

Section XVI

Responding to Reports of Sexual Abuse

Reporting, and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse for Educators.

What do I do when a child reports abuse to me?

Do:

- Keep Calm. It is important to remember that you are not angry with the child but at what happened. Children can mistakenly interpret anger or disgust as being director towards them.
- Make sure the person talking with the child is the person in the school most competent to talk with children.
- Conduct the discussion in private.
- Sit next to the child, not across a table or a desk.
- Tell the child that the discussion is confidential, but that child abuse and neglect must be shared with Child Protective Services.
- Conduct the discussion in language that the child understands.
- Ask the child to clarify words/terms you do not understand.
- Believe the child. In most circumstances children do not lie about sexual abuse.
- Give positive messages such as “I know you couldn’t help it,” or “I’m proud of you for telling.”
- Explain to the child that he or she is not to blame for what happened.
- Listen and answer the child’s questions honestly.
- Respect the child’s privacy. Be careful not to discuss the abuse in front of people who do not need to know what happened.
- Tell the child if any future action will be required.
- **Be responsible.** *Report the incident to the Department of Children and Family Services:



DCFS Hotline: 1-800-252-2873 or in Springfield, 524-2606.

They can help protect the child’s safety and provide resources for further help.

***If the reported abuse involves Church personnel as the offender also contact the Victim Assistance Coordinator: Pat Kornfeld at: 217-321-1155**

Don’t:

- Allow the child to feel “in trouble”, or “at fault.”
- Disparage or criticize the child’s choice of words or language.
- Suggest answers to the child.
- Probe or press for answers the child is unwilling to give.
- Display horror, shock, or disapproval of parents, the child, the offender, or the situation.
- Pressure or force the child to remove clothing.
- Conduct the discussion with a group of people.
- Blame the child. Sexual abuse is never the child’s fault

For answers to this and many other questions regarding reporting the abuse of a child refer to the DCFS Publication – *Protecting the Children: A School Administrator’s Guide to Child Welfare Services in Illinois* This publication can be downloaded or viewed at:
http://www.state.il.us/dcfs/library/com_communications_protect.shtml

When talking with parents:

You may want to confer with Child Protective Services prior to talking to the parents about the referral.

Do:

Determine if you are the most appropriate person to talk with the parents.
Conduct the discussion in private.
Tell the parent(s) why the discussion is taking place
Be direct, honest, and professional.
Reassure the parent(s) a referral was made.
Advise the parent(s) of the school’s legal responsibility to make a report.

Don’t:

Try to prove abuse or neglect; that is not the educator’s role
Display horror, anger, or disapproval of parent(s), the child or the situation.
Pry into family matters unrelated to the specific situation/concern.
Place blame or make judgments about the parent(s) or child.