

LPS Employee Guide:

Responding to Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect

A Resource from
LPS School Social Workers

Phone Directory.....inside front cover

What is Child Abuse & Neglect?1

How Do I Respond to Child Disclosures?2

When Do I Make a Report of Child Abuse & Neglect?3

What If I Feel Uncertain About Reporting?.....7

How Do I Make a Child Abuse/Neglect Referral?9

What Can I Expect Following My Report?.....8

Am I Protected as a Reporting Party?8

What is Expected of the School Following a Report?9

Possible Indicators of Abuse & Neglect?3

Phone Contacts

Lincoln Police Department

Dispatch (to request an officer) 441-6000 or 441-7245

Family Crimes Unit..... 441-7220

Service Desk/Information 441-7204

Crimestoppers..... 475-3600

Department of Health and Human Services

Switchboard 471-7000

Child Abuse and/or Neglect Hotline..... 1-800-652-1999

Child Protective–Fax..... 471-5164

Your LPS School Social Worker..... 436-1658

- Extreme absence of expressiveness.
- Wearing many layers of clothing, regardless of the weather.
- Causing deliberate harm to her/himself, suicide attempts.
- Eating disorders (especially adolescents), sudden weight loss or gain.
- Feels threatened by physical contact or closeness.

Neglect

What are possible indicators of NEGLECT (physical, emotional, medical or educational)?

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress.
- Constant fatigue, listlessness or falling asleep.
- States there is no caretaker at home or that caretaker is incapacitated due to alcohol, drugs or anything contributing to an unsafe environment.
- Frequent school absences or tardies.
- Unattended physical problems, medical or educational needs.
- Excessive attention seeking from adults.
- Unsafe or unhealthy living environment.
- Coming to school very early and leaving very late.
- Inappropriate adult or infantile behaviors.
- Chronic runaway (especially adolescents).
- Delays in physical/emotional and/or intellectual development.
- Suicidal threats/behavior.
- Lack of response by parent or caretaker to suicidal threats/behavior.

Domestic Violence

Children who have witnessed domestic violence often demonstrate behaviors similar to children who have been physically abused themselves.

- Poor concentration, preoccupation, erratic attendance.
- Poor conflict resolution skills or tendency to use aggression.
- Rigid sex stereotypes.
- Believe violence is acceptable to express anger or get what you want.
- Boys are more likely to fight with peers, be defiant (especially with female teachers), be destructive and disobedient. They are more likely to blame others and not accept responsibility for their actions.
- Girls are more likely to be clingy, dependent, sad and secretive.
- Bullying behaviors.
- May appear school phobic or attention deficit.

Sexual Abuse

What are possible indicators of SEXUAL ABUSE?

- Reports of sexual assault by parent/caretaker.
- An abrupt change in behavior or personality.
- Pain or itching in genital area.
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas.
- Venereal disease, frequent urinary or yeast infections.
- Withdrawal, fantasy or infantile behavior.
- Unusual sexual knowledge or sexual acting out.
- Poor boundaries with opposite sex adult.
- Excessive or inappropriate masturbation.
- Excessive aggression, anger, hysteria, lack of emotional control.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting.

What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

According to Nebraska State Law:

Abuse or neglect shall mean knowingly, intentionally, or negligently causing or permitting a minor child to be: a) Placed in a situation that endangers his or her life or physical or mental health; b) cruelly confined or cruelly punished; c) deprived of necessary food, clothing, shelter or care; d) left unattended in a motor vehicle, if such minor child is six years of age or younger; e) sexually abused; or f) sexually exploited by allowing, encouraging or forcing such person to solicit for or engage in prostitution, debauchery, public indecency or obscene or pornographic photography, films or depictions.

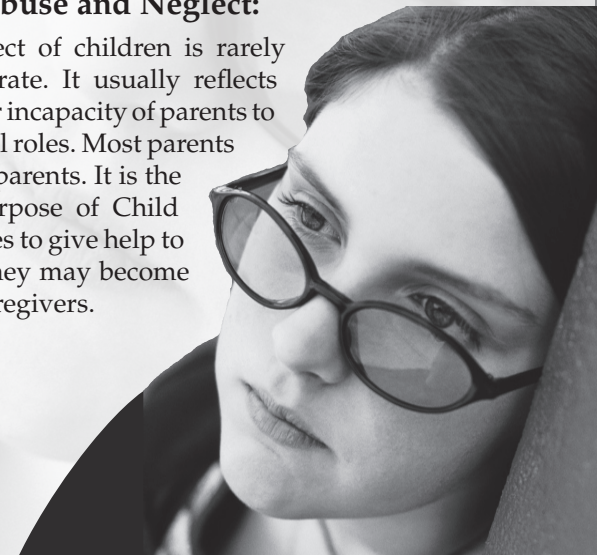
Please Note:

CHILD ABUSE is an **act** taken by a parent/caretaker which results in physical and/or emotional harm to a child. **Note:** This can include children witnessing family violence and drug use.

CHILD NEGLECT is an **act of omission** by a parent/caretaker. It is a failure by parent/caretaker to take actions to meet a child's physical, emotional, medical or educational needs.

Reasons for Abuse and Neglect:

Abuse and neglect of children is rarely willful or deliberate. It usually reflects the inadequacy or incapacity of parents to live up to parental roles. Most parents want to be good parents. It is the function and purpose of Child Protective Services to give help to parents so that they may become more effective caregivers.



How Do I Respond to Child Disclosures of Possible Abuse/Neglect?

Do:

- Listen. Get the basic information (ask as few questions as possible).

Don't:

- Don't cut the child's statements off in order to ask questions.
- Don't assume what happened.
- Don't ask leading questions.*
- Don't suggest a perpetrator or behavior(s) the perpetrator may have done.
- Don't press the child for information.
- Don't have other school staff re-interview the child.
- Don't take photographs (it is not the school's job to collect evidence).

*What Can I Ask That is Non-Leading?

- What does that mean?
Explain that to me.
- Where did this happen?
(don't suggest places)
- When did this happen?
(don't suggest times)
- Who did this?
(don't suggest people)



Possible Indicators of Abuse and Neglect:

Nebraska State Law has guidelines regarding what will be accepted as an abuse/neglect referral to be investigated by the Lincoln Police Department (LPD) and/or Child Protective Services (CPS). The witnessing of family violence by children can be considered child abuse. The following are lists of some of the common behavioral characteristics of children who have been abused and/or neglected. These indicators are offered with a word of caution against overzealous identification. Any one of these indicators alone does not necessarily mean there is abuse/neglect. Several extreme or pervasive behaviors may indicate abuse and certainly warrant an exploration as to the source of the problem.

Physical Abuse

What are possible indicators of physical abuse?

- Reported injuries by parents/caretakers.
- Unexplained, unbelievable reasons for chronic bruises, welts, fractures, burns, lacerations or abrasions.
- Frequent complaints of soreness or pain.
- Display of extreme behavior (aggressiveness, withdrawal, overachievement, underachievement).
- Wary of physical contact with adults (flinch from adult touch).
- Consistent early arrival to school or reluctance to go home.
- Seeking more than an average amount of attention from adults.
- Delays in emotional and intellectual development.
- Chronic runaway (especially adolescents).
- Self destructive behavior (e.g. cutting, eating disorders, suicidal threats/actions).
- Frequent visits to health office—headaches, etc.
- Hypervigilant (alertly watchful)
- Wearing clothing inappropriate to the weather to hide bruises or other marks

IF YOU CONTACT CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES, they may call LPD or advise you to call LPD if the situation requires immediate attention, a criminal investigation or photographs. Otherwise, reports are prioritized based on the degree of risk to the child and will be assigned for assessment to a CPS employee.

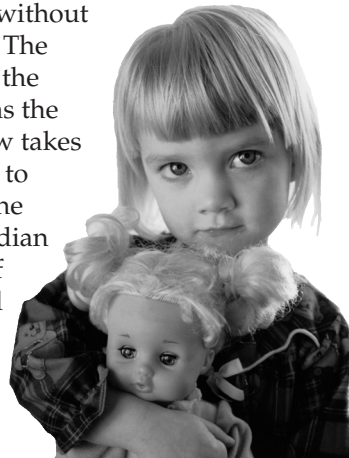
LINCOLN POLICE DEPARTMENT and CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES will share reports of investigated child abuse or neglect referrals with the county attorney who will then decide whether juvenile court action will be taken.

Am I protected as a reporting party?

Reporting individuals are granted anonymity by CPS and are protected by law from legal retaliation from the alleged perpetrator(s) except for maliciously false reports. Reports to the police are usually kept confidential, but this is not a legal requirement.

What is expected of the SCHOOL following a report of child abuse/neglect?

The person making the report is required to document it on the "Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect Report" form. LPS policy #5502 states building principals are to allow LPD or CPS workers to interview the child without permission of the parents or guardian. The principal, or a employee appointed by the principal, shall be present at all times as the student's representative if the interview takes place at school. They shall be expected to take such action during the course of the interview as a reasonable parent/guardian would take under the circumstances. If the interview is conducted at the Child Advocacy Center, school staff are not required to be present, although in some instances they may be asked to accompany the child.



REPORTING: IT'S THE LAW

When do I make a report of child abuse/neglect?

Nebraska State Law mandates any person to make a report to the proper law enforcement agency or the Department of Health and Human Services (Child Protective Services) **WHEN THERE IS REASONABLE CAUSE to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, or a child is in a situation which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect.**

LPS Policy #5504 is consistent with the reporting law in mandating ANY EMPLOYEE to make a report of abuse/neglect. Employees are also required to inform their building principal or supervisor that they are making a report. Informing a principal or supervisor does not end the employee's responsibility.

It is vital that the report be made as accurately and as soon as possible. Call in reports as early in the school day as possible so that there is an opportunity for a response before dismissal. This minimizes potential risk to the child.

Remember:

Our first obligation is to the safety and well being of our students. The law requires we not make judgments, but simply report. Child Protective Services and/or the Lincoln Police Department will decide if the report warrants an investigation.

Involving other people or sharing the information with a parent that a report has been made may place the child at risk. This may also undermine the investigation.

What If I Feel Uncertain About Reporting?

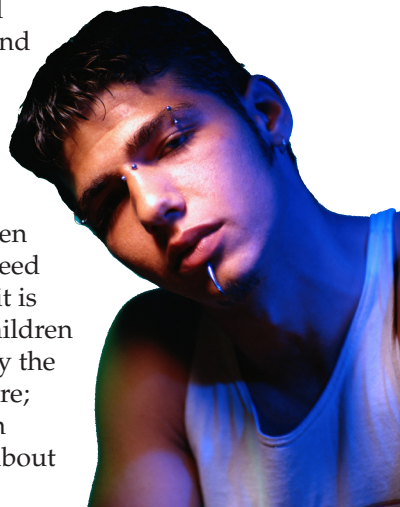
Although the reporting law is clear, making reports can be complex because of relationships and past experiences.

Each situation is unique and often we feel uncertain about how to interpret what we see and what children tell us. We're often concerned about parents' reaction to our referral and our ongoing relationship with the parents and the child. We also tend to want to believe that abuse/neglect could not occur, or at least may not in certain families.

We can't allow our concern over the handling of our referral, or the effect it may have on the family, to influence the decision to report.

Despite our intentions, contacting parents to notify them of our CPS referral can place the child at risk. Parents can more easily assume the information reported came from the child and may retaliate against the child. Contacting the parents can also undermine the investigation. There can be one or more days delay between referral and investigation. If families have advance notice, they may feel compelled to influence or coerce family members to present an inaccurate version of the situation. If parents confront or question the school regarding the reporting party, school personnel are not obligated to reveal or explain their actions.

It is not uncommon to have conflicting feelings about making a report of abuse or neglect. It is helpful to be aware that, at times, upon our contact with LPD/CPS to make a referral or express a concern, the family is already receiving services from CPS. Or, a referral is pending awaiting assignment or further information. In many cases, students have shared sensitive, confidential information and you may have a sense that you are betraying a student's trust if you share that information. Sometimes we need to be reminded that there can be no "secrets" when a child is at risk from abuse or neglect. Children can, and often do, understand our need to get someone else involved when it is explained to them. In some cases, children surprise us by being bothered less by the need to refer to LPD/CPS than we are; or feel affirmed when we take action that tells them we believe and care about them. Information can be given to



children to help them to know what action to expect from LPD/CPS. We can also discuss risk factors and safety plans.

Feel free to consult with your **School Social worker, Counselor, Administrator or Child Protective Services Hotline (1-800-652-1999) that day.** If your information is not sufficient for a referral, the information may be kept on file at CPS and reviewed as new information is submitted.

How Do I Make A Child Abuse/Neglect Report?

- Complete the LPS Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect Report form prior to contacting law enforcement or the CPS Abuse Hotline so that you will have gathered all necessary information.
- Inform the building principal of your need to make a report. If your supervisor is someone other than the building principal, that person should also be notified.
- Contact LPD to report visual bruises or marks at 441-6000.
- Report cases of sexual abuse to the LPD Family Crimes Unit at 441-7220.
- Other abuse and/or neglect concerns should be reported to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline 1-800-652-1999.

What can I expect following my report of abuse/neglect?

IF YOU CONTACT THE LINCOLN POLICE DEPARTMENT, Lincoln Police Dispatch will send a police officer to the person you identify as the contact person at your school. The officer may interview the child(ren) at the school or at the Child Advocacy Center. Every effort is made by the police department to follow up with the parent/caretaker the same day. A citation may be issued to the parent/caretaker. When the investigation is completed, a police report is shared with Child Protective Services. CPS may then assign one of their employees for further assessment.