



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

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 they are 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 next
- ▶ 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

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.



Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia

A Guide for School Employees

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

Virginia Department of Social Services
801 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.dss.virginia.gov

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.

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 their family.

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, supervision, emotional nurturing, or health care.
- 4) Abandons the child.
- 5) Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or use a child in any sexually explicit visual material.



- 6) Knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender.

An abused or neglected child includes a child who has been sex trafficked.

In addition, the law requires health care providers to report newborns who are affected by substance abuse or experiencing withdrawal symptoms as a result of being exposed to drugs or alcohol during pregnancy.

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 their 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.

*Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

| | Physical Indicators | Behavioral Indicators |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Physical Abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent hunger, poor hygiene • Unattended physical problems or medical needs • Consistent lack of supervision • Abandonment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports no caretaker at home • Begg, steals food • Frequently absent or tardy • Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class • Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure) • Shunned by peers |
| Sexual Abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens) • Pregnancy • Difficulty walking or sitting • Pain or itching in genital area • Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing • Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports sexual abuse • Highly sexualized play • Detailed, age inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior • Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings • Chronic runaway • Excessive seductiveness • Suicide attempts (adolescents) • Deterioration in academic performance • Sudden, noticeable behavior changes |
| Mental Abuse or Neglect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits age inappropriate behaviors such as thumb sucking, biting, head banging or rocking • Exhibits extreme behaviors such as over compliance, passivity, aggression, or withdrawal • Exhibits emotional or intellectual developmental delays • Exhibits cruel behavior or may seem to get pleasure from hurting others and/or animals • May abuse alcohol or drugs • May have eating disorders |

*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.