Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect

No child deserves to be abused or neglected. As a person who cares about children, you have a moral (and maybe a legal) responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect. The following is information that will help you recognize and report suspected child abuse and neglect.

This pamphlet was prepared by the
Jefferson County Human Services Department.

Mandated Reporters

Certain individuals whose employment brings them into contact with children are required by law to report any suspected abuse or neglect or threatened abuse or neglect to a child seen in the course of their professional duties. Anyone who suspects a child is being maltreated may make such a referral. Persons making reports in good faith are immune from criminal or civil liability.

Persons Required to Report Abuse and Neglect:
Mandated Reporters
Wisconsin State Statute 48.981(2):

Physicians, coroners, medical examiners, nurses, dentists, chiropractors, optometrists, acupuncturists, a medical or mental health professional, social workers, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, public assistance workers, school teachers, school administrators, school counselors, mediators, childcare workers in a daycare center, group home, or residential care center for children and youth, daycare providers, alcohol or other drug abuse counselors, physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, occupational therapists, dieticians, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, emergency medical technicians, first responders, police and law enforcement officers, and court-appointed special advocates.

Two new laws were enacted in Wisconsin in December 2011 to broaden the scope of individuals who are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to include various school and university employees not otherwise specified as mandatory reporters. Specifically, Act 81 extends the requirement to any school employee and Executive Order #54 extends the requirement to all University of Wisconsin System professors, administrators, coaches, and employees.

A person who is mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect will be informed by the county what action, if any, was taken to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the child who is the subject of the report.

Where to Call to Make a Report

Keep in mind that reports should be made *to the county in which the child or the child's family resides.*

County	Business Phone
Jefferson	(920) 674-3105
Dodge	(920) 386-3750
Waukesha	(262) 548-7212
Dane	(608) 261-5437
Rock	(608) 757-5401
Walworth	(262) 741-3200

Additional Information & Training Opportunities

The Children's Hospital of Wisconsin created the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Mandated Reporter Training (SCAN-MRT) Program to inform individuals of their responsibilities when they suspect child maltreatment. For additional information about the SCAN-MRT training program, go to the Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin website at www.preventchildabusewi.org or call 920/996-2210.

If you suspect abuse:

- Be aware of both physical and behavioral signs
- Be approachable - Let the child know that you are available to talk; build a relationship with the child that will allow him/her to feel comfortable sharing such difficult information with you
- Evaluate the situation - Contact local law enforcement if you think there is immediate danger to the child or get medical help immediately if you think the child has been injured
- Make a report - Remember, you only need to have "reasonable cause to believe" that a child is being abused or neglected for you to make a report - you don't need proof. If you think a child is being hurt in any way, you have a legal (in some cases) and moral responsibility to report it. You can report suspected abuse even if the child doesn't tell you about it.

If a Child Tells You About Abuse or Neglect

- Listen to and believe the child - Show through your words and actions that you are listening to the child and that you believe what the child is telling you. Encourage the child to talk but don't push him/her to do so. Use open-ended questions (such as, "What happened?") rather than leading questions (such as, "When did she hit you?").
- Be supportive of the child - Tell the child she/he did the right thing in telling you, and stress that the child is not to blame for what happened. Let the child know that you will try to help, but don't make any promises (such as, "I'll make things better") that you may not be able to keep.
- Don't overreact - Try to stay calm; this will help keep the child from becoming more frightened and may encourage him/her to tell you more. Do not talk negatively about the suspected abuser in front of the child; simply reassure the child that it is not the child's fault.
- Write down what the child says and report it - Write down as much of the child's actual words as possible so that you can share those words with the appropriate agency. Describe in writing any signs of abuse/neglect you observe.

If you need to make a report, remember:

- Anyone can make a report - while some people are legally mandated to report, you can report suspected abuse regardless of your profession or relationship to the child
- Don't delay - Never assume that somebody else will make a report, and don't put off reporting because you're not sure if you should. It is better to make a report and let trained professionals decide what action needs to be taken than to risk further harm to the child. The sooner you report, the sooner the child and family can get help.
- Identify the appropriate reporting agency (see back). You can also call your local law enforcement agency to make a report, especially if you think the child is in immediate danger.
- Try to gather as much information as you can before you make a report, including:

- Demographic information (child, parents, household members, suspected perpetrator), including full names, addresses, phone numbers, relationships, and dates of birth
- Specifics of the alleged abuse/neglect – time, place, details of injury, specific statements made by child or caretaker, concerns for child's immediate safety
- Access to alleged perpetrator
- Any knowledge you have of suspected or known past abuse/neglect
- Names and contact information for any other witness(es)
- Your relationship to the child (friend, teacher, neighbor, stranger, etc.)

Common Questions and Answers:

- **Do I need to have proof of abuse/neglect in order to make a report?** No, you need reasonable cause to believe abuse/neglect has occurred.
- **What happens after I make a report?** The agency will first determine whether the information constitutes an allegation of child maltreatment or threatened harm *as defined by Wisconsin law*. If the report is found to meet the definition of child maltreatment, the agency will investigate the case and determine whether abuse/neglect has occurred and what actions to take to ensure the child's safety and determine whether the family is in need of any services.
- **How do I know if anything is being done after I make the report?** In Wisconsin, mandated reporters usually receive information within 60 days of filing a report as to what action, if any, was taken to protect the child who was the subject of the report. In most cases, non-mandated reporters do *not* have the right to be notified of the results of an investigation.
- **Will I have to testify in court?** Not in most cases, but it is a possibility.
- **Will my report be confidential?** In most cases, yes. However, your identity may be revealed if you're called to testify in court. If you are concerned about being identified, you can make a report without giving your name.
- **Can I be sued if I report abuse/neglect and it turns out I was wrong?** Wisconsin has a law protecting people who report "in good faith," meaning that the reporter had reasonable cause to believe abuse/neglect had occurred.
- **Will the child be removed from his/her home if I make a report?** In most cases, child protective services tries to keep the child and family together and provide the needed intervention to prevent the maltreatment from occurring. If the child is in immediate danger, he/she may be removed and placed in protective custody. More often, the alleged perpetrator is required to leave the home.