

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DCF RECEIVES A REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

There are several possibilities, depending on the allegations reported and other case-specific circumstances:

If the Department determines there is reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, a social worker is assigned to investigate the report. The investigation, called a 51B, includes a home visit during which the social worker meets and talks with the child and the caretaker. If DCF determines that there is an immediate danger of abuse and neglect, an investigation begins within 2 hours with an interim determination within 24 hours and a final determination within 5 business days. All other investigations begin within 2 business days and a final determination is made within 15 business days.

If the Department determines that there is reasonable cause to believe that an incident of abuse or neglect did occur, the report is supported and the Department provides the family with services to reduce the risk of harm to the child.

If the report is unsupported but the family appears to be in need of services, the Department may offer the family services on a voluntary basis. DCF will notify the mandated reporter, in writing, of its decision.

Referrals to the District Attorney

The Department of Children and Families must notify the District Attorney and law enforcement if it determines that a child has been the subject of multiple 51As, has been sexually abused or sexually exploited, has suffered serious physical abuse or injury, or has died as a result of abuse or neglect.

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REPORT ABUSE

If you suspect that a child has been a victim of abuse or neglect, report to the Department of Children and Families in Massachusetts. Certain circumstances may warrant an immediate call to 911 or local police department.

Police	911
Child-at-Risk Hotline	1-800-792-5200
MA Department of Children and Families	617 748-2000 www.mass.gov/dss
Parental Stress Line	1-800-632-8188 www.pcsonline.org/helplines

LOCAL DCF OFFICES

* Arlington Area Office Covers Canton, Dedham, Foxboro, Medfield, Millis, Norfolk, Needham, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Walpole, Wellesley, Westwood, Wrentham	781-641-8500
* Brockton Area Office Covers Avon, Holbrook, Stoughton	508-894-3700
* Coastal Area Office Covers Braintree, Cohasset, Milton, Quincy, Randolph, Weymouth	781-682-0800
* Dimock Area Office Covers Brookline	617-989-2800
* Framingham Area Office Covers Dover	508-424-0100
* South Central Area Office Covers Franklin, Medway	508-234-1000



Norfolk Advocates for Children

508-543-0500 | www.NorfolkAdvocatesforChildren.com

Norfolk Advocates for Children is a program of the Norfolk District Attorney's Office, in partnership with the NAC, a 501(c)3

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

A GUIDE FOR MANDATED REPORTERS

Norfolk Advocates for Children



is a collaboration of public and private agencies, that provide services to children and families who have experienced physical, sexual, and domestic abuse.

Norfolk Advocates for Children develop resources and coordinate direct care to these children and families through a multi-disciplinary approach.

The goal of Norfolk Advocates for Children is to foster collaboration and communication among agencies, minimize the number of times that children are interviewed, and provide a swift and sensitive coordinated response to victims and witnesses in a child friendly and culturally sensitive environment. The NAC also responds to the needs of the community by facilitating education, training, outreach, networking and advocacy programs.

Introduction

Under Massachusetts law, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is the agency that receives all reports of suspected abuse or neglect of children under the age of 18. State law requires professionals whose work brings them in contact with children to notify DCF if they suspect that a child has been, or is at risk of being, abused or neglected.

DCF depends on reports from professionals and other concerned individuals to learn about children who may need protection. The Department receives reports on more than 100,000 children each year.

References to Massachusetts law in this Guide are citations from Chapter 119, Section 51A-E

WHO IS A MANDATED REPORTER?

Massachusetts law defines the following professionals as mandated reporters:

- Physicians, medical interns, hospital personnel engaged in the examination, care or treatment of children.
- Public or private schoolteachers; school nurses and coaches
- Educational administrators, guidance or family counselors
- Daycare and child workers, including any person paid to care for, or work with, a child
- Probation officers, clerk magistrate of district courts, parole officers
- Foster parents
- Firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, police officers
- Office of child care services licensors
- School attendance officers, allied mental health and licensed human services professionals
- Psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, drug and alcoholism counselors
- Priests, rabbis, clergy members, ordained or licensed ministers

Mandated Reporters who are staff members of medical or other public or private institutions, schools or facilities, must either notify the Department directly or notify the person in charge of the institution, school or facility, or his/her designee, who then becomes responsible for filing the report. However, staff members retain the right to contact DCF directly.

AS A MANDATED REPORTER, WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES?

Massachusetts law requires mandated reporters to immediately make an oral report to the Department of Children and Families when, in their professional capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering from abuse or neglect.

You should report any physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse, including sexual abuse; or any indication of neglect, including malnutrition; or any instance in which a child is determined to be physically dependent upon an addictive drug at birth.

A written report must be submitted to DCF within 48 hours after the oral report has been made. Please note that any mandated reporter who fails to make required oral and written reports can be punished by a fine of \$5,000 and/or 2 1/2 years in jail.

During the screening and investigation of a 51A report, any mandated reporter who has information which he/she believes might aid the Department in determining whether a child has been abused or neglected shall, upon request by DCF, disclose the relevant information to the Department. Under the law, mandated reporters are protected from liability in any civil or criminal action and from any discriminatory or retaliatory actions by an employer.



HOW ARE ABUSE AND NEGLECT DEFINED?

Under the Department of Children & Families regulations (110 CMR, Section 2.00):

ABUSE

The non-accidental commission of any act by a caretaker upon a child under age 18 which causes or creates a substantial risk of, physical or emotional injury; or constitutes a sexual offense under the laws of the Commonwealth; or any sexual contact between a caretaker and a child under the care of the individual.

NEGLECT

Failure by a caretaker, either deliberately or through negligence or inability, to take those actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and growth, or other essential care; provided, however, that such inability is not due solely to inadequate economic resources or solely to the existence of a handicapping condition.

Emotional injury is an impairment to or disorder of the intellectual or psychological capacity of a child as evidenced by observable and substantial reduction in the child's ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior.

PHYSICAL INJURY

Death; or fracture of a bone, a subdural hematoma, burns, impairment of any organ, and any other such nontrivial injury; or soft tissue swelling or skin bruising, depending upon such factors as the child's age, circumstances, under which the injury occurred and the number and location of bruises; or addiction due to a drug or drugs at birth; or failure to thrive.

HOW DO I MAKE A REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT? WHEN MUST I FILE IT?

When you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, you should immediately telephone the DCF Area Office serving the child's residence and ask for the Protective Screening Unit.

You will find a directory of the DCF Area Offices serving Norfolk County at the back of this Guide. Offices are staffed between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays.

To make a report at any other time, including after 5 p.m. and on weekends and holidays, call the **Child-At-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200.**

Certain circumstances may warrant an immediate call to 911 or local police department.

As a mandated reporter, you are also required by law to mail or fax a child abuse & neglect written report form to the Department within 48 hours after making the oral report. The form for filing this report can be obtained from your local DCF Area Office or online to the following URL: www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dss/can_reporting_form.pdf

Your report should include

- All identifying information you have about the child, family, caretaker, or any other person living or frequenting the home, if known;
- The nature and extent of the suspected abuse or neglect, including any evidence or knowledge of prior injury, abuse, maltreatment, or neglect;
- The circumstances under which you first became aware of the child's injuries, abuse, maltreatment or neglect;
- What action, if any, has been taken thus far to treat, shelter, or otherwise assist the child; and
- Any other information you believe might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injury and/or person responsible.