

Child Abuse Reporting Fact Sheet

1. What is a mandated reporter?

A mandated reporter is someone who is legally obliged to report incidences of suspected child abuse/neglect.

2. Who is a mandated reporter?

Medical practitioners, public and private school teachers and administrators, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, daycare workers, foster parents, public safety officers—and others.

Effective May 2002, **clergy and those who work** for religious institutions are also mandated reporters.

The Diocese of Springfield's "Policy on the Protection of Children" has deemed that those who **volunteer for the Church**, while not legally mandated, are obligated to report suspected abuse.

3. What about child abuse revealed during Confession?

The "Confessional Exception" is narrow. State law says "Clergy shall report all cases of abuse unless the information derives solely from the confessional (or similar confidential communication in other religions)."

4. Am I obligated to report suspected abuse at all times?

No. You must report when you are in your role as a staff/volunteer for the Church.

Of course, a person can always call DSS when there is concern about suspected abuse.

5. How are abuse and neglect defined?

Abuse: the non-accidental commission of any act against a child that causes or creates a substantial risk of physical injury.

Neglect: the failure of the caregiver to provide minimally adequate care in these areas: food, shelter, clothing, medical care, supervision, emotional stability, or other essential care.

Sexual Abuse: any sexual contact between a child and a caretaker. This includes involvement with pornography.

6. Under what circumstances must a mandated reporter or a volunteer within the Diocese file with DSS?

Whenever the reporter has "reasonable cause to believe" that a child under 18 is being abused or neglected.

You can always call DSS to consult. They will advise you regarding whether a report is necessary or not.

7. How is suspected child abuse/neglect reported?

During business hours, call the appropriate office:

Springfield, 413-452-3200
Holyoke, 413-493-2600
(or 1-800-698-3935)
Northampton, 413-584-1698
(or 1-800-841-2692)
Greenfield, 413-775-5000
(or 1-800-842-5905)
Pittsfield, 413-236-1800
(or 1-800-292-5022)

After hours, call **1-800-792-5200**.

8. What if I am not sure if a child is being abused?

When in doubt – make a report.

Absolute proof is not needed.
“Reasonable cause to believe” covers anything that creates reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused.

9. Will the name of the reporter be revealed?

Legally mandated reporters must give their name to DSS, but DSS regulations prohibit the release of a reporter’s name to others. However, if the crime is of a sufficiently serious nature to warrant a referral to the District Attorney’s office, the DA will receive the name of the mandated reporter.

A person making a voluntary report – such as a church volunteer -- may do so anonymously.

10. Under what circumstances do DSS and the District Attorney collaborate during the DSS investigation?

When investigating the most serious allegations of sexual and physical abuse, DSS, the DA, and the police work together to conduct forensic interviews. Also, if a case does not involve a “caretaker,” DSS may refer the matter to the DA’s office.

11. Can the reporter delegate the reporting to a superior?

No. The Diocese of Springfield’s policy is that the person who obtains the information is the one who calls DSS.

12. Must a Church staff or volunteer tell the DRE or Pastor that he/she is filing a report?

No. The staff or volunteer may review the situation with a superior if he/she wants, but there is no obligation to tell a superior.

13. Can a reporter be civilly or criminally liable for filing a report with DSS?

To encourage reporters to file, MA law protects reporters from civil and criminal liability for making a report to DSS.

14. If I suspect child abuse, do I contact DSS or the Diocese of Springfield Review Board first?

Call DSS first.

15. What is the role of the Review Board?

The Review Board is an independent board that hears complaints regarding sexual misconduct on the part of a Diocesan employee or volunteer. If you would like to make a report to the Review Board, the number is **1-800-842-9055**.

16. Where can I get more information about child abuse reporting?

The Department of Social Services web site contains a wealth of valuable information: www.state.ma.us/dss

*Fact Sheet prepared by:
Diocese of Springfield
Office of Counseling, Prevention and
Victim Services
413-452-0624*