

## Illinois DCFS Flowchart – How to Report Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

### **Organize the Information for your report.**

Gather **ONLY** the information you need to make the report of abuse/neglect to the Hotline. Remember, it is **NOT** your role to interview the child about the abuse. Only ask the child for information that you **NEED** to know, such as a brief description of the incident. Most of the other information can be gathered from sources other than the child (such as school records, family members, or a child's case file). Try to have this information available before calling:

1. Name, address and age of victim
2. Name and address of parents/caretakers and siblings
3. Relationship of caretaker to victim
4. Your observations, including specific incidents you have witnessed or the child has told you about, location and severity of injuries, any pattern of neglect or abuse, and any physical evidence
5. Any explanation provided by the child (in the child's own words)
6. Any other relevant information that would expedite the investigation, such as directions to the victim's house (especially in rural areas) or information about potential risks to the investigator.

Later you will be asked to **submit a written confirmation**, so here are some tips for documenting:

- If you have a camera, taking photographs of the injury can be very helpful to the investigator. This type of documentation is particularly important when the child has a visible injury (a bruise) that may disappear or change in nature before the investigator sees it.
- Medical professionals may find it easier to use a body chart or draw a body to record the location and the nature (cuts, welts, burns, bruises, broken bones) of the injury. If you are a medical professional, your notes in the chart may also become part of the investigation record.
- Non-medical reporters should not ask a child to undress to verify that the injuries the child described are present. They should refer the child to a medical professional.
- In addition to your observations of the injury, write down what the child said. It is helpful to make careful notes, using the child's exact words whenever possible.

DCFS has a Checklist Form that is a helpful tool for documenting. (See the Mandated Reporter Manual, Appendix B.)

**Call the Hotline!!!**

Dial:

**1-800-25ABUSE**  
(1-800-252-2873)

A TTY number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-358-5117.  
Reporters phoning from outside of Illinois should call 217-524-2606.



At the Hotline, specially trained intake workers are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to answer calls from Mandated Reporters and others who wish to report an incident of suspected child abuse or neglect.

**“Call Back” Process**

During peak times, the Hotline may be receiving too many calls to answer each one immediately. If you are put “on hold” when you call, follow these steps:

1. Remain on the line, as the first available worker may answer you shortly.
2. If all Hotline workers are already taking calls, someone may ask to take your “call back” information. A “call back” will be made just as soon as an intake worker becomes available.
3. Try to anticipate where you will be for the next several hours and give the worker not only your present number, but any other number(s) where you may be reached at a later time. A Hotline worker **will** call you back.

It is always important to report suspected abuse or neglect as soon as you recognize it. It is best not to wait until the end of your business day to call, as this is frequently a peak time at the Hotline.

**Report Information on What You’ve Seen and Heard**

This is where you will use the information you previously organized, so have your notes handy.

When a Hotline intake worker answers a call, s/he will tell you his/her name. You may want to write down the worker’s name in the event you need to speak with him/ her later.

The Hotline worker will ask you a series of questions to guide you through the reporting process. Do not be concerned if you do not know the answer to every question. Provide the relevant information that you have organized; the DCFS investigator will locate missing information during the investigation. You can always call back later if/when you have additional facts you want to add to your report.

While you are making the report, the Hotline worker will be searching the DCFS State Central Registry, the child abuse database, for any information that DCFS may have on the child, the family or the perpetrator.

### ***The Hotline Intake Worker Accepts Your Report***

The **function of the Hotline worker** is to determine whether the harm to the child, as described by the reporter, meets the requirements to be investigated by DCFS.

It is **not the job** of the Hotline worker **to determine whether abuse has actually occurred**. This is the function of the DCFS Division of Child Protection (DCP) Investigator.

#### ***If “No”, then:***

If the Hotline worker does not accept your report for investigation, you will be informed of that fact and given the reason. Typically the explanation will relate to DCFS's legal jurisdiction or to the evaluation of risk of harm to the child. If you disagree with the Hotline worker's conclusions, you may ask to speak with a Hotline supervisor. Explain the details of the case, the reasons you were given for the report being refused, and why you think the worker's assessment was inaccurate.

If the Hotline worker does not accept the report of a Mandated Reporter, the information is still entered into the computer database system and maintained on file for six months. The Hotline worker will often refer you to the police (for investigation of a crime outside DCFS mandates) or to other agencies that can provide helpful services to the family or the child.

As a Mandated Reporter, you may ask the Hotline worker to identify community-based resources and services that may help the child or family. In some instances, the DCFS local field office may refer the family for voluntary child welfare services.

#### ***If “Yes”, then:***

When a Hotline Intake Worker takes a report, the information from the reporter is entered into the DCFS computer database system and sent electronically to the DCFS field office responsible for the area in which the child resides. An investigator will try to make contact with the victim **within 24 hours or less**.

As a Mandated Reporter, you will be asked to supply a written confirmation of your verbal report **within 48 hours**. The Hotline worker will give you the fax number or address of the local DCFS office that will be investigating your report. The local DCFS

field office can provide the appropriate form for you (CANTS 4 or 5). Note that these forms may be used as evidence in any judicial proceeding that results from the incident.

***Investigator Determines If the Allegation Is Serious***

The law requires DCFS to report serious allegations to the local law enforcement agency and the State's Attorney, as possible criminal acts. These allegations include:

- Death
- Head injuries
- Internal injuries
- Wounds
- Torture
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Sexual penetration
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual molestation
- Failure to thrive (infants)
- Medical neglect of disabled infants
- Malnutrition

***If "Yes", then:***

Serious allegations have a requirement that the local law enforcement agency and the State's Attorney be notified of the report as a possible criminal act. The investigator assigned to the case will notify law enforcement and the State's Attorney's Office, who may also contact you. The State's Attorney may decide to file criminal charges. Meanwhile, DCFS will be conducting an investigation of your report. You may be asked to provide evidence for both investigations, which often occur at the same time.

For cases of sexual abuse and serious physical abuse, most counties have established team protocols for handling the investigation. Many counties have Children's Advocacy Centers ([www.nca-online.org](http://www.nca-online.org)) or special child-friendly interviewing rooms for coordinating the contacts DCFS and law enforcement agencies have with child abuse victims and their families.

***Investigator Determines If There Are Safety Concerns For the Child***

Immediately after the Child Protection Investigator (CPI) contacts the child, he/she must conduct an assessment of the child's safety. This investigation typically includes meeting with the family.

***If "Yes", then:***

If safety concerns are identified, the investigator must work with the family to develop and implement a "safety plan." The safety plan may include temporary alternate living arrangements for the alleged perpetrator, family member or for the alleged child victim.

If safety alternatives are not available, the CPI may take temporary protective custody of the child. Two other categories of professionals are also legally authorized to take temporary protective custody of a child: police officers and medical doctors. This means these professionals can take a child from the custody of his/her parents without a court order. Within 48 hours of taking protective custody (excluding weekends and holidays), the case must be brought before the court so a judge can decide whether the child should remain in DCFS custody.

***An Investigator Interviews You and May Talk to Other Family Members***

A Child Protection Investigator (CPI) interviews you to confirm the information you reported and to ask any questions s/he may have. In addition, the CPI may talk to other family members, potential witnesses or professionals as part of the investigation. (If the abuse is a crime, a Police Investigator may interview you too.)

***Investigator Finds “Credible Evidence” That the Perpetrator Committed Child Abuse/Neglect***

Once the investigator completes the investigation, they must decide whether or not there was credible evidence of child abuse/neglect.

***If “Yes”, then:***

When the investigator finds credible evidence to support the allegation of abuse or neglect, the case is “indicated”. This information is entered into the Department’s central computer database system. That means if someone calls the Hotline in the future about the same alleged victim or perpetrator, the Hotline Worker will be able to reference this indicated finding.

When appropriate, DCFS workers will suggest follow-up services to stabilize the family and to protect the child. A family has the right to refuse such services. If the caseworker believes that such a refusal jeopardizes the child’s welfare and safety, the worker may file a neglect or abuse petition in the Juvenile Court.

Many services are available to families with an indicated finding of child abuse. The parents may receive counseling or assistance in developing parenting or homemaking skills. Parents with substance abuse problems, mental illness, or difficulty controlling their anger may receive referrals to specialized agencies. When the harm or risk to the child is so severe that it is not safe to leave the child in the parents’ care, the child may be placed in a foster home or with relatives while DCFS attempts to rehabilitate the family.

***If “No”, then:***

Mandated Reporters will receive notification that a report is “unfounded.” If you disagree with this finding, you may request a review of the investigation within 10 days of receiving the notice. The steps for requesting this type of review are described in the notification letter.

Unfounded reports made by Mandated Reporters are retained for various periods of time:

- If the allegation is serious (sexual abuse, serious physical injury, or death), the report is kept for 3 years.
- Records of less serious abuse reports are kept for 1 year.
- Neglect reports are retained for 60 days on the state computer database.

Note that even when a report against a parent is unfounded, DCFS frequently refers the parent to child welfare agencies that may be able to provide services or resources to help the family.

**In Cases of Serious Abuse, DCFS Sends a Report of Indicated Findings to the Child's Public School**

A copy of the Mandated Reporter's written confirmation, the police report (if available), and the notification of "indicated" report should be kept in the child's temporary school record. If the report is "unfounded," the notification letter and any document referencing that report should be removed from the child's school record.

**As a Mandated Reporter, you will receive a letter.**

*(NOTE: See following pages for the graphic flowchart.)*



