

Mandated Reporter Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is mandated reporting?

Mandated reporting is the early recognition of child maltreatment with the goal of preventing further abuse from occurring. Many mandated reporters have professional relationships with children that make it possible for children to disclose abuse or for the mandated reporter to identify maltreatment.

Anyone working with children under 18 years of age who have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect should report it. However, certain professions are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect in Georgia [OCGA 19-7-5(c)(1)]. Most reports are made by mandated reporters, making them a first line of defense. The law aims to protect and prevent further abuse and its adverse effects as well as bring protective services into the home with the hopes of improving the child's welfare and preserving the family when possible.

The following professionals are considered Mandated Reporters according to Georgia law:

Child Welfare agency Personnel Child Service Organization Personnel Counselor/ Social Worker Dentist Hospital or Medical Personnel/Volunteer Licensed Psychologists a Marriage and family therapists Physicians, Physician Assistants, Interns or Residents	Podiatrist Pregnancy Resource Center Personnel and Volunteers Psychiatrist Registered Nurse/ Nurse Aides Reproductive Health Care Personnel School Administrator/School Guidance Counselor School Personnel School Psychologist School teacher / Visiting Teacher
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2. When should I make a report?

You should make the report as soon as you have reason to believe abuse is occurring, witness the abuse or receive a disclosure. Ideally, you should report the abuse immediately but at least within 24 hours. You do not need to have proof or knowledge beyond a reasonable doubt that abuse is occurring. All you need is a suspicion. Again, this means that you do not have to have proof just knowledge to reasonably suspect abuse. Do not wait for proof or more information to make a report.

3. How do I make a report?

You have three options to make a report:

- Option 1: Report by calling the 1-855-GA-CHILD (422-4453) number 24/7.

When making a report try to include:

- Names and addresses of the child(ren) and the child's parents or caretakers

- The child's age
 - Nature and extent of the child's injuries, including any evidence of previous injuries
 - Information that the reporting person believes might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries and the identity of the perpetrator
 - Include the child's current location and other children in the home
- Option 2: E-mail the completed Georgia Mandated Reporter form to customer_services_dfcs@dhs.ga.gov or fax the form to 229-317-9663. You will receive an auto-reply confirmation and possibly a return phone call within two hours to acknowledge your report and collect any additional information needed. Please include a number where you can be reached on the report.

To request a PDF version of the form, contact customer_services_dfcs@dhs.ga.gov

- Complete the digital form located at <https://cps.dhs.ga.gov>. A private code is needed to access the digital form which requires you complete the online mandated reporter training through Prosolutions.

Proolutions Website: <https://prosolutionstraining.com>

Mandated reporters are required to report immediately, but at least within 24 hours (O.C.G.A §19-7-5 (e)(2016).

4. How do you know if a child is being abused without seeing the child in-person?

- a. You can ask open-ended questions about their current situation and inquire about who they are interacting with.
- b. You do not need proof of abuse to make a report. You only need to suspect the abuse. However, it is always important to provide as many details as possible to the Intake Caseworker. This will provide DFCS with enough information to warrant an assessment of the child.

5. How do you make a report without putting the child in harm's way?

- Making the report is the first step in protecting the child. Make a report by calling the 1-855-GA-CHILD (422-4453) number 24/7. If you are concerned the child is in immediate danger, please call 911 immediately.

6. What time of day is the child abuse reporting hotline, 1-855-GA-CHILD, available?

Reports are taken 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-855-GACHILD (1-855-422-4453).

7. What information do I need to make a referral and report a suspected incident of child abuse and neglect?

DFCS may ask the following questions:

- What happened and who is involved? What happened refers to the type of maltreatment and injury sustained.
- Describe your observations (description should include details about injury/incident, environment, home conditions, severity, impact on the child, etc.).
- When and where did the incident occur (include current location of the child(ren))
- What was going on before, during, and after the specific incident/circumstances/alleged maltreatment you are concerned about?
- Can you describe the caregiver's ability to protect/provide for the child and the child's ability to protect/provide for themselves? (e.g. Does either the caregiver or child have any developmental delays, special needs, malnourished? What is the child's maturity level? Does any caregiver have the ability to protect the child? Please provide examples).
- Family supports, additional comments, or worker safety concerns?

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- Include the child's current location and other children in the home

8. As a mandated reporter, do I have rights?

As a mandated reporter, you do have rights. Those rights include anonymity or confidentiality, limited liability, and knowledge of the outcome of a report (only whether the case was substantiated or not).

While anonymous reports are allowable, it is helpful to provide your name if further information is needed. Additionally, if you would like to receive the outcome of the investigation and the mandated reporter letter, you will need to provide an email.

9. What are the penalties for not making a report?

A person who is required to report child abuse and who fails to do so has committed a crime. Penalties vary by state. Your state law defines the type of crime as well as imprisonment and/or any fines imposed.

10. Can I make an anonymous call to report an incident of child abuse or neglect?

Reports are confidential and those who call do not have to provide their name. However, it is most helpful to the child, in the long run, if the reporter is willing to provide his or her name and address and, if necessary, testify in court.

11. How can I find out what happened with a case of child abuse and neglect after I have reported it to DFCS?

If the person who makes the original report wants to know the outcome of the report, DFCS is not at liberty to share report information or outcomes with the general public. However, if the reporter is a mandated reporter, a letter will be provided to indicate if the report was accepted or screened out.

12. Will I receive a case tracking number for my call to DFCS?

All reported cases of suspected child abuse or neglect are assigned a case number. However, DFCS is not at liberty to share report information or outcomes with the general public.

13. Can a family find out that I am the person who reported the abuse/neglect?

Information regarding reporters of child abuse and neglect are confidential. Reports of child abuse and neglect can be made anonymously.

14. After I have reported the abuse/neglect, how soon will DFCS take action?

If DFCS determines the child is in immediate or impending danger, DFCS will begin an initial safety assessment immediately to 24 hours after receiving the allegations of child abuse/neglect by a caretaker. If allegations of maltreatment are present and the child is not in immediate or impending danger, DFCS will respond within 72 hours.

15. How can you differentiate child abuse from brittle bone syndrome?

The child will need extensive medical testing, preferably done under the watch of a child abuse pediatrician or another pediatrician with specialty training or experience working with children who have been abused. There are tests that need to be ordered but a solid history of the extent of fractures throughout the child's life is important as well to determine mild vs. severe cases. A child with osteogenesis imperfect (brittle bone syndrome) will often have an extensive history of fractures beginning early in life (sometimes even during birth) along with other physical signs that may be present.

16. If a family is experiencing hardship or poverty and it affects the child(ren), should I make a report? Is it appropriate to report a family for experiencing poverty?

Keep in mind, living in poverty or having limited resources is not neglect. However, a family's failure to use available information and resources to care for their child may put the child's health or safety at risk, and DFCS intervention could be required. If you believe the child's safety and well-being are at risk, please make a report.

You can also familiarize yourself with community support and resources such as the 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline or Georgia Family Connection Partnerships. These are great resources to provide to families that need support but do not require a report to DFCS.

17. Should I ask the child about an abuse concern, or try to investigate the situation further?

It can be tempting to try and get more information to better understand the situation, but *this is usually not a good idea and can impair the ability of other authorities to keep the child safe*. Asking questions can influence what a child says in the future, and can suggest that what they initially told you was not "ok" or you didn't believe them.

The best way to react to a child's statement about potential abuse or neglect is to reassure them that whatever happened wasn't their fault, and that they deserve to be safe, healthy and happy at home, at school and in the community. It may be helpful to ask them what they think might help or if they need an adult's help to feel safe at home.

If you feel you *must* gather more information, *make sure you ask open-ended questions* rather than leading or closed-ended questions. For example, you might say, "Tell me more about that." Or "I'm not sure I understand, can you explain what happened?" Questions like "Did your dad give you that bruise?" or "Were you hurt by someone in your family?" may suggest a particular response and can complicate efforts to ensure the child's safety.

Use the information on pages 3-6 of your Mandated Reporting Handout to assist you if you choose to discuss these concerns with a child.

18. What should I do if a child discloses abuse to me?

When a child reports abuse to you, it is very important that you listen without expressing anger or disbelief. Children first need to know that they are believed and that the abuse is not their fault. Listen attentively and ask only open-ended questions, like "then what happened?"

If possible, determine what happened, where and when it happened, and by whom. This is sometimes called a "minimal fact" interview. However, do not ask leading questions or try to draw out information, even if you are certain you know the answers. This can re-traumatize the child and contaminate the investigation.

Do not attempt further investigation on your own – and especially do not investigate physical signs. Report immediately to law enforcement, child protective services, or both. Do not make false promises to the child like keeping the disclosure confidential. Trained investigators need to gather facts and details, and this may involve talking to the child. You do not need to have proof of sexual abuse to make a good faith report.

19. Can I be sued for making a report? Can any other negative action (i.e. revocation of my professional license, fines, court action, etc.) occur because I did or didn't make a report?

If you make a report about suspected child abuse or neglect in good faith, you are immune from any liability resulting from the report (*RCW 26.44.060*).

If you *fail to make a report* when you have reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred, you may be subject to criminal prosecution, as well as criminal and civil penalties.

20. What about confidentiality? My profession must keep the information clients disclose confidential.

O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5

(g) Suspected child abuse which is required to be reported by any person pursuant to this Code section shall be reported notwithstanding that the reasonable cause to believe such abuse has occurred or is occurring is based in whole or in part upon any communication to that person which is otherwise made privileged or confidential by law; provided, however, that a member of the clergy shall not be required to report child abuse reported solely within the context of confession or other similar communication required to be kept confidential under church doctrine or practice. When a clergy member receives information about child abuse from any other source, the clergy member shall comply with the reporting requirements of this Code section, even though the clergy member may have also received a report of child abuse from the confession of the perpetrator.

21. What about informing the parents that I have made a report? Am I required to or prohibited from telling them?

There is no legal requirement to tell parents that you have made a report concerning their child, or to withhold that information. You may want to discuss your concerns with the staff person taking the report, as they can help you think through the possible consequences of telling or not telling the parents.

In some circumstances, telling the parents before a DFCS case worker has met with the child might further endanger the child. In those cases, it's important not to discuss the report until the case worker has made contact with the family.

22. “At my workplace, we are required to discuss concerns about possible child abuse and neglect with a designated staff person or supervisor first, and that person makes the decision about whether a report will be made. Is this ok?”

O.C.G.A. §19-7-5.

(2) If a person is required to report abuse pursuant to this subsection because that person attends to a child pursuant to such person's duties as a member of the staff of a hospital, school, social agency, or similar facility, **that person shall notify the person in charge of the facility, or the designated delegate thereof, and the person so notified shall report or cause a report to be made in accordance with this Code section.** A staff member who makes a report to the person designated pursuant to this paragraph shall be deemed to have fully complied with this subsection. **Under no circumstances shall any person in charge of such hospital, school, agency, or facility, or the designated delegate thereof, to whom such notification has been made exercise any control, restraint, modification, or make other change to the information provided by the reporter,** although each of the aforementioned persons may be consulted prior to the making of a report and may provide any additional, relevant, and necessary information when making the report.

23. Is there any way for children to check in with the teacher one-on-one?

There should be an administrator involved in all meetings. Students can email their teacher directly and set up a private meeting if available. This will vary from district to district.

24. Question prompts for educators and child serving professionals to use when they call to check on students:

- It is important to build a rapport with children and ask open ended questions such as:
 - "How are things going at home?"
 - "How do you feel about your time at home?"
 - "Who are you hanging out with at home?"
 - "Tell me more about that."
 - If there are concerning or vague answers you may want to follow up with "Are you feeling safe/hungry/comfortable, etc.?"

Mandated Reporting During COVID-19

1. What are suggested strategies for mandated reporting after children return to school?

Strategies for mandated reporting will be the same after the crisis; however, it is important to be aware that there will likely be an increase in reporting (from our current situation) once children are able to interact with others outside the home. Since school has been suspended until August, the first youth-serving adults that children will likely interact with outside of family may be camp counselors, recreation center staff, childcare centers, faith leaders, etc. It is important to reiterate mandated reporting procedures to these youth-serving adults.

2. Is there a specific protocol for case workers when making face-to-face visits such as placing children in foster homes?

On March 16, 2020, DFCS Director Tom Rawlings sent all DFCS staff the DFCS Child Welfare Temporary Direct Services Continuity Standard Operations Procedure (SOP) Number 20:01 depicting the current protocol for making face-to-face visits with families and children. However, each local DFCS office should have something in place to narrow the scope of this process even further and any additional questions should go to the entities outlined in his email directive.

3. Is there any public outreach via social media or local channels encouraging general public to report any signs of child abuse during COVID-19?

Please refer to the following resources for more information:

Reporting During COVID-19 – Prevent Child Abuse Georgia

Link: <https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/free-online-mandated-reporting/>

Protecting Children During Covid-19 – End Violence Against Children

Link: <https://www.end-violence.org/protecting-children-during-covid-19-outbreak>

Additional Resources

- **Autism Speaks – COVID-19 Information and Resources for Families**
Link: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/covid-19-information-and-resources-families>
- **Childhelp – National Reporting Hotline and Text line for Children and Youth**
Link: <https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>
- **Mental Health America of Georgia – Mental Health & COVID-19 Resources**
Link: <https://www.mhageorgia.org/covid19/>
- **Prevent Child Abuse Georgia Resources on Recognizing and Reporting During Physical Distancing**
Link: <https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/free-online-mandated-reporting/>
- **Prevent Child Abuse Georgia In-Person Mandated Reporter Training**
Link: <https://abuse.publichealth.gsu.edu/training/>
- **ProSolutions Online Mandated Reporting Training**
Link: https://www.prosolutionstraining.com/content/?id=41/Mandated_Reporters_Georgia/