



## Human Services Department

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Business Operations • Economic Support • Clinical Services •  
Child Protective Services • Child & Family Services • Family Resiliency Services • Youth & Family Services

### **REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND/OR NEGLECT**

#### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

##### **WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?**

**Child abuse** is the physical, sexual, or emotional maltreatment of a child (ages 0 to 17) by a parent, family member, other caregiver, or non-caregiver. Physical abuse will involve cuts, broken or fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, or “severe and frequent bruising” inflicted on a child by other than accidental means. Sexual abuse will involve sexual intercourse, other sexual contact, or exploitation. Emotional damage means harm to a child’s psychological or intellectual functioning, exhibited to a severe degree. **Child neglect** is the failure of a parent or other caregiver to provide necessary care (including supervision), food, clothing, shelter, and medical care – for reasons other than poverty – so as to seriously endanger the physical health of a child.

##### **WHAT IF I’M NOT SURE IF I SHOULD REPORT?**

Please report! A report requires only reasonable suspicion, NOT absolute certainty. Human Services staff will make follow-up decisions. We at Human Services cannot protect children unless they are brought to our attention.

##### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN I REPORT CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS?**

A social worker will write up your report. They will ask for information such as dates of birth, addresses and phone numbers regarding the child, parent/caregiver, household members and suspected maltreater. They will also ask questions about the suspected abuse or neglect. Please be prepared to provide information. The more information that you share, the better subsequent agency decision-making will be.

A supervisor will review the report for acceptancy and urgency decision. The supervisor will make a response time decision if a case is opened or “screened in”. Response time is determined by several factors and level of imminent danger. Screened in cases are designated a response time varying from immediate/same day up to 5 business days.

If you make a report and it is not opened for investigation or “screened out”, it doesn’t mean that your concerns are not valid. Screened out cases may have two outcomes: the case may be closed with no further action taken by our agency; or the case could be referred to Community Response, a voluntary program through the agency. A Community Response worker would provide support and offer assistance with resources in regards to housing, food, child care resources, parenting assistance for children of all ages, activities to do with children, help with finances and many more!

##### **Information You Will Be Asked When Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

- Identifying Information (i.e. names, dates of birth, relationships and addresses of family and household members)
- Specifics of the injury/alleged maltreatment (such as time, place, details of injury)
- Access to alleged maltreater (how often does the alleged maltreater have access to the child?)

- Description of the child including current locations (i.e. school), functioning (i.e. special needs) and vulnerability (i.e. young age)
- Description of the parents' functioning and parenting practices
- Description of the family, highlighting general functioning, current stresses and how the family might respond to intervention by social services
- Names and contact information for other people who may have information about the child or family
- Any information you know or suspect about issues concerning the family or prior concerns you have had
- American Indian Heritage

*\*\*\*Please be aware that all of the above information is not necessary to report abuse and neglect. The questions above are simply a guide to help prepare you for what will be asked. Even if you do not know all of the answers, please do not hesitate to report.*

### **WILL THE FAMILY KNOW THAT I REPORTED?**

State law protects reporter confidentiality. We will not disclose your name to the individuals whom you report. You should not be afraid of reprisals if you report.

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE SOCIAL WORKER SEES THE CHILD AND FAMILY?**

If at any time it is found that children are in a dangerous environment, Child Protective Services (CPS) has the legal obligation to take action to protect the children, to prevent further abuse and neglect and to preserve families whenever possible. When a social worker meets with the child and family, they will interview the children, parents and other household members regarding the maltreatment concerns, observe the family home, assess for the child's safety and risks as well as family strengths and needs. Based on the information collected, a determination will be made in accordance with state statutes as to whether maltreatment has occurred. Services that may benefit the child/ren and family will also be identified. A brochure has been developed [Parent's Guide to Child Protect Service Assessments](#) to help parents understand what to expect in the child protection process.

### **TRADITIONAL VS. ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE APPROACHES AND OUTCOMES**

Child Protective Services (CPS) has the flexibility to apply the response that best matches the needs of the families. Manitowoc County CPS utilizes two approaches: Traditional Response and Alternative Response.

When there is a serious and immediate risk of harm to children, CPS responds with a Traditional Investigation. Once an investigation is completed, the social worker must decide if the child has been or is likely to be abused or neglected. If the social worker finds that child abuse or neglect did not occur, the report is "unsubstantiated". If the social worker finds that child abuse or neglect did occur, the case is "substantiated".

When a child is not in immediate danger, an Alternative Response (AR) is used. With Alternative Response, the goal is to help families get needed services, supports, and other help that will resolve concerns and stressors often associated with allegations of child maltreatment. Once an assessment has been completed, a case decision is made. There are two decisions that can be made: Services Not Needed and the case is closed or Services Needed and the family will receive ongoing services through the Department.

For more information regarding the Alternative Response approach in Wisconsin, please visit the [Department of Children and Families website](#).

## **WILL THE CHILD BE REMOVED FROM THEIR FAMILY?**

Human Services strives to keep families together. We serve most children and families in the family home. Court action is necessary whenever a child is removed from the parental home.

In removal situations, Human Service actions are guided by Wisconsin State Statutes. These statutes set forth agency child protection responsibilities, situations in which agencies may petition the Courts for involvement in children's lives, dispositions which Courts might enter on children's behalf, criteria which must be met in order to take children into custody, places in which children taken into custody may be held, and more. These Statutes closely circumscribe social workers' actions. Children and families are awarded many rights by these statutes.

## **MANDATED REPORTERS:**

Persons required to report abuse and neglect are: Physicians, Coroners, Medical Examiners, Nurses, Dentists, Chiropractors, Acupuncturists, Optometrists, Day Care Providers, Chemical Dependency Counselors, Marriage/Family Therapists, Professional Counselors, Physical Therapist, including PT assistants, Occupational Therapists, Dietitians, Speech Therapists, Audiologists, EMTs/Paramedics, Social/Public Assistance Workers as defined under 49.141(1)(d), School Administrators, Teachers/Counselors, Police/Law Enforcement Officers, Mediators under s. 767.11, a child care worker in a child care center, group home or residential care center for children and youth, a child care provider, a member of a treatment staff employed by or working under contract with a county department or a residential care center for children and youth, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

For more information regarding mandated reporters, please read the [State of Wisconsin Statute 48.981\(2\)](#).