Local Department of Social Services
Response

After a report is made, a child protective services (CPS) worker will interview the child and siblings. The interview may occur at school. Parental consent to interview at school is not necessary pursuant to Section 63.2-1518 of the Code of Virginia.

The CPS worker will also interview the parents or caretakers, the alleged abuser and other persons having information about the suspected abuse or neglect.

The CPS worker will conduct a child safety assessment; determine if child abuse or neglect occurred or if there is risk of harm; and develop a safety and services plan with the family when indicated.

The primary goal of child protective services is to strengthen and support families in preventing the (re)occurrence of child maltreatment through community-based services.

Talking with the Child

When it is necessary to talk with a child in response to a disclosure of maltreatment or to clarify suspicions, it is important to remember to handle the discussion with sensitivity. Your response has the power to calm or upset the child.

Do:
- Find a private place to talk
- Reassure the child that he/she is not in trouble
- Keep your own feelings under control
- Listen
- Use open ended questions, “Tell me what happened?”
- Use the child’s vocabulary
- Let the child know what you will do
- Support the child

Do Not:
- Press for details beyond what the child is willing to share (You do not need to prove abuse or neglect)
- Promise confidentiality
- Ask leading or suggestive questions
- Make angry or critical comments about the alleged abuser
- Disclose information indiscriminately, keeping in mind the child’s right to privacy

School employees reporting in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability pursuant to Section 63.2-1512 of the Code of Virginia.

Additional Information

For additional information, prevention materials, and/or in-service training, contact your local social services department or the Virginia Department of Social Services at www.dss.virginia.gov

Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-552-7096
Language Interpretive Services Available
What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Section 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia defines an abused or neglected child as any child under 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child’s care:

1) Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury.
2) Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury during the manufacture or sale of certain drugs.
3) Neglects or refuses to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care.
4) Abandons the child.
5) Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child’s age and level of development.

Physical and Mental Abuse

Abuse and neglect of children occurs within families and in other settings where children are provided care or services. These settings include schools, residential facilities, day care centers/homes, and recreational or sporting programs.

As a school employee who has daily contact with students, you are in a key position to recognize indicators of child maltreatment and request help and services for the child and his/her family.

Making a Difference in a Child’s Life

Each year in Virginia, approximately 50,000 children are reported to local social services departments for suspected child abuse or neglect. Many of these children attend public and private schools.

Required Reporting

Section 63.2-1509A of the Code of Virginia requires teachers or other persons employed in a public or private school, kindergarten, or nursery school, when acting in their professional roles, to immediately report suspicions of child abuse or neglect that may have occurred both within and outside of the school setting.

Reports can be made by calling your local social services department or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.

The Code of Virginia permits school employees to immediately notify the person in charge at his/her school, or his designee, who “shall make a report forthwith” and provide the name of the individual receiving the report, and shall forward any communication resulting from the report, including any action taken regarding the report to the person who made the initial report.

Physical Indicators

- Unexplained bruises on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs
- Multiple injuries in various stages of healing
- Bruises/welts resembling instrument used e.g. belt, cord
- Human bite marks
- Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.
- Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions

Behavioral Indicators

- Reports injury by caretaker
- Uncomfortable with physical contact
- Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably
- Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)
- Afraid to go home
- Chronic runaway (adolescents)
- Behavior extremes (withdrawn, aggressive)
- Apprehensive when other children cry

Physical Neglect

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene
- Untended physical problems or medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Abandonment

Sexual Abuse

- Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens)
- Pregnancy
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pain or itching in genital area
- Torn, stained, or bloody underwear
- Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia

Mental Abuse or Neglect

- May have frequent stomach aches, head aches or unexplained weight fluctuations
- May have speech disorders
- May lag in physical development
- May have a non-organic, failure-to-thrive medical diagnosis
- May have learning problems

*Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

*A combination or pattern of indicators should alert you to the possibility of maltreatment. Indicators should be considered together with the explanation provided, the child’s developmental and physical capabilities, and behavior changes.

**Note:** The image contains text that is not fully visible due to the cropping of the image.