

The Family Services Division (FSD) of the Department for Children and Families shares an important responsibility with all Vermonters: keeping children safe and making sure their basic needs are met.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, report it. Protecting children is everyone's business!

How do I make a report?

Call 1-800-649-5285 — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. *If the child is in immediate danger, dial 911 or your local police first. Then, call FSD to make a report.*

What happens when I call?

A social worker will:

1. Question you about the situation;
2. Record the information you provide;
3. Ask you to fill out a written report; and
4. In some cases, ask you to gather more information.

Try to have as much information on hand as possible (e.g., the child's name, date of birth, home address, school or child care provider, and parents' names).

What if I'm not sure it's abuse?

Please call us for advice, if you:

- Are not sure a report is warranted; or
- Are considering telling the parents about your report. *In some cases, this could endanger the child and hinder the response.*

Who can make a report?

While all Vermonters are encouraged to report their concerns about children's safety to FSD, certain people — called mandated reporters — are required by law to do so.

If you work in one of the professions listed below, you are a mandated reporter. This means that *you alone* are legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect to FSD within 24 hours.

Mandated Reporters in Vermont

- **Chiropractor, dentist, emergency medical personnel, licensed practical nurse, medical examiner, mental health professional, osteopath, pharmacist, physician, physician's assistant, psychologist, registered nurse, surgeon, any other health care provider;**
- **Hospital administrator, intern, resident physician in any hospital in the state;**
- **School superintendent, principal, headmaster, teacher, librarian, guidance counselor, other individual regularly employed by, or contracted and paid by, a school district or independent school to provide student services;**
- **Child care worker, police officer, probation officer, social worker, clergy member;**
- **Residential and non-residential camp administrator, counselor, or owner; and**
- **Employee, contractor, or grantee of the Agency of Human Services who has contact with clients.**

What happens to reports?

1. A supervisor reviews each report.

The supervisor decides whether a report can be accepted for intervention according to Vermont law and departmental policy. Several factors are considered, including:

- The child's age;
- The alleged abuser's relationship to the child; and
- The nature of the allegation.

2. If a report is accepted, the supervisor determines the appropriate intervention.

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention: assessment and investigation. An investigation is *required* in certain situations, including when a report alleges that:

- A child was sexually abused by someone over 10;
- A child is at risk of harm for sexual abuse by an adult;
- Something a *person responsible for a child's welfare*¹ did or didn't do resulted in a child's death or serious injury; or
- A *person responsible for a child's welfare*¹:
 - Abandoned a child;
 - Maliciously punished a child;
 - Physically abused a child under three or one of any age who does not talk or is not able to walk; or
 - Allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

¹Person responsible for a child's welfare includes:

- The child's parent, guardian, or foster parent;
- Any other adult residing in the child's home who serves in a parental role;
- An employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or
- Other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

3. FSD opens an investigation or assessment.

A social worker is assigned to the case and the selected intervention begins, usually within 72 hours but sooner if a child is in imminent danger.

Both types of intervention include similar steps:

- A. Assessing a child's immediate safety;
- B. Assessing the risk of future maltreatment;
- C. Determining the outcome of the intervention; and
- D. If needed, opening a case for ongoing services.

The main difference between the two interventions is that an investigation requires a formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect happened and should be substantiated, while an assessment does not.

What happens at the end of an assessment or investigation?

An assessment results in:

- A determination of the family's need for ongoing services, based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment.

An investigation results in both:

1. A determination of the family's need for ongoing services, based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment; and
2. A formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred.
The report is either substantiated or unsubstantiated.

What information may be shared with me?

If you are a mandated reporter, we may share the following with you:

- Whether your report was accepted for investigation or assessment;
- If an investigation was conducted, whether it was substantiated; and
- If an assessment was conducted, whether a need for services was found.

Can I be sued?

Vermont law provides you with immunity from civil or criminal liability as long as your report was made in good faith.

What about HIPAA?

The HIPAA privacy rule allows covered organizations to disclose protected health information to report suspected child abuse or neglect to government authorities authorized by law to receive such reports.

Is my report confidential?

We will not divulge your identity unless:

- You give us your permission to do so;
- Your report leads to a court or human services board proceeding;
- A court finds probable cause to believe your report was not made in good faith and orders DCF to divulge your identity; or
- The person substantiated for abuse requests a review of the decision, and we determine that identifying information about you can be provided without compromising your safety.

1-800-649-5285

(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

dcf.vermont.gov/fsd

If English is not your primary language and you need help understanding this information, please let us know.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an abused or neglected child one whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed or is at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by:

1. Abandonment of the child,
2. Emotional maltreatment,
3. Neglect, or
4. Physical injury.

Emotional Maltreatment: a pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Neglect: failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

Physical Injury: death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual Abuse: any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

Risk of Harm: a significant danger a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.



How to Report Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect

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Agency of Human Services