

Children & Youth Advocate Manual

Section 3: Child Abuse, Neglect, & Sexual Assault



Introduction & Importance

Understanding the dynamics of child abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse is critical for advocates working with children from violent homes. 40% to 60% of abusers also abuse their children. One in ten children will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday. Protective caregivers that HAVE experienced abuse are more likely to abuse their children than protective caregivers that have NOT experienced abuse. Child abuse can be used a method of holding power and control over the protective caregiver receiving the abuse.

Mandatory Reporting

Due to the nature of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault it is important for all advocates to understand what mandatory reporting is and how it has the potential to help you, as well as, frustrate you. **LEGALLY, IN WISCONSIN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT ADVOCATES ARE NOT MANDATORY REPORTERS.** However, funders may have agencies address child abuse reporting. For example; the Department of Children and Families (DCF) requires programs, who receive their children's program funding, to have a Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) process and policy. Check with your director as to what you are required to do for CAN. Please **ALWAYS** follow your agencies policies and **NEVER** make the decision to report child abuse or neglect alone.

All states in the United States and most nations around the world have legally mandated reporter laws that require a responsible adult to promptly report the abuse to the proper authorities. WI law states a **LEGALLY** mandated reporter must report **IF** they have reasonable cause to **SUSPECT** or **BELIEVE** a child seen in the course of **THEIR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES** has been threatened with or has been abused or neglected. If you are not a legally mandated reporter of Child Abuse and Neglect, please review your agency policies and follow as instructed.

When working with schools or other agencies ask about their mandated reporting statutes and policies. If you are not a legally mandated please follow your agencies policies and procedures. If you are a legally mandated reporter, reports of alleged child abuse or neglect should be made to the county where the child or the child's family resides. Contact the county department of social and/or human services or law enforcement, where appropriate.

It is important to immediately let the family know that you are a mandated reporter in order to build and maintain their trust. Explain to the family the types of information you would need to report by giving examples. If the youth requests someone to talk to who is not a mandated reporter; be prepared to provide appropriate resources.

Mandatory Reporting Sample Language

"We are going to be talking about experiences with Teen Dating Violence and Sexual Assault. There are different laws meant to protect children and teens from being abused and neglected. Because I care about all of you, I want to make sure that you are all aware of what mandatory reporting is. Has anyone heard of mandatory reporting?"

(Lead discussion and brief Q&A) Does anyone have any questions about this? If so, feel free to stop me at any time during this group, or find me during one of the breaks, and I'd be happy to clear up any questions you have."

"I am more than willing to listen to anything you would like to share. Your confidentiality is important to me. I will try to make sure that anything you tell me is not shared without your permission; however, there are some exceptions. I may be required to report child abuse or neglect. Also, if I'm very concerned about your safety, I may need to tell another adult or someone who can better help you. Before I tell someone, I will make every effort to talk to you first to let you know that I am going to tell someone. If at any point you have questions, you can always ask me. What questions do you have about mandatory reporting?"

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Mandatory Reporting Possible Questions and Responses

The following responses are from Wisconsin Statutes and Laws for other states refer to the link below.

What is Mandatory Reporting?

- Calling child protective services or law enforcement to report abuse or neglect of a child.

What kinds of things does a mandatory reporters have to report?

- Child abuse and neglect.

Who does the mandatory reporter make the report to?

- Contact Child Protective Services, known as CPS, or law enforcement. In appropriate cases, you may call Indian Child Welfare.

Under what time frame are mandatory reporters required to report under the law?

- You are required to report child abuse and neglect immediately.

Are Mandatory reporters required to report if someone else already reported?

- No, only one legally mandated reporter within an agency is required to report the same incident of abuse.

Who is considered a child under the law?

- Anyone under the age of 18 is considered a child.

How would a teen know if someone is a mandated reporter?

- Ask that person if they are LEGALLY mandated to report under Wisconsin laws and/or if they consider themselves a permissive/voluntary reporter.
 - If the person says yes to either of these questions, that person will report suspected child abuse or neglect.

If someone is not a LEGALLY mandated reporter can they still make a report?

- Yes, even if someone is not a LEGALLY mandated reporter they MAY still choose to report suspected child abuse or neglect as a permissive reporter.

What is a voluntary reporter?

- Any person, not specified under [Wis Stat. 48.981](#) par.(2) (a); (b); or (bm), who has reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected or who has reason to believe that a child has been threatened with abuse or neglect and that abuse or neglect of the child will occur may report to appropriate authorities.

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Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse occurs when a caregiver, family member, or caretaker physically hurts a child or adolescent, makes that youth feel worthless, has sexual contact with him or her, or does not provide adequate food, care, or shelter. Child abuse can happen in all types of families, and in most cases, the abuser is related to the victim. Every state has laws against child abuse.

Most people agree acts which threaten a young person's life or cause serious injury are physical abuse. When punishment is very severe or leaves bruises or other injuries, then it's no longer discipline—it's child abuse, and it should stop. Emotional abuse can include swearing at, yelling at, or insulting a young person, usually over and over again. It also can include denying a young person basic emotional needs, such as affection or security.

Neglect is when a caregiver does not provide care for a young person's safety and health—necessities like food, proper clothing, a place to live, or medical care. Leaving kids alone for long periods or kicking them out of the house also can be interpreted as neglect. Abuse and neglect affect the way young people view themselves and the rest of the world. Many people who were abused as children find it hard as adults to like themselves or to trust other people.

Statistics

It is the goal of End Abuse to update this manual every two years which will include updating any statistics. Children who experience child abuse and neglect are 59% more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28% more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30% more likely to commit violent crimes. About 80% of 21-year-olds who were abused as children met criteria for at least one psychological disorder. 14% of all men and 36% of all women in prison were abused as children. Abused children are less likely to practice safe sex, putting them at greater risk for STDs. They're also 25% more likely to experience teen pregnancy. In the United States, more than four children die from child abuse and neglect on a daily basis. Over 70% of these children are below the age of three.

Child Sexual Abuse

Although one in ten children will be sexually abused before their eighteenth birthday; if you look at sexual abuse by gender, 1 out of 3 girls and 1 out of 5 boys will be sexually abused before they reach age 18. Sexual abuse occurs when an adult forces, threatens, or induces a young person into any kind of sexual contact. It includes direct physical contact and non-touching sexual "contact," such as when a young person is persuaded to view obscene materials. 90% of child sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator in some way. 68% are abused by a family member. Incest is a form of sexual abuse that is defined as any sexual contact or behavior between family members. The most common form of incest occurs between an older family member and a child or teenager. Incest, as well as all forms of abuse, can happen to children of any gender. To learn more about Child Sexual Abuse view this [information sheet series](#).

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Safety Planning

Creating a safety plan with both the child and protective caregiver is a necessary skill. Below are some example points that should be talked about with the family receiving services when going through safety plans. It can be helpful to have an idea of what to do in dangerous situations, but understand the child is not responsible to enact the safety plan exactly. Common reactions to trauma are typically fight, flight, or freeze. Each safety plan will be unique and adaptable to meet the needs of the families. (Refer to the New Advocate Manual: Crisis Counseling and Safety Planning)

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The following points should be talked about with the family receiving services when going through safety plans.

- Children should not try to get in the middle of a fight
- Where are the safe places to go in & out of home
- Who are the safe people to call or talk to during or after the "event"
- When is it safe to call those people?
- What to do when there are siblings?
- When it is safe for children to call 9-1-1?

Child Abuse Prevention Month

Since 1983, National Child Abuse Prevention Month or Child Abuse Prevention Month (CAP month) is an annual observance in the United States dedicated to raising awareness and preventing child abuse. Communities should rededicate themselves to being supportive of families, and play an active role in preventing child abuse and neglect as well as taking positive action to promote child and family well-being. To aid in promoting CAP month are resources that provide updated CAP month toolkits and promotional items.

[Prevent Child Abuse America](#) lays the groundwork to deliver the great childhoods that all children deserve. They are dedicated to promoting services that improve child well-being in all 50 states and developing programs that help to prevent all types of abuse and neglect.

[National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#) recognizes the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and neglect and promotes the social and emotional well-being of children and families. During the month of April and throughout the year, communities are encouraged to increase awareness and provide education and support to families through resources and strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect.

[Positive Promotions](#) provides materials you can pay for to promote awareness about the dangers of child abuse and steps that can be taken to prevent it in your community.

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Resources

[Child Sexual Abuse Prevention](#) a resources and research landing page for resources dedicated to the prevention of child sexual abuse with infographics, information on prevention legislation, published resources, position statements, and fact sheets.

[Child Welfare Information Gateway State Status Search](#) a resource to look for specific laws, statutes and policies by state and topic.

[Darkness To Light \(D2L\)](#) a non-profit committed to empowering adults to prevent child sexual abuse. Their work is guided by the vision of a world free from child sexual abuse, where children can grow up happy, healthy and safe. They know that prevention is possible, and they believe that it is an adult responsibility to protect children.

[Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. They have carried out programs to prevent sexual violence, help victims, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

[Wisconsin Department of Children and Families Mandated Child Abuse and Neglect Reporters](#) a resource that has more information about mandatory reporting from what is required to be reported, who is required to report, and how to report.

[Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault \(WCASA\)](#) is the membership agency which supports 56 certified sexual assault service provider (SASP) agencies working to end sexual violence in Wisconsin and offer support, advocacy and information to its victims of sexual assault and their families. WCASA works to ensure that every victim in Wisconsin gets the support and care they need. WCASA also works to create the social change necessary to ensure a future where no child, woman or man is ever sexually violated again.

Mandatory reporting, Child Abuse, & Safety Planning Survey

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CJ7F52G>