



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

All New Jersey residents are mandated reporters, meaning that by law anyone with a reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected is required to report it to authorities immediately. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously. If you have a suspicion, call the New Jersey Child Abuse Hotline. The Hotline is open 24-hours a day, 7-days a week.

New Jersey Child Abuse Hotline
1-877-NJ ABUSE
1-877-652-2873

Q. How do you define child abuse and neglect?

A. Child abuse is the physical, sexual, or emotional harm or risk of harm to a child under the age of 18 caused by a parent or other person who acts as a caregiver for the child. Child neglect occurs when a parent or caregiver fails to provide proper supervision for a child or adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care although financially able or assisted to do so.

Q. What is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect?

A. When you suspect or entertain the possibility that a child has been abused or neglected, or is in imminent danger of abuse or neglect, based on your observations, training, and/or the circumstances before you, you are required by law to call the NJ Child Abuse Hotline. Remember, you do not have to be sure that abuse has taken place to call the Child Abuse Hotline. Having reasonable suspicion is enough to trigger a report.

Q. What should I do if I have a reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected?

A. State law requires that you *immediately* report reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected to the authorities. If you believe a child is in immediate danger call your local police by dialing 911. To report a suspicion of abuse or neglect, call the NJ Child Abuse Hotline at 1-877-NJ Abuse or 1-877-652-2873.

Q. What does it mean to make a report “immediately”?

A. Immediately means “right now.” Only in exceptional circumstances should your delay in reporting to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline be more than 30 minutes.

Q. If I need to report a reasonable suspicion should I ignore my school or institution’s policy for reporting this information to a supervisor?

A. No. It is permissible to report your reasonable suspicion to a supervisor consistent with your institution’s policy (the school principal, for example). Your report to a supervisor, however, must not delay your primary obligation to report suspected abuse or neglect immediately to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline.

Q. What if a supervisor is at lunch, a meeting, or otherwise unavailable?

A. You must then immediately identify an alternate supervisor and notify that person of your suspicion of abuse. But, your report to an alternate supervisor must not delay your primary obligation to report suspected abuse immediately to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline.

Q. What if I cannot locate any supervisor or alternate supervisor?

A. In the unlikely event that you cannot locate a supervisor, alternate supervisor or if your institution does not have such a policy, you must report suspected abuse to immediately to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline.

Q. What information should I be prepared to provide when I call the NJ Child Abuse Hotline?

A. At a minimum, the NJ Child Abuse Hotline professional who answers your call will ask you to provide detailed information regarding the circumstances of your suspicion (i.e., the circumstances or observations that triggered your call). He or she will also ask you to provide detailed information about the child, including his or her name, the names of his or her caretakers, as well as phone numbers, address, and other contact information for the family.

Q. Can I also report suspected abuse to the municipal police?

A. Yes, many schools have longstanding relationships with the municipal police in their community. Some schools have their own school resource officers (SRO). You may provide notification to the police, but this must not delay your primary obligation to report suspected abuse immediately to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline.

Q. If I report suspected abuse to the SRO, must I still report to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline?

A. Yes, state law requires that you report suspected abuse to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline immediately. If you choose to report the suspicion to the SRO, that report is **in addition** to your legal obligation to report to the Hotline. Also, it is critical that you alert any agency to whom you report abuse, that you have reported the same information to another agency. For example, if your first report is to the SRO, and then you make your mandatory report to the Hotline, you must advise the Hotline that you have made an initial report to the SRO. **REMINDER:** New Jersey law requires that you immediately report abuse to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline. You shall not delay such reporting for any reason, including trying to locate the SRO or a supervisor.

Q. After I make a report to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline (or additional child protection agencies) what should I do next?

A. The NJ Child Abuse Hotline professional who takes your call will provide specific direction about what to do next. If their advice is unclear, you must ask follow-up questions and take notes. Moreover, if any of the advice is conflicting with that of your agency, you can call the Hotline and ask to speak to a supervisor, or you can call your local prosecutor's office for further instructions.

Q. Once I have made a mandatory report of child abuse can I notify the child's parent or guardian (who is not a suspect)?

A. No. Never contact anyone in the child's family, including the nonoffending caregiver, to discuss the suspected abuse, until you have discussed that issue with the professionals at the Child Abuse Hotline. Similarly, you should never contact the person suspected of abusing or neglecting the child.

Q. Can I move the child who disclosed abuse to the office of the principal, school nurse, or other safe place during the reporting process?

A. Yes, in some cases it may be necessary to remove the child from classes for their own safety or psychological well-being. It is important, however, that you do not question the child further about any statement of abuse. Nor should the child be required to repeat a statement of abuse to additional school personnel to validate your suspicion. The NJ Child Abuse Hotline has trained professionals who will conduct any follow-up inquiry. Moreover, any additional questioning has the potential to compromise the investigation.

Q. Can the school nurse, school psychologist, or other appropriate health professional question the child further if there is acute physical injury or the child is actively exhibiting serious psychological trauma?

A. Yes, under these serious circumstances it may be necessary for medical or mental health professionals to question the child for diagnosis and/or treatment.

Q. What if I am not sure that the child's statements are sufficient to establish reasonable cause of abuse, for example, if the child's report is vague or implausible?

A. You always should err on the side of safety and immediately report your concerns to the NJ Child Abuse Hotline. Remember, as a mandated reporter, your responsibility is to report a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect, not validate a suspicion or otherwise determine if abuse or neglect has occurred—leave that to the trained professionals who will determine if further investigation is warranted.

Q. Do I have to personally make the report of my reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or can a supervisor make the report for me?

A. New Jersey law requires that person who has a reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused make the report to the Child Abuse Hotline. School staff may however, make the report collaboratively with supervisory or other appropriate personnel.

Q. Can I be sued or fired from my job if I am wrong and it is determined that abuse or neglect is unfounded?

A. No. As long as you made the report in good faith, you are protected from civil or criminal liability and/or penalty.

Q. Can I be sued, fired, or prosecuted if I fail to report a reasonable suspicion of abuse.

A. Yes, under some circumstances, failing to report a suspicion may expose you to civil or criminal liability. More importantly, failing to make a report may put a child's health and safety in danger. You are required by law to immediately report a suspicion. Immediately means right now.