

S^D Associates LLC

Behavioral Services Assessment, Consultation, Training and Direct Service

www.sdplus.org referrals: (802) 235-9322

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse / Neglect

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 Department of Children and Families immediately.

- 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;
- 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 or non-residential camp administrator, counselor, or owner; and
- Employee, contractor, or grantee of the Agency of Human Services who has contact with the clients.

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

How do I make a report?

Call our 24-hour child protection hotline: 1 (800) 792-5200 or if it's between 9am-5pm call the Greenfield office: 1(413) 775-5000 and ask for the Screening Unit.

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. You can fax your written report to 1 (617) 261-7435. The written report must be submitted within 48 hours of making the oral report. You can find the report template at www.mass.gov/dcf under "Child Neglect and Abuse" (find "Reporting Child Neglect and Abuse").

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 case, this could endanger the child and hinder the response.

What happens when DCF receives a report of child abuse and/or neglect?

When DCF receives a report of abuse and/or neglect, called a "51A report," from either a mandated reporter or another concerned citizen, DCF is required to evaluate the allegations and determine the safety of the children. During DCF's response process, all mandated reporters are required to answer the Department's questions and provide information to assist in determining whether a child is being abused and/or neglected and in assessing the child's safety in the household.

Here are the steps in the Child Protective Services (CPS) process:

1. The report is screened. The purpose of the screening process is to gather sufficient information to determine whether the allegation meets the Department's criteria for suspected abuse and/or neglect, whether there is immediate danger to the safety of a child, whether DCF involvement is warranted and how best to target the Department's initial response. The Department begins its screening process immediately upon receipt of a report. During the screening process DCF obtains information from the person filing the report and also contacts professionals involved with the family, such as doctors or teachers who may be able to provide information about the child's condition. DCF may also contact the family if appropriate.

2. If the report is "Screened-In", it is assigned either for a Child Protective Services (CPS) Investigation or Assessment Response:

■ *CPS Investigation Response*: Generally, cases of sexual or serious physical abuse, or severe neglect will be assigned to the CPS Investigation Response. The severity of the situation will dictate whether it requires an emergency or non-emergency investigation. The primary purpose of the Investigation Response is to determine the current safety and the potential risk to the reported child, the validity of an allegation, identification of person(s) responsible and whether DCF intervention is necessary.

■ *CPS Assessment Response (Initial Assessment)*: Generally, moderate or lower risk allegations, are assigned to the CPS Assessment Response. The primary purpose of the Assessment Response is to determine if DCF involvement is necessary and to engage and support families. This response involves a review of the reported allegations, assessing safety and risk of the child, identifying family strengths and determining what, if any, supports and services are needed.

3. A determination is made as to whether there is a basis to the allegation, whether the child can safely remain at home and whether the family would benefit from continued DCF involvement. If DCF involvement continues, a Comprehensive Assessment and Service Plan are developed with the family. Some families come to the attention of the Department outside the 51A process: Children Requiring Assistance (CRA) cases referred by the Juvenile Court, cases referred by the Probate and Family Court, babies surrendered under the Safe Haven Act, and voluntary requests for services by a parent/family. These cases are generally referred directly for a Comprehensive Assessment.

Will I be informed about the DCF determination?

If you are the mandated reporter who filed the report, you will receive a copy of the decision letter that is sent to the parents or caretaker. In that letter you will be informed of the Department's response, the determination and whether DCF is opening a case for continued DCF involvement.

What about HIPPA?

The HIPPA 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.

Does DCF tell the family who made the 51A report?

DCF regulations do not allow the Department to disclose the name of a reporter unless ordered by a court or required by statute such as when the Department is required to provide the 51A report to the District Attorney or other law enforcement (CMR 12.00 etseq.).

Where Can I Get More Information?

www.mass.gov/dcf

Referenced: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dcf/can-mandated-reporters-guide.pdf>