

Abuse Hotline Frequently Asked Questions

<https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/abuse-hotline/faq>



1. What is abuse?

For children: "Abuse" means any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child.

For adults: "Abuse" means any willful act or threatened act by a relative, caregiver, or household member which causes or is likely to cause significant impairment to a vulnerable adult's physical, mental, or emotional health. Abuse includes acts and omissions.

2. What is neglect?

For adults: "Neglect" means the failure or omission on the part of the caregiver or vulnerable adult to provide the care, supervision, and services necessary to maintain the physical and mental health of the vulnerable adult, including, but not limited to, food, clothing, medicine, shelter, supervision, and medical services, which a prudent person would consider essential for the well-being of a vulnerable adult. The term "neglect" also means the failure of a caregiver or vulnerable adult to make a reasonable effort to protect a vulnerable adult from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others.

For children: "Neglect" occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired.

3. What is exploitation?

"Exploitation" means a person who:

1. Stands in a position of trust and confidence with a vulnerable adult and knowingly, by deception or intimidation, obtains or uses, or endeavors to obtain or use, a vulnerable adult's funds, assets, or property with the intent to temporarily or permanently deprive a vulnerable adult of the use, benefit, or possession of the funds, assets, or property for the benefit of someone other than the vulnerable adult; or
2. Knows or should know that the vulnerable adult lacks the capacity to consent, and obtains or uses, or endeavors to obtain or use, the vulnerable adult's funds, assets, or property with the intent to temporarily or permanently deprive the vulnerable adult of the use, benefit, or possession of the funds, assets, or property for the benefit of someone other than the vulnerable adult.

4. Who do you consider a child?

A child is an unmarried person who is born, under the age of 18, and who has not been emancipated by order of the court.

5. Who do you consider a vulnerable adult?

"Vulnerable adult" means a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, sensory, long-term physical, or developmental disability or dysfunction, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging.

6. What should I do if I suspect a child or vulnerable adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited?

Everyone, including professionally mandatory reporters, should contact the Florida Abuse Hotline when they know or have reasonable cause to suspect that a child or a vulnerable adult has been abused,

abandoned, neglected, or exploited. The Abuse Hotline Counselor will determine if the information provided meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation.

7. When should I call?

Any person, including professionally mandatory reports, should contact the Florida Abuse Hotline when they know or have reasonable cause to suspect that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused, abandoned, neglected, or exploited. The Hotline has counselors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

8. How do I make a report?

The Hotline counselor will determine if the information provided meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation.

There are four ways to make a report:

1. By Telephone: [800-96-ABUSE](tel:800-96-ABUSE) / [800-962-2873](tel:800-962-2873)
2. By Fax: 800-914-0004
3. By Florida Relay: 7-1-1
4. By TTY: 800-955-8771
5. By Web Reporting: <https://reportabuse.myflfamilies.com>

9. What should I expect when I contact the Hotline?

Reporters contacting the Hotline should expect to be asked for the following information:

- A means to locate the subjects of the report. Some common means to locate may include, but not be limited to:
 - Directions to the Home
 - Home Address
 - Parents/Caregivers Work Location, Address, Phone Number
 - Phone number
 - School Name, Address, and Phone Number
- Demographical information of the person's involved in the situation being reported. This includes the names, ages, dates of birth (if known), race, gender, social security number (if known).
- Hotline counselors accept reports on the basis of specific criteria from Chapter 39 and 415 of the Florida Statutes. Each call acceptance decision is based only on information provided during the call.
- Specifics of the incident being reported. Some common questions asked by the Hotline Counselor include:
 - Any known history, frequency, etc. of the same or similar incidents.
 - What happened to the victim?
 - What were the effects to the victim?
 - Who caused the harm?

10. What kind of information do I need to have ready when I call?

Specific descriptions of the incident(s) or the circumstances contributing to the risk of harm, including who was involved, what occurred, when and where it occurred, why it happened, the extent of any injuries sustained, what the victim(s) said happened, and any other pertinent information are very important. Information callers should have ready includes:

- Addresses or another means to locate the subjects of the report, including current location.
- Name, date of birth (or approximate age), race, and gender, for all adults and children involved.
- Information regarding disabilities and/or limitations of the victims (especially for vulnerable adult victims).
- Other relevant information that would expedite an investigation, such as directions to the victim (especially in rural areas) and potential risks to the investigator, should be given to the Abuse Hotline Counselor.

- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child or adult victim(s).

11. Will the person(s) know I reported him or her?

All reports are confidential. Access to these reports is limited by specific criteria in Chapters 39 and 415 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.).

Florida Abuse Hotline Counselors will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular caller, nor will they release any information provided by a caller or any information contained in a report. No reports are released by the Abuse Hotline other than to those persons specifically authorized under Chapters 39 and 415, F.S. Any person with a statutory right to a report copy must contact the local investigative office.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for child reports

View section [415.107](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for adult reports

12. Do I have to give my name?

No. You do not have to give your name in order to make a report. Providing your name, however, is helpful in the event a protective investigator needs to ask you more questions or seek clarification about the information you provided to the Hotline Counselor.

The names of reporters are held confidential, and under Florida Statutory requirements, should not be released to the individuals the report is about.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., for who has a right to the copy of a report related to child victims

View section [415.107](#), F.S., for who has a right to a copy of a report related to adult victims

Although every person has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect, some occupations are specified in Florida law as required to do so. These occupations are considered “professionally mandatory reporters”. A professionally mandatory reporter of child abuse/neglect is required by Florida Statute to provide his or her name to the Abuse Hotline Counselor when reporting. A professionally mandatory reporter's name is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential (§ 39.202, F.S. and 415.107, F.S.)

View section [39.202](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for child reports

View section [415.107](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for adult reports

13. Are your calls recorded?

Yes, all calls made to the Florida Abuse Hotline are recorded.

14. Why do you record calls to the Hotline?

Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes mandate that the Hotline records all incoming or outgoing calls.

The Florida Abuse Hotline may use these recordings for quality assurance and training of Hotline counselors.

15. Who is a mandated reporter?

There are specific occupations under the Florida Law that are required to report suspected abuse or neglect.

Mandated reporters can be viewed here:

View section [39.201](#), F.S., regarding Professionally Mandated Reporters for child reports

View section [415.1034](#), F.S., regarding Professionally Mandated Reporters for adult reports

16. What kind of information do you need from me when I call?

When contacting the Florida Abuse Hotline, please have as much of the information listed below available before you call.

This information is important to know no matter who is reporting or what method they choose to report.

If you are unable to obtain some of the information below, you may still call the Hotline and a counselor will assess the information available to see if it meets statutory criteria for the Florida Department of Children and Families to initiate a protective investigation.

Be prepared to provide the following information:

- A brief description of the victim's disability or infirmity (required for vulnerable adults).
- A brief, yet concise, description of the abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation, including physical, mental or sexual injuries, if any.
- Complete addresses for subjects, including a numbered street address, apartment or lot number, city, state, and zip code and/or directions to their location.
- Estimated or actual dates of birth.
- Names of other residents and their relationship to the victim(s), if available.
- Reporter name (this is required for professionally mandated reporters).
 - [Download the professionally mandated reporters' packet.](#)
 - View section [39.201](#), F.S., regarding Professionally Mandated Reporters for child reports
 - View section [415.1034](#), F.S., regarding Professionally Mandated Reporters for adult reports
- Social Security numbers, if available.
- Telephone numbers, including area code.
- The relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the victim.
- Victim name, possible responsible person, or alleged perpetrator name(s).

17. Can I fax in a report?

Yes. To make a report, via fax, please send a detailed written report with your name and contact telephone or FAX contact information using the Florida Abuse Hotline's [fax reporting form](#) to: **(800) 914-0004**.

This form is available in [PDF Format](#), (requires that you use [Adobe Acrobat](#) to view and print).
[Tips for Successful Fax Reporting](#)

18. How do I report on-line?

Web reporting should not be used for situations requiring immediate attention. Please contact the Hotline's toll-free reporting number if you believe a child or vulnerable adult is at imminent risk of harm.

To make a report via the Florida Abuse Hotline's web reporting option, please gather all of your information in advance, review the [Guide for Reporting on-line](#) and then make a [web report](#).

19. How do I follow up to find out what happened to the information I reported?

All reports are confidential. Access to these reports is limited by specific criteria in Chapters 39 and 415 of the Florida Statutes. The Hotline counselor will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular caller, nor will they release any information provided by a caller or any information contained in a report.

Any person with a statutory right to a report copy must contact the local investigative office.

View Chapter [39](#), F.S., for who has a right to the copy of a report related to child victims

View Chapter [415](#), F.S., for who has a right to a copy of a report related to adult victims

20. Why did the counsellor tell me they could not accept my report?

The Florida Abuse Hotline is committed to providing a clear understanding of services available to customers whether from the Florida Department of Children and Families or other state and community agencies.

Prior to concluding each call, the Hotline counselor is required to inform each caller if a report was accepted or not. When a report is not accepted, the Hotline Counselor may provide appropriate referral information to the caller so their concerns can be addressed by the appropriate entity.

21. What happens with the information I give you if a report is not taken?

The Hotline counselor is required to document information for all information received, in the Hotline's system of record database. This database is maintained for all contacts in compliance with Florida Statutes and for quality assurance and training purposes.

22. Who do I contact if I want to make a compliment/complaint about the Hotline?

You may ask to speak to a Hotline Supervisor or Call Center Manager. If the Supervisor or Manager cannot resolve your concern, then you may call the Hotline's administrative number [\(850\) 487-6100](#) and ask to speak to the Operations Manager or Director of the Hotline.

23. What kind of education and/or training do the Hotline Counselors have?

The minimum requirement for all Hotline counselors is one of the following:

1. A high school diploma or GED equivalent and four years of law enforcement experience or active military service (honorably discharged or status that current service reflects serving honorably); **or**
2. An associate degree or 60+ credit hours from an accredited college or university and two years of professional work experience (see examples below) or two years of law enforcement experience or active military service (honorably discharged or status that current service reflects serving honorably); **or**
3. Bachelor's degree from an accredited university

Examples of professional work experience could be, although not limited to:

- Behavioral Health Technician
- Daycare Provider/Worker
- Group Home Worker
- Guardian Ad Litem or similar child advocate role
- EMT
- Family Intervention Specialist
- Family Support Worker
- Home Health Aide
- Nurse (LPN or RN) or similar profession
- Nursing Facility Assistant
- Teacher's Assistant/Aide
- Therapeutic Assistant
- Other welfare, education or medical professional jobs that occur in high-paced, high-stress environments that require critical decision-making to occur

In addition, all Hotline counselors are required to complete a nine-week pre-service training prior to taking calls in Hotline's call center. This training includes seven weeks of classroom training and practice and concludes with a two-week service practicum. During the practicum period, trainees take

live abuse hotline calls, and have a trainer, supervisor, or veteran counselor with them to assist and review their decisions and reports.

On-going in-service training is conducted annually with all Hotline Counselors.

24. What if I don't have an address for the victim(s)?

If you do not have an address, please go ahead and call the hotline and provide the information you do have. While we do need to have a means to locate the subject of an abuse report, there are many other ways we can locate them. Addresses are the best means to locate, but we can also use phone numbers, school names and locations, parent/caregiver work location, Florida tag numbers, directions to the home, and many others.

Gather as much information as you can, and when you call the Abuse Hotline, the Counselor will make a determination based on the information you have available at the time of the call.

25. What if they find out I called in a report on them?

All reporters' information is confidential. The name of any person reporting child abuse, neglect or abandonment, may not be released to any person other than those allowed to have access to this information according to Florida Statute.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for child reports

View section 415.107, F.S., related to Confidentiality for adult reports

If you believe someone you made a report about has obtained reporter information inappropriately, then please contact the county protective investigations office where the investigation is being handled and ask to speak to a Protective Investigations Supervisor or you may contact the [Client Relations Coordinator](#) in your county.

26. Who has access to the reporter's information?

Access to reporter information is available to those professionals directly involved in child or adult protective investigations. A list of those individuals with access to this information can be found in Chapter 39 and Chapter 415 of the Florida Statutes.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for child reports

View section [415.107](#), F.S., related to Confidentiality for adult reports

27. I called in a report last week, and the investigator told them my name, what can I do?

If you believe someone you made a report about has obtained reporter information inappropriately, then please contact the county protective investigations office where the investigation is being handled and ask to speak to a Protective Investigations Supervisor or you may contact the [Client Relations Coordinator](#) in your county to file a complaint.

28. What happens after the Hotline accepts a report from the information I provided?

The Hotline counselor sends a typed report of the allegations to the local investigation County office where the victim is located. After the report is sent to the local office the report is assigned to a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) or Adult Protective Investigator (API). The CPI/API is then responsible for conducting an investigation on the allegations that meet statutory criteria for the Florida Department of Children and Families to investigate.

29. How soon does DCF respond to the home?

The Florida Department of Children and Families makes every effort to act with a sense of urgency to all allegations of harm to children and/or vulnerable adults.

The Florida Abuse Hotline strives to submit all reports to the appropriate investigative office within one hour after the call to the Hotline ends. Once the report arrives at the investigative office and is assigned to an investigator, the investigator has up to 24 hours to initiate contact with the subjects of the report. In situations in which it is believed the victim is at imminent risk of harm, the investigator will respond as soon as possible.

30. How old does a child have to be to be left home alone?

Chapter 39 of the Florida Statutes (F.S.) mandates that the Hotline be contacted when any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child of *any age* is being left home alone without adult supervision or arrangements appropriate for the child's age or mental or physical condition, so that the child is unable to care for the child's own needs or another's basic needs or is unable to exercise good judgment in responding to any kind of physical or emotional crisis.

The Hotline Counselor will assess the information provided in the call and make a determination of report acceptance or non-acceptance based on statutory criteria.

31. Is a child not wearing a seat belt considered abuse or neglect?

Generally, the use of child safety restraints would be within the jurisdiction of law enforcement to investigate, rather than the Florida Department of Children and Families. There are situations, however, in which DCF would become involved in these investigations. Therefore, we encourage callers to contact the Abuse Hotline when they have concerns and allow a Hotline Counselor to make the determination as to whether an incident meets the statutory criteria for acceptance of a report.

These calls will be handled on a case-by-case review of the facts presented in the call. Law enforcement should also be contacted for concerns involving child safety restraints.

32. Who do I contact if I have a complaint about the way an investigation was handled?

The best practice is to contact Florida Department of Children and Families adult or child protective investigative office in the county where the investigation occurred. In addition, investigative complaints can be processed through our [Client Relations Coordinator](#).

33. How can I get a copy of the report made against me?

Any person with a statutory right to a copy of a report must contact the [local Florida Department of Children and Families office](#) in the county where the investigation occurred.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., for who has a right to the copy of a report related to child victims

View section [415.107](#), F.S., for who has a right to a copy of a report related to adult victims

34. How can I get a copy of the report that I made?

Florida Statutes determine who is entitled to a copy of a report of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult. If you meet the statutory criteria for who is entitled to a copy of the abuse report, then you can receive a copy by contacting the Florida Department of Children and Families [child or adult investigative office](#) in the county where the investigation occurred.

View section [39.202](#), F.S., for who has a right to the copy of a report related to child victims

View section [415.107](#), F.S., for who has a right to a copy of a report related to adult victims

35. I made a report, why didn't anyone contact me?

The reporter may or may not be contacted by the protective investigator handling the case. If you have not been contacted and wish to speak to the investigator handling the case you reported, then you should contact the [local protective investigations office](#).

36. Will the children be removed from the home?

This decision determined by a dependency court judge based on the identified risks to the children's well-being. DCF's mission is to ensure the children are in a safe environment.

37. Will the children go straight into foster care?

When placement is needed for a child at risk of harm, DCF makes every effort to arrange for appropriate and safe placement for the child(ren). These decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

In some cases, the children can be placed with approved relatives or other individuals the child may know personally, in other cases, the child(ren) may be placed in foster care. For further questions related to the process of placement selection, please contact your [local Florida Department of Children and Families, Child Protection Office](#).