

Guidelines for Local School Governance Teams on the reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect.

All District employees and volunteers are mandatory reporters under the law.

When does the report have to be made?

An oral report of suspected abuse should be made immediately, "but in no case later than 24 hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, by telephone or otherwise and followed by a report in writing, if requested, to a child welfare agency providing protective services . . . or, in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney." *O.C.G.A. 19-7-5(e)*.

DFCS PROTOCOL

The School adheres to the reporting child abuse requirements found in O.C.G.A §§ 19-7-5 and 20-2-751.7 ("mandatory reporting"), as well as the Professional Standards Commission's state mandated reporter process for students, volunteers, and employees to follow when reporting instances of abuse, including alleged inappropriate sexual or abusive behavior by another school employee. Any parent/guardian or friend of a student who becomes aware a student has been the victim of abuse is also urged to make a report directly to DFCS.

What is the purpose of the mandatory reporting law?

The Georgia law mandates reports of suspected child abuse by school employees. O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(a) states that its purpose is to provide for the protection of children. Mandatory reporting of abuse is intended "to cause the protective services of the state to be brought to bear on the situation". Finally, it states that the law "shall be liberally construed so as to carry out the[se] purposes". **What is child abuse?**

Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, physical injury; death; neglect; exploitation; sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (including prostitution or sexually explicit conduct); verbal, psychological, or emotional abuse. O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5. **What are the penalties for failure to report or an untimely report?**

In addition to professional repercussions, such as termination of employment, a person required to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a criminal misdemeanor. O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(h).

What does the law say about how to make report?

If danger is imminent, call DFCS and if no answer, or if no oral report is taken, call 911.

If a person is required to report child abuse, "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. An employee or volunteer who makes a report to the person designated pursuant to this paragraph shall be deemed to have fully complied with this subsection." O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5.

How does an employee report abuse?

- Contact the person in charge of the facility or his/her designee.
- If the designee is not available, the mandated reporter shall make the report on his/her own.

- Complete the Georgia Child Protective Services Mandated Reporter Form to the best of your ability, in order to prepare the information needed for making a report.

The designated or other mandated reporter can make a report using one of the following options:

- Option One: An oral report by telephone to 1-855-422-4453. This is a 24-hour reporting line.
- Option Two: A written report, Form JG-4, by electronic submission to cpsintake@dhs.ga.gov
- Option Three: Facsimile of Form JG-4 to 229-317-9663
- Option Four: Complete the digital form located at <http://dfcs.dhs.georgia.gov/child-abuse-neglect>. A private code is needed to access the digital form and the school counselors receive this code upon completion of their training.
<https://www.prosolutionstraining.com/hostedcourses/hostcode.cfm?hostid=18>.

How do reporters know who the school or facility designee will be?

Each year, the person in charge of the school or facility is required to appoint a designee or designees (i.e. school administrators, school counselors, school social worker, etc.). The identities of designees should be communicated to all school employees and to the appropriate Level Assistant Superintendent. At least one designee should be on the premises of the facility during the business hours of the facility.

What if the situation involves an emergency?

If danger is imminent, call DFCS at 1-855-422-4453 or 911.

What if I need additional assistance or have questions?

- *If an employee or volunteer is unsure whether a report is required*, the person in charge of the facility or his/her designee may assist the staff member or volunteer with consultation. If the employee develops reasonable cause to believe that a report should be made (whether or not DFCS agrees), the process outlined above will be immediately followed. *Should you have any questions or concerns about a DFCS report that has been made*, contact the school social worker.

Are child abuse reports confidential?

Yes. All reports of child abuse are confidential except as provided by law. Section (i) provides for confidentiality, as does O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40(b) Reports of child abuse are not generally subject to public inspection, and “each and every record concerning reports of child abuse is declared to be confidential”, and access is prohibited by O.C.G.A. § 49-5-40(b), except as specifically provided by law.

NO information about child abuse reporting is to be placed in the student’s file or record. The school is not to make any parent/guardian contact regarding the reporting of possible abuse, regardless of the agency that comes to the school to interview the student.

Is the reporter protected?

Yes. Any person or entity participating in the making of a report or causing a report to be made is “immune from any civil or criminal liability . . . provided such participation pursuant to this Code section or any other law is made in good faith.” O.C.G.A. § 19-7-5(f).