

## Wisconsin's Child Protective Services (CPS) System

The purposes of the CPS System are:

- To promote the well being of the child in his or her home setting, whenever possible, or in another safe and stable placement;
- To assure that appropriate protective services are provided to abused and neglected children and their families and to protect children from further harm;
- To provide support, counseling and other services to children who have been abused or neglected and their families;
- To protect the health, safety and welfare of children by providing education on the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect.

Chapter 48 of Wisconsin's Statutes defines abuse as:

### Physical Abuse

Physical injury inflicted on a child by other than accidental means. Physical injury includes, but is not limited to, lacerations, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, severe or frequent bruising or great bodily harm.

### Sexual Abuse

Sexual intercourse or sexual touching of a child, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking of a child, forced viewing of sexual activity, or permitting, allowing or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution.

### Emotional Damage

Harm to a child's psychological or intellectual functioning which is exhibited by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal or aggression.

Emotional damage may be demonstrated by substantial and observable changes in behavior, emotional response or learning which are incompatible with the child's age or stage of development.

## Neglect

When a parent. . .or caretaker. . .fails, refuses or is unable, for reasons other than poverty, to provide the necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care which seriously endanger the physical health of the child.

## MANDATED REPORTERS

Mandated reporters are required to report suspected abuse and neglect of any child they see in the course of their professional duties. They must also report those situations in which they have reason to believe that a child has been threatened with abuse or neglect and that abuse or neglect is likely to occur.

Examples of mandated reporters include law enforcement officials, medical and mental health. Professionals, school teachers, counselors, and administrators, and social and child care workers etc.

For a full listing of mandated reporters, please refer to the Wisconsin Children's Code and Juvenile Justice Code [s. 48.981(2)(a)].

Any other person may report if there is a reason to believe that a child has been abused or neglected or has been threatened with abuse or neglect.

### Penalty

**Persons required to report and who intentionally fail to report suspected child abuse or neglect may be fined up to \$1,000 or imprisoned for up to 6 months or both.**

**Persons who report in good faith are immune from civil or criminal liability.**

## REPORTING IS NOT "MEDDLING"

Deciding to get involved in a situation of suspected abuse or neglect can be difficult. It is, however, a decision that may be crucial to a child not only today, but also in the future. Parents who have abused or neglected their children may need services and support to provide safe care for their children.

## HOW TO REPORT

Contact your county social/human services department, sheriff, or local police department immediately - by telephone or in person.

## WHAT TO REPORT

Explain, as well as you can, what happened or is happening to the child. Describe the nature of the abuse or neglect. Be as specific as possible.

Be prepared to give the name, address, and telephone number of the child and also the name of the parent or caretaker. Even if you do not know all of this information, report what you do know.

Tell all you know about the situation.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

A social worker from the county department of social/human services, an agency under contract with the county department or the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services will work with the parents and assess the situation to determine if any support or assistance is needed to protect the child and help the family.

Services available to help the family and the child include counseling, in-home services, mental health and alcohol or drug abuse services, assistance or training in home and financial management, parent education and self-help groups. In severe situations, it may be necessary to temporarily place a child in out-of-home care.

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.

### **SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT**

Following are the major signs of physical and sexual abuse, emotional damage and neglect. One of these, or even several in combination, may not indicate that abuse has occurred. They may indicate accidents or that medical conditions, emotional illness or other problems exist. If a number of these signs occur together or if they reoccur frequently, child abuse and neglect may be suspected.

### **SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE**

- Bruises, welts on face, neck, chest, back
- Injuries in the shape of object (belt, cord)
- Unexplained burns on palms, soles of feet, back
- 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 to go home
- Frightened of parents
- Fearful of other adults

### **SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DAMAGE**

- Low self-esteem
- Self-denigration
- Severe depression
- Aggression
- Withdrawal
- Severe anxiety

### **SIGNS OF NEGLECT**

- Poor hygiene, odor
- Inappropriately dressed for weather
- Needs medical or dental care
- Left alone, unsupervised for long periods
- Failure to thrive, malnutrition
- Constant hunger, begs or steals food
- Extreme willingness to please
- Frequent absence from school
- Arrives early and stays late at school or play areas or other people's homes

### **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
- Venereal disease
- Refusal to take part in gym or other exercises
- Poor peer relationships
- Unusual interest in sex for age
- Drastic change in school achievement
- Runaway or delinquent
- Regressive or childlike behavior

### **YOU CAN HELP! REPORT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

**Immediately contact your county department of social or human services, sheriff, or the local police.**

To locate the appropriate county human/social service agency to report:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/reportabuse>

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access this information in an alternate format, or need it translated to another language, please contact (608) 266-8787 or the (Wisconsin Relay Service WRS) - 711 TTY. For civil rights questions call (608) 422-6889 or (Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS)

# ***It shouldn't hurt to be a child***



**... but sometimes it does**

**Ask Yourself How You Can Help**

**REPORT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**



Division of Safety and Permanence



County Department of Human/Social Services  
or the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services