Policy and Procedures
Child Abuse Mandated Reporters
Page 1 of 3

Dauphin County MH/ID Program
Policy and Procedure

Department:  
MH          Policy No.  12-11
ID          Effective Date  1-16-12
X  EI        Revision Date  10-4-13
Admin
Crisis  
Approved  

Title: Reporting Child Abuse for Mandated Reporters

Policy: Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected child abuse immediately to Pennsylvania’s ChildLine based on their professional training or other experience. They also must make a written follow-up report to the investigating County Children and Youth Agency within 48 hours. Mandated reporters who make a report in good faith have immunity from civil and criminal liability that might otherwise result from their actions.

Background: Protecting children is the responsibility of us all. But certain professionals, due to their contact with children, have special responsibilities. These people are called mandated reporters and are of critical importance to the child abuse prevention effort. Mandated reporters have consistently provided the most accurate and reliable information on abused and neglected children.

Definitions:

Child Abuse: PA’s Child Protective Services Law defines abuse as non-accidental serious physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation, or serious physical neglect caused by acts or omissions of the parent or caretaker.

Mandated Reporter: A mandated reporter includes the following professionals:
1. Health care professionals
2. Law enforcement officials
3. Social service professionals, including early intervention and child care staff
4. Education professionals
5. Anyone who, as part of his or her job, has contact with children.

If you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, call ChildLine immediately at 1-800-932-0313.
Procedure:

1. If you think or suspect that a child has been abused, or witness child abuse, contact CHILDLINE at 1-800-932-0313 IMMEDIATELY. If it is an emergency or if the abuse is occurring right now, call 911. All reports are confidential and referred for investigation. When making a report it is helpful to have as much of the following information as possible:
   1. Name or physical description of the child.
   2. Age or approximate age of the child.
   3. Name, home address, and telephone number of the parent or legal guardian.
   4. Name or physical description of the suspected abuser or license plate number if the name is not known.
   5. Relationship of the suspected abuser to the child.
   6. Type of abuse that is suspected.
   7. A description of the suspected injury or impairment of bodily function.
   8. Where the incident took place and when it occurred.
   9. Any concern for the child’s immediate safety.
   10. Your name and relationship to the child.
   11. What actions you have taken – talking to the parent, reporting to the police, obtaining medical care for the child.
   12. You may report an incident anonymously; however it is helpful for the agency to be able to contact you for additional information if necessary.

2. Child abuse takes many forms, and the warning signs vary. Abuse can be physical, mental, sexual, or happen through neglect. Some typical signs include:
   A. Physical Abuse – purposely hurt through hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, or similar action. Physical signs include: unexplained bruises, welts, cuts or other injuries; broken bones and burns. Behavioral signs may include wearing clothing that is inappropriate for the weather to hide injuries; seeming withdrawn or depressed; seeming afraid to go home; shying away from physical contact, and showing aggression.
   B. Mental Abuse – repeated threats or insults that are intended to scare or embarrass children or crush their self-esteem. Physical signs may include: speech disorders and/or slowed physical development. Behavioral signs may include: child acting too mature or too childish for his or her age; having difficulty making or keeping friends; and having extreme behavioral changes.
   C. Sexual Abuse – inappropriate sexual activity with a child, inappropriate touching, using the child for sexual films or prostitution, or exposing the child to adult sexual activity (through photographs, videos, etc.). Physical signs may include: torn, stained or bloody underwear; trouble walking or sitting; pain or itching in the genital area; bruises or bleeding in the genital area; or a sexually transmitted disease. Behavioral signs may include: an unusual knowledge of sex; fear of a particular person; seeming to be withdrawn or depressed; sudden weight gain or loss; shying away from physical contact.
D. Neglect – repeated failure to provide a child with needed care, protection, and attention. Physical signs may include: poor hygiene, slowed physical development or appearing underweight; unattended medical needs or little or no supervision at home. Behavioral signs may include: arriving at school very early or late, or missing school often; being frequently tired or hungry; stealing food or dressing inappropriately for the weather.
   i. Physical neglect includes abandonment or rejection; lack of supervision; failure to provide food, clothing, or proper hygiene and the failure to seek medical care.
   ii. Medical Neglect includes refusing to obtain medical treatment.
E. Imminent Risk – the act or failure to act that is likely to cause non-accidental serious injury, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child. Failure to act means that an adult knew or should have understood the risk for the child, or the adult failed to exercise reasonable judgment in protecting the child involved in an abuse situation. Examples may include: firing a gun toward a child, leaving the child unsupervised, leaving the child in the unsupervised care of a known sex offender; attempting to sexually abuse a child.

3. Mandated reporters are responsible to make the report to CHILDLINE when you suspect a child is abused. The caseworker of the County Children and Youth agency will investigate and determine whether the child was abused.

4. Mandated reporters, by law, must report suspected abuse when they come into contact with children in the course of their employment. You must report when you have reason to suspect on the basis of your professional training and experience. A mandated reporter who is convicted of willfully failing to report suspected child abuse is guilty of a summary offense. A second or subsequent offense is a misdemeanor of the third degree. The maximum penalty of each is a fine and/or jail time.

5. Alert the child’s Service Coordinator: All providers of early intervention services, their employees, and subcontractors are to report incidents of suspected or alleged child abuse of which they become aware, regardless of whether they were providing services at the time of the alleged abuse. The initial reporter responds to the situation and notifies the point person at their agency and/or the service coordinator as designated in their agency policy.

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References: