Recognizing and Reporting
Child Abuse and Neglect

A Handbook for Employees
Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Introduction

Child abuse and neglect are devastating problems faced by thousands of students in the Dallas Independent School District. School employees play a vital role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children under their care. Employees who are knowledgeable about indicators of abuse and neglect, and who know what to do when they see them, will be better prepared to respond appropriately when faced with a child at risk of harm.

The Dallas ISD’s Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention Office provides employees with information, support, and assistance in reporting suspected child abuse to the proper authorities.

This handbook provides employees with information about:

- signs of possible child abuse and neglect
- how to report suspected abuse or neglect
- where to find local and state policies and regulations about reporting suspected child abuse and neglect
- your role in prevention of abuse and neglect

One call to the district’s Child Abuse Office at 1-888-57-ABUSE (1-888-572-2873) puts you in touch with people who are trained to help you meet your legal and ethical obligation to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

Mandatory Reporting

*Every Dallas ISD employee is mandated to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately. Failure to report is not only a violation of district policy and subject to disciplinary action, but is also a Class A Misdemeanor.*

The requirement to report applies to every employee and may not be delegated to anyone else. Even if the employee has reported his suspicions to a school administrator, counselor or nurse, the employee is still responsible for reporting the matter to the District’s Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention Office, as well as to appropriate authorities, including Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement. The District’s Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention Office was established to assist school employees to meet the requirements for reporting child abuse and neglect under the Texas Family Code.
Definitions and Signs of Abuse or Neglect

Physical Abuse:
Physical abuse is an act that results in a non-accidental physical injury that causes substantial harm to the child or the genuine threat of substantial physical harm to the child.

Signs of possible physical abuse:

- Child reports an injury inflicted by a parent or other caregiver.
- Child has unexplained or unusual injuries, or injuries that do not appear to be consistent with the explanation given, including bruises, black eyes, burns, bite marks, fractures, or dislocations.
- Child has multiple or frequent injuries, especially after an absence from school.
- Parent or caregiver uses harsh physical discipline with the child.
- The child is afraid of the parent or caregiver.

Emotional Abuse:
Emotional abuse is an act that results in mental or emotional injury to the child that causes observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

Signs of possible emotional abuse:

- The parent or caregiver constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child or overtly rejects the child.
- The parent or caregiver terrorizes the child.
- The child's growth, development, or psychological functioning has been impaired as a result of the abusive treatment by the parent or caregiver.

Sexual Abuse:
Sexual abuse is an act that consists of any sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare.

Signs of possible sexual abuse:

- The child reports that he or she has been sexually abused.
- The child demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior for the child’s age or developmental level.
- The child becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted infection, particularly if under the age of 14.
- The child has difficulty walking or sitting due to trauma to the genital area.
• The child suffers from nightmares, bedwetting, changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, phobias, somatic symptoms, anxiety, depression or other signs of psychological trauma.
• The child runs away to escape the abuse.
• The abuser may be jealous or controlling of the child and severely limit the child’s contact with peers, especially the opposite sex.
• A child who has been sexually abused may initially share only parts of his/her story to gauge the adult’s reaction. If the adult responds emotionally or negatively, the child may shut down and refuse to tell more.

Other reportable behaviors may include the following:
• A parent or caregiver is aware of sexual abuse by another party and has failed to take action to prevent it.
• Any sexual relationship between an educator and a student, regardless of the student’s age, constitutes Improper Relationship between an Educator and a Student, according to the Texas Penal Code, and is a second degree felony.
• A person attempts to engage the child in watching pornography, using alcohol or drugs, playing games that involve touching, or engaging in other activities intended to break down the child’s inhibitions to sexual behavior.

Neglect:

Neglect is an act or omission that results in any of the following:

1. Leaving a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm; or without adult supervision in a situation which requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and that results in substantial risk of immediate harm to the child;
2. Failing to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for a child, with the failure resulting in or presenting a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, bodily injury, or observable and material impairment to the growth, development, or functioning of the child;
3. Failing to provide a child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services were offered and refused;
4. Placing a child in or failing to remove the child from a situation in which the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of abuse, including sexual abuse.

Signs of possible neglect:
• The child lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
• The child is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
• The child lacks appropriate clothing for the weather (not simply due to poverty).
• The child is left alone without adult supervision at an age or developmental level such that the child lacks the ability to make appropriate judgments about his/her own safety. Of particular concern are situations where preadolescent children are left in charge of the care of younger children and situations where children are left in high-risk environments.
• The child begs or steals food or money.
• The parent or caregiver appears to be indifferent to the child, and may seem apathetic or depressed.
• The parent or caregiver may abuse drugs or alcohol or behave in a bizarre, irrational manner.

Family Violence:

Family violence is an act by a member of a family or household against another member of the family or household that is intended to result in physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault, or that is a threat that reasonably places the member in fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault. It does not include defensive measures to protect oneself. Family violence is of concern because children may be injured or killed during an altercation between the adults in the home. This also includes dating violence.

Signs of possible family violence:
• The child may report violent behavior by adults that poses a risk to the children in the home.
• The child may express a fear of a parent or another adult in the home and may show signs of psychological trauma.

Drug Endangered Children:

Drug endangered children are children at risk of physical harm or neglect as a result of illegal drug use, possession, manufacturing, cultivation or distribution. Children may be at risk of environmental hazards such as burns, explosions, and respiratory problems due to chemicals in the home. They are also children whose caretakers’ substance misuse interferes with their ability to parent and provide a safe and nurturing environment.

Signs of drug endangerment:
• A drug endangered child may show signs of extreme neglect, physical abuse, and/or sexual abuse.
• Child or parent may show signs of drug intoxication and/or exposure to toxic substances in the home, with symptoms such as red eyes, blurred vision, poor balance, slurred speech, confusion, headaches, stomachaches, the smell of chemicals, and so forth.
Your responsibilities when you suspect abuse or neglect:

Your responsibilities as an employee of the Dallas ISD are subject to both local and state reporting criteria:

- Texas laws mandate that any person who has reason to suspect that a child has been or may be abused or neglected must immediately report his suspicions to Child Protective Services and/or to law enforcement.
- Failure to report known or suspected abuse or neglect is a Class A misdemeanor, a violation of the Employee Code of Conduct, and may result in disciplinary action.
- Dallas ISD requires that employees who suspect child abuse or neglect report their suspicions to the Dallas ISD Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention.

IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE OR NEGLECT, DO NOT:

- Attempt to verify or investigate an allegation.
- Confront or notify parents or the alleged perpetrator.

Dallas ISD’s Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention

When you make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, you will need the following information:

- Child’s name, birth date, and student ID number.
- Name of parent or guardian, address, and phone number.
- Name of alleged perpetrator, if known, and relationship to child.
- Information indicating that this child has been or will be abused or neglected. Be as specific as possible.
- If the child appears to have an injury, ask the school nurse to examine the child and document the injuries.
- Names and contact information for any other persons who have information concerning the alleged abuse or neglect.
- If the situation is of an urgent nature where a child might be at risk if he/she goes home that night, make the call as early as possible in the day.
**DISD Hotline:**

Call the district’s Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention at **1-888-57-ABUSE** (1-888-572-2873) between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to report the above information. A trained specialist will help you decide whether the information should be reported first to law enforcement or to Child Protective Services and will transfer your call to Child Protective Services or the appropriate law enforcement agency after a preliminary report is taken.

**Child Protective Services Hotline:**

Reports to Child Protective Services may be made through their hotline at **1-800-252-5400** or, if not urgent, online at [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org). If you need to make a report outside of office hours, contact CPS directly and follow up with a Suspected Child Abuse Reporting form faxed to the district’s Child Abuse Office at 972-794-3568.

**Reporting Obligation:**

The duty to report applies to any person who has knowledge of the suspected abuse or neglect. It cannot be delegated to another person on the campus, such as a school nurse or counselor.

- The identity of the person making the report is confidential by law and any person who makes a good faith report is immune from civil or criminal liability or from repercussions with regard to their employment status.
- Anonymous reports are accepted. However, employees are encouraged to give their names, as the investigator may need to contact them for further information, particularly if the child made an outcry of abuse to the reporting employee.
- After completing your report to CPS and/or law enforcement, complete and submit the Suspected Child Abuse Reporting Form and fax it to the Office of Child Abuse Prevention at (972) 794-3568.
- Occasionally, there may be a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a special needs student aged 18 or older. When this occurs, Adult Protective Services will investigate. The procedures for reporting are the same as for students under age 18.
- All reports of child abuse and neglect are confidential. It is important to respect the privacy of our students as well as of any person against whom an allegation has been made.
- All reports of suspected abuse or neglect that implicate an employee of Dallas ISD will be reported to the school administrator by the Office of Child Abuse Prevention and will be reviewed by the district’s Child Abuse Investigation Review Team. This team consists of representatives of the Child Abuse office, the Office of Professional Responsibility, Employee Relations, and Dallas ISD Police and Security.
Child Protective Services Response to a Report of Child Abuse or Neglect:

All reports received by Child Protective Services are reviewed to determine the level of risk to the child and whether it meets statutory criteria for abuse or neglect. The report may be assigned for investigation or taken as information only.

- If the case is assigned for investigation, a CPS caseworker will attempt to interview the child, family, alleged perpetrator and any witnesses concerning the allegations.
- If a CPS caseworker comes to a school to interview a child, the school must comply by making the child accessible and providing a private location where the child can be interviewed. No school employee should be present during the interview.
- The parent is not to be contacted if CPS or law enforcement comes to the school to interview a child about abuse or neglect.

Law Enforcement Response to a Report of Child Abuse or Neglect:

In case of an emergency, call 9-1-1 for immediate attention for a child who has been sexually assaulted or a child with current injuries due to abuse.

The Dallas Police Department Child Abuse squad investigates reports of criminal behavior involving abuse or neglect that occur off campus.

Dallas ISD Police and Security Services investigates reports of abuse or neglect by employees that appear to involve a criminal act, except for sexual abuse complaints, which are handled by the Dallas Police Department Child Abuse or Child Exploitation squads.

Laws and Policies regarding reporting of Child Abuse/Neglect:

- Texas Family Code, Chapter 261:  
  http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/docs/FA/htm/FA.261.htm  
- Texas Education Agency Prevention of Child Abuse Overview:  
  http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index.aspx?id=2820  
- Dallas Independent School District Board Policies regarding Child abuse reporting:  
Prevention of Sexual Abuse:

House Bill 1041, passed in the 81st Regular Legislative session of the State of Texas, mandated that school districts adopt and implement policies to increase teacher, student, and parent awareness of issues regarding sexual abuse of children, including knowledge of likely warning signs that a child may be a victim of sexual abuse, actions that a child who is a victim of sexual abuse should take to obtain assistance and intervention, and available counseling options for students affected by sexual abuse.

All persons who work with children should be aware that:

- There is no typical sex offender. A person who sexually abuses a child can be of any age or occupation, male or female, or even another child.
- Most sex offenses against children are perpetrated by someone known to the victim.
- Children should be taught that they are in control of their bodies and to report any inappropriate touches to a trusted adult.
- Children cannot protect themselves alone and their caregivers should take steps to ensure their safety from potential offenders.
- Children who have been affected by sexual abuse may suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and benefit from counseling. Resources in our community that offer services to victims of sexual abuse include:
  - Youth and Family Centers, Dallas Independent School District
  - Dallas Children’s Advocacy Center, (214) 818-2600
  - Parkland Victim Intervention Program and Rape Crisis Center, (214) 590-0430

Dating Violence

Dating violence is the intentional use of physical, verbal, or emotional abuse by a person to harm, threaten, intimidate, or control another person in an intimate or dating relationship. Examples of dating violence:

- Physical or sexual assaults
- Name calling and/or put downs
- Threats to hurt the victim or the victim’s family
- Destruction of property belonging to the victim
- Threats to commit suicide or homicide if the relationship is terminated
- Attempts to isolate the victim from friends and family
- Stalking
- Cyber-bullying

Studies have shown that approximately 1 in 5 female high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner. Students who are targets of dating violence should be referred to the school counselor for assistance. Any incidents of physical or sexual violence must be reported to the appropriate law enforcement authority (Dallas Police Department, if the incident occurred off campus or Dallas ISD Police, if on campus).
Presentations on Teen Dating Violence Awareness for middle and high school students, parents and staff can be arranged through the Office of Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention.

**Training:**

All employees are mandated to receive annual training on recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect. Presentations can be scheduled through the District’s Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Prevention Office at 972-580-4180. Additionally, presentations on Teen Dating Violence are available to staff and students.

**One call to the District’s Child Abuse Office puts you in touch with people who are trained to help you meet your obligation to report suspected child abuse and neglect.**

1-888-57-ABUSE  
(1-888-572-2873)

**Dallas ISD Child Abuse/Domestic Violence Office**  
2909 North Buckner, Ste. 804  
Dallas, TX 75228  
Office: 972-580-4180  
Fax: 972-794-3568  
E-mail: childabuse@dallasisd.org

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**  
1-800-799-SAFE or 1-800-787-3224  

**National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline**  
1-866-331-9474  
1-866-331-8453  
(TTY for deaf/hearing impaired)

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