Will I be protected from a lawsuit?**

A: Yes. If you made the report in good faith—meaning you had reasonable cause to believe a child was abuse, neglected, or at risk—you are protected by law. The law presumes you acted in good faith.

**Q: Have I fulfilled my obligation as a mandated reporter if I tell my supervisor about my suspicions of child abuse or neglect?**

A: No. It is your individual responsibility to report to the hotline. Telling your supervisor or anyone else does not fulfill your legal obligation. You may want to ask

your supervisor make the hotline call with you, especially if you both have first-hand information about the child.

**Q: Does my supervisor have authority to decide whether I call the hotline?**

A: Although every organization has its own internal policies on reporting child abuse/neglect, District law states that under no circumstances shall any person in charge of an institution control, restrain, or modify a child abuse/neglect report.

**Q: If a Child Protective Services investigator wants to talk to a child at my workplace, shouldn't I be allowed to be in the room during the interview if I am the mandated reporter?**

A: Sorry, no. The investigator needs to interview the child alone and away from any type of influence.

**Q: What's the best place to get information about being a mandated reporter in DC?**

A: CFSA has comprehensive, convenient, no-cost training online specifically for professionals mandated to report child abuse and neglect in the District. Go to the CFSA website at [www.cfsa.dc.gov](http://www.cfsa.dc.gov) and click on Mandated Reporter Training on the home page. We recommend this training for every mandated reporter.

**Q: What's the most important thing I need to know about being a mandated reporter?**

A: The most important thing to remember is the hotline number: 202-671-SAFE (7233). Any time you suspect abuse or neglect, make the call. Not sure you have enough details? Make the call anyway. Not sure if it really fits the criteria for abuse or neglect? Don't sweat over the decision—go ahead and call. That's why the hotline is here.