

Mandated Reporting: Information for School Staff During 'Safer at Home'

Know the Signs

As mandated reporters, all school employees should be aware of the signs of child abuse and neglect and to know how to report those signs to their local child welfare agencies. During this extraordinary time, it is important to continue to let students know you remain a supportive, caring adult in their lives.

Consider the context

It is essential to keep in mind that during these challenging times families are doing their best to navigate the realities of work, home, children, and life stressors. One of the signs as listed below, such as failing to complete coursework, does not necessarily indicate abuse is occurring. These signs may provide an indication that a family may be struggling and in need of additional support. Also, keep in mind comments heard over the phone or through virtual platforms can be out of context. Conversations with students and caregivers can help school staff better understand the circumstances and may help provide information about concerns. Question prompts are provided on the next page to assist staff in their conversations with students and families.

Signs of Neglect

- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriately dressed for weather or social situation
- Needs medical or dental care
- Left alone, unsupervised for long periods
- Failure to thrive, malnutrition
- Constant hunger, goes to open an empty fridge multiple times during a virtual meeting
- Extreme willingness to please
- Does not attempt to complete any assignments or check-ins with teachers
- Does not respond to any method of communication such as phone, mail, virtual

Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Low self-esteem
- Self-denigration
- Severe depression
- Unusual level of aggression
- Severe anxiety
- Extreme withdrawal
- Failure to learn

Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Pain, swelling, or itching in genital area
- Bruises, bleeding, discharge in genital area
- Difficulty walking or sitting, frequent urination, pain
- Stained or bloody underclothing
- Sexually transmitted infection or disease
- Poor peer relationships
- Unusual interest in sex for age
- Drastic change in school achievement even for the context
- Runaway or delinquent behavior
- Regressive or childlike behavior

Signs of Physical Abuse

- Bruises, welts on face, neck, chest, back
- Injuries in the shape of object (belt, cord)
- Unexplained burns
- Fractures that do not fit the story of how an injury occurred
- Delay in seeking medical help
- Extremes in behavior: very aggressive or withdrawn and shy
- Afraid of adult in home
- Frightened of adult hearing conversation with others

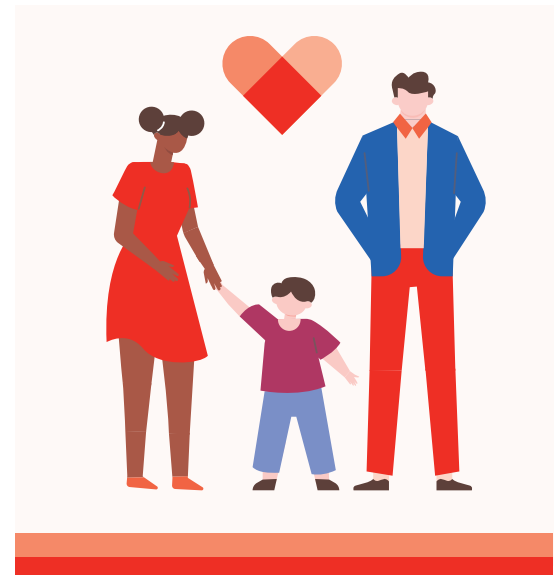
To report a case of child abuse or neglect, contact the county or tribe where the child or child's family lives. If the agency is not known, contact the closest county or call 9-1-1. Contact information for county and tribal child welfare agencies is available at dcf.wisconsin.gov.

Questions To Further Understanding

Sometimes a comment from a student or what can be observed is not sufficient information to determine if a report is necessary. In these circumstances, a school staff member should have more conversation with the student. School staff are encouraged to ask open-ended questions to better understand a student's situation, and to provide support. School staff should not conduct an interview of a student and should not ask leading questions. Once it is determined a report is or is not necessary, no further questions should be asked.

Questions for Students

- Tell me about how things are going at home.
 - Are you worried about anything?
 - How is learning from home different from learning at school?
- Who is taking care of you?
 - Do you have everything you need?
- How is everyone getting along with each other?
 - Are you worried about anyone?
 - How can you tell when someone in your home is having a hard time – what do they do and what makes them feel better?
- Tell me about what your day is like. Do you have a schedule?
 - What things do you like to do at home? What don't you like to do?
- What do you like most about staying at home? What do you like least?
 - What do you miss the most about school?



Questions for Caregivers

- Is now a good time to talk? If not, is there a better time for me to call?
- Are there any resources or information I could provide?
- Are you able to access what you need to care for your family? (food, clothing, housing, medical care)
- How is everyone getting along with each other?
- Are you worried about anyone? Why?
- What's it like parenting right now?
 - How is it different?
 - What's going well and what are some of the challenges?
- How are you coping with stress?
 - What seems to be bothering you the most?
 - What makes it better/worse?

Make a Report if Necessary

If you reasonably suspect a student is unsafe in their home, you must make a report.

Additional training for school mandated reporters can be found at:

dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pupil-services/school-social-work/contents/child-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect