



Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota

Reporting To Child Protection Services

Most people realize they should do something if they suspect child abuse and neglect. However, many people are unsure of where to report abuse and how to determine if what they observe is really child abuse. The following questions address these concerns and may help with the reporting process.

Where should I report abuse?

Report all suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to CPS in the county where the family lives. You can find this number in the local phone book or in our Resources Section. If you are unsure, call the nearest county CPS office (numbers are included at the end of this document) and they will help you determine where to report. You may also report to the local law enforcement agency in the city/county where the child resides or where the child is found.

How do I know if what I see is really child abuse?

The simple answer to this question is that you don't have to know. If you see something that concerns you, give that information to a professional who is trained to know if it meets the state requirements for investigation by calling your local CPS office. If it does not meet the guidelines, the CPS representative will explain why it does not and can tell you what to look for in the future. (If the CPS representative does not automatically give you this information, don't be afraid to ask.) If it does meet the guidelines, CPS will investigate. This is a process in which they attempt to determine if abuse took place and, if so, to offer services to the family.

What happens when I call CPS?

CPS investigates reports of abuse and neglect of children in every county. When you witness or are aware of a situation that concerns you, it is important to contact CPS as soon as possible. Although the law permits allegations that are up to three years old to be investigated, the most accurate assessments are done soon after the incident of abuse or neglect occurs. People forget details after time and often there is no documentation available (such as photos or medical examinations) of the injuries.

The intake worker will ask that you explain what you saw and provide as much specific information about the family as possible, such as: names, ages of children, address, workplace of parents(s), children's school, and relatives or friends who may also know of the situation. Additionally, the intake worker will ask you for your name, though you do have the option not to provide this. However, it does help the investigating caseworker to have your name as a contact person.

What will happen when the caseworker goes out to the home?

If the case is accepted for investigation, CPS will assign a caseworker, who will do a thorough investigation of the situation. This person will speak to family members and other people who may have information concerning the situation. Based on this investigation, the CPS caseworker will determine if there will be continued involvement by CPS.

Will the family know I was the one to report?

According to law, your name as reporter is kept confidential from the family involved. If you do not feel secure about this, you may choose not to reveal your identity to the intake worker. Remember, however, that when the caseworker does not have your name, he/she may have a more difficult time investigating and acting on the situation. Retaliation by a family is rare, so this fear should not deter you from reporting. The safety of the child should be the highest priority.

Remember – If you do not report, nothing can be done for the child. If everyone relies on “someone else” to report a situation to authorities, then it may never be reported and a child may suffer needlessly.

What does it take for CPS to become involved?

When reporting suspected child maltreatment, it is important to present as much factual information about what was observed, when it occurred, whether there were physical injuries, or if any statements were made by the child or adult in the family. It is best to call promptly when abuse or neglect is observed.

Some people report to CPS with the expectation that children will be removed from the home, and when the children remain in the home, they think that nothing has been done. When services are provided to a family with the children in the home, it is important to inform CPS if problems continue to occur. CPS has to make decisions based on the information available to them. Do not stop reporting a situation because “nothing has been done in the past.” The system relies on information from members of the public. A caseworker cannot be with a family at all times. If you see or learn about a new incident of abuse or neglect, report it immediately. This may be just the piece of information CPS needs to act on the case.

Won't CPS just remove the children from the home?

CPS works with the family to improve the conditions, guides parents on how to manage their children's behavior problems, and helps parents obtain resources to deal with problems such as: chemical dependency, domestic violence, mental health issues, and financial stress. Often when other stresses are reduced in the family, the parents' ability to cope with their children improves. The purpose of CPS is to protect children and so sometimes children must be placed in a separate environment when the parents are unable to keep their children safe. When children are considered to be in danger in their parents home, they may be placed in foster care on a temporary basis. In most cases, however, it is not necessary to remove children from their home for their protection.

Remember – Some people may believe that a certain practice is inappropriate parenting; however, that does not authorize the state to interfere in that family's life. CPS follows strict guidelines developed through an attempt to balance the rights of parents with the rights of children. Ultimately, CPS is following guidelines mandated by the government. If you disagree with these guidelines, respond by voicing your concern to your legislator and lobbying for system-wide changes. A CPS worker will not be able to change the reporting guidelines for any specific cases.

Some helpful tips to remember when making a report:

- Report as soon as possible after the incident of abuse or maltreatment occurs.
- Provide the intake worker with as much specific information about the family and situation as possible.
- If it is determined that the situation falls outside the guidelines, find out why and what you might look for in the future.
- Get the name of the intake worker. Then if you need to make future reports regarding incidents with the same family, you can request to speak with the worker who is familiar with the case.
- Keep documentation on what happened, when and where it happened, when you reported, whom you reported to, etc.
- Encourage others who may know of the situation to make a report as well.
- Never be afraid to ask questions. That way you will be more likely to feel that everything that can possibly be done in this situation will be done.