



Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a Child in Texas: Reporting Basics

How does reporting abuse or neglect of children in Texas work? What do I need to do to make a report?

State law requires anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect to report those suspicions to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or to a local law enforcement agency.



Any person making a report to DFPS is immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in good faith. The reporter's name is also confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee. *There are circumstances under which DFPS is required to disclose a reporter's identity to law enforcement, a court of law, or another state agency. Please see the section below on Confidentiality for more information.*

A person who suspects child abuse or neglect, but fails to report it, can be charged with a misdemeanor or state jail felony. Remember, reporting suspected child abuse or neglect makes it possible for a child to get help.

Report child abuse or neglect in two ways:

Telephone	Internet
<p>You may call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 to report abuse or neglect. The hotline is answered by DFPS Intake Specialists (who are all degreed professionals) 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.</p> <p>You will be asked to provide your name and contact information.</p> <p>You will be asked to explain your concerns. The Intake Specialist might ask additional questions to determine if the situation that you describe meets the Texas Family Code's definitions of abuse or neglect.</p>	<p>You may report your allegations to the Texas Abuse Hotline through the Internet at https://www.txabusehotline.org. This secure website provides a way to explain your concerns in writing.</p> <p>You must provide your name and a valid e-mail address. Your identity remains confidential and will not be provided directly to the accused person by any DFPS employee.</p> <p>Once an Intake Specialist processes your report, you will receive a confirmation e-mail with a Call Identification Number. The e-mail will also tell you whether or not your report was forwarded to a local DFPS office for further investigation.</p>

Please note that the Internet Reporting System is for ***non-urgent situations***. Receipt of internet reports may be delayed during times of high call volume to the Texas Abuse Hotline. The Internet Reporting System should NOT be used in urgent or emergency situations, including but not limited to:

- Injuries to a child age 5 or under or serious injuries to any age child
- Immediate need for medical care (including a suicidal child)
- Sexual abuse where the perpetrator has access or will have access to the child in the near future
- A child age 5 or younger who is alone or is likely to be left alone in the next 24 hours
- Any other situation you feel requires a response within 24 hours

**Call in reports about these (and similar situations) to the
Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400.
Always call local law enforcement first if a child is in imminent danger.**

What information do I need when I make a report? What will I be asked to provide?

Intake Specialists need specific information before they can forward a report of abuse or neglect to a local Child Protective Services (CPS) office for investigation. This information includes the alleged victim's address (or other information to help CPS contact the family) **and** an allegation that indicates abuse or neglect as defined by the Texas Family Code.

Not every allegation reported to DFPS will result in a CPS investigation. This is because not every situation involving concern for a child meets the legal definition for abuse or neglect under the Texas Family Code. It is crucial that you provide as many details as possible about the alleged abuse or neglect, as well as the family demographics, so that the Intake Specialist can make an accurate assessment of the situation.

Before making your report, please take a moment to gather any records or notes you have on the family so you have easy access to the necessary information. While you may not have all of the information noted below, providing as much of it as possible will allow DFPS to make the best decision about how to proceed.

Persons Involved/Persons with Knowledge		
<p>Household Members All known persons living in the child's home (adults and children)</p> <p>Alleged Perpetrator(s) The person or persons suspected of abusing or neglecting the child. They may or may not be household members</p> <p>Collaterals Any other people who may have information about the situation. This may include school employees, neighbors, other relatives, medical staff, etc.</p>		
Information Requested for Each Person		
<p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name, • Date of birth (preferred) or age • Social Security number, • Race/ethnicity • Marital status 	<p>Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home address (including apartment name and number) • Directions to the home • Home phone number & cell phone number(s) • Work • School, or daycare name • Address, phone number, hours in attendance, and grade level. <p><i>Note: Multiple forms of locating information are important so we can find the family as quickly as possible. For example, having only a school address is challenging if we need to locate the family quickly on a Saturday morning.</i></p>	<p>Special Needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the child, parents, siblings, or alleged perpetrator have any special needs? • If so, how do those needs affect their normal functioning?

To send a report to CPS for investigation, an Intake Specialist also **must** have an allegation that meets the Texas Family Code definition of abuse or neglect. Giving as much detailed information as possible helps the Intake Specialist make as

accurate an assessment as possible. *This is especially important with Internet reports because the Intake Specialist cannot ask follow-up questions.*

Learning to identify child abuse and neglect and deciding to make a report is very distressing for many people. However, DFPS can more accurately assess a situation if you frame your statements as objectively as possible. Clear and detailed information allows the Intake Specialist to make the most accurate assessment possible.

When you make your telephone or Internet report, you will be guided through a series of questions. The questions below are ones most commonly asked by our staff when assessing information.

Allegation Information
<p>What happened?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What led you to suspect abuse or neglect?• Did you witness something?• If so, what did you see?• Where and when did it occur?• Was anyone else present?• If someone said something to you, who was it (the child or someone else)?• What did the person say?• When did the person tell you?• Are you aware of anyone else who may have been told?
<p>Who abused or neglected the child?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you know who may be abusing or neglecting the child?• Does that person live in the home with the child?• If not, how often does the perpetrator have access to the child or when will the person see the child again?• Does the perpetrator have access to other children?
<p>What is the role of the parent/guardian?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the parent or guardian is not the perpetrator, is he or she aware of the concern?• Do the parents or guardians seem protective?• If they are not aware of the concern, will you tell them?• How do you think they will react?
<p>What else is happening in the family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there factors at work that put additional stress on the family such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, gang activity, recent marital problems or job loss?• Are there any issues that could pose a safety risk to our staff?• Is anyone helping to support the family?• Have there been any previous concerns?• Do you know if they have been reported to our agency or another agency before?• How is the family likely to react when we contact them?

Questions Specific to Different Types of Abuse & Neglect

Emotional Abuse

- How is the child being emotionally abused?
- If verbally, what is being said to the child?
- How is the child reacting to the abuse?
- Has the child demonstrated or verbalized any self-harming thoughts or behaviors?
- Is this child being treated differently than others in the home?

Sexual Abuse

- What makes you think the child has been sexually abused?
- Has the child said anything?
- Are there physical indicators of sexual abuse (e.g., physical injury or sexually transmitted disease)?
- Has the child been examined by a medical professional?
- Is there a known sex offender in the home?

Medical Care

- Does the child have medical needs (regular or acute) that are not being met?
- If so, what are those needs?
- Have these needs been determined by a doctor or other professional?
- What medicines should the child be taking and for what conditions are the medicines prescribed?
- What are the short term and long term consequences of not receiving care?

Physical Care

- Are there concerns about the child's physical care?
- Does the child appear malnourished or seem to be losing weight?
- Is the child extremely dirty or inappropriately dressed for the weather?
- Is there a bug or rodent infestation in the home?
- Are there concerns about trash, rotting food, sewage, or animal waste in the home?
- Are there hazardous home conditions that pose a safety risk to the child (e.g., exposed wiring, broken glass, loose nails, or holes in the floor)?
- What effects (if any) have the home conditions or the cleanliness of the child had on the child's health (e.g., constant illness, rashes, etc.)?

Supervision

- Is a young child being left alone or in the care of someone not capable of providing supervision (e.g., child is young; caregiver is intoxicated)?
- Are children living alone?
- Are very young children left outside unsupervised?

Reminder: Call 911 if a child appears to need immediate medical attention or otherwise appears to be in immediate danger!



If you have questions about a situation or are unsure if abuse or neglect is occurring, call the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400. Our staff will help you determine if the situation needs to be reported.