

A photograph of a woman with dark hair and a young boy sitting at a wooden table. The woman is smiling broadly and looking at the boy. The boy is also smiling and looking back at the woman. On the table in front of them are several small, colorful blocks (green, yellow, red) and a white tray. In the background, there are wooden shelves with various items, including bottles and containers. The overall atmosphere is warm and positive.

Mandated Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is an abuse of power that takes away a child/teen's right to healthy and trusting relationships, safety, security, and sense of self.

Child abuse thrives in silence, secrecy, and shame. A child may not tell about abuse for many reasons. They may feel responsible or worry that they won't be believed. They may not even know to call it abuse.

Caring adults can learn to spot behavior changes, listen, and protect youth from abuse. We all have the responsibility to create a space where young people are safe, respected, and believed.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when a person exposes a minor, a person under the age of 18, to sexual acts or behaviors. It is never the child/teen's fault.

Child sexual abuse happens at an alarming rate. 49% of female victims and 41% of male victims reported their first rape happened before the age of 18 (Basile et al., 2022).

Individuals who sexually abuse minors are often known to and trusted by the youth they harm and may be in positions of power or authority, such as a family member, friend of the family, teacher, coach, or youth leader. Research shows that most of the time, victims of sexual violence know the person who harmed them (Basile et al., 2022).



Child abuse categories in Pennsylvania

The term child abuse means intentionally, knowingly or recklessly causing any of the following through an act or failure to act:

- Bodily injury
- Fabricating, exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease
- Serious mental injury
- Sexual abuse or exploitation
- Likelihood of bodily injury & sexual abuse or exploitation
- Serious physical neglect
- Death of a child
- Human trafficking (As defined under 103 of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000)
- Specific recent acts of child abuse



Specific recent acts of child abuse include:

- Kicking biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child
- Unreasonably restraining or confining a child
- Forcefully shaking, slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age
- Interfering with the breathing of a child
- Causing a child to be present at a location where methamphetamine is being manufactured and law enforcement is investigating
- Leaving a child unsupervised with a sexually violent predator, a sexually violent delinquent child, or a sexual offender subject to registration (other than the child's parent). This is when the adult "knows or should have reasonably known" this information.

(As per the CPSL, 'Recent' is defined as within two years from the date the report is made – however, sexual abuse, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect, and deaths have no time limit). Find explanations to these categories in the [Child Protection Services Law](#).



Mandated reporting

Anyone can report child abuse, but mandated reporters are legally required to make a report. Mandated Reporters MUST report if any of the following situations occur (Keep Kids Safe, n.d.):

- 1 You come into contact with a child through your professional role or through a regularly scheduled program
- 2 You are responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of a child
- 3 A person makes a specific disclosure to you that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse
- 4 A person 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to you that they have committed child abuse

Only minimal facts are needed and first-hand observation of abuse is not required. Remember, abuse does not need to be disclosed or investigated.

A mandated reporter is required to report when there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect of a person under the age of 18.

Who is a mandated reporter?

Being a mandated reporter means you are required by law to report suspected child abuse. Pennsylvania law includes a specific list of adults who have a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse and neglect (Keep Kids Safe, n.d.).

- A person licensed or certified to practice in any health-related field
- A medical examiner, coroner, or funeral director
- An employee of a health care facility or provider who is engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of individuals
- A school employee
- An employee of a child care service, who has direct contact with children in the course of employment
- A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer, or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization
- An independent contractor
- An emergency medical services provider
- An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity, or service, accepts responsibility for a child
- An employee of a social services agency, who has direct contact with children in the course of employment

- A peace officer or law enforcement official
- An employee of a public library, who has direct contact with children in the course of employment
- An individual supervised or managed by a mandated reporter who has direct contact with children in the course of employment
- Attorneys affiliated with an agency organization or institution that is responsible for the care, supervision, guidance, or control of children
- A foster parent
- An adult family member responsible for a child's welfare and provides services to a child in a family living home, community home for individuals with intellectual disabilities, or host home for children which are subject to supervision or licensure by the department

How to make a mandated report:

Make a report to Childline electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by phone at 1-800-932-0313.



If you are making the report as a professional or a volunteer, immediately after making the report, notify the person in charge of the organization (unless they are the person allegedly committing the abuse). Check your organization's policy on Mandated Reporting.

If an oral report to ChildLine is made, complete a written CY 47 form (Keep Kids Safe, 2014) and send to the local Child Protective Services agency within 48 hours.

Tips for responding to disclosures of child abuse

If a child/teen shares a story of abuse with you, it is important to be supportive.

It can be tempting to ask a lot of questions, but that can add to the minor's stress and can complicate the investigative process. If you need more information in order to keep the youth safe, simple and open-ended questions are preferred.

It is a Mandated Reporter's responsibility to report suspected child abuse. However, making a report can be stressful, raise conflicting feelings, or bring on vicarious trauma. If you need support, have questions about mandated reporting, or responding to disclosures, reach out to your local sexual assault center (PCAR, n.d.).

Stay calm

“ I'm happy to help you.

Support

“ I'm sorry this happened to you.

Affirm

“ You did the right thing by telling me.

Believe

“ It's not your fault, I believe you.

Empower

“ You have the right to be safe.

Report

“ We need to tell others about this to make sure you are safe.

Resources

ChildLine: The Pennsylvania child abuse reporting hotline 1-800-932-0313 or www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis is available to take reports of suspected child abuse or neglect 24 hours a day.

Child Welfare Information Gateway: For resources and information on child abuse laws in other states, visit www.childwelfare.gov

Keep Kids Safe PA: For information on training, clearances and general information related to child protection, visit www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov

Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect (PCAR): To learn more and find your local rape crisis center in Pennsylvania, visit www.pcar.org or call 1-888-772-PCAR (7227).

References

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The Child Protective Services Law (23 Pa.C.S. Chapter 63). <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/CT/HTM/23/00.063..HTM>

Keep Kids Safe. (n.d.). *Mandated reports: Frequently asked questions*. Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Documents/FAQ_Mandated%20Reporter.pdf

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Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect. (n.d.). *Help in PA: Locations* [Webpage]. <https://pcar.org/help-pa/locations>

Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, Pub. L. 106-386, § 103, 114 Stat. 1469. <https://www.congress.gov/106/plaws/publ386/PLAW-106publ386.pdf>

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Pennsylvania Coalition to
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 1-888-772-PCAR

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