

Contacting the Florida Abuse Hotline

HOW TO MAKE A REPORT

Everyone, including professionally mandatory reporters, should call 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 by the caller meets legal requirements to accept a report for investigation.

There are four ways to make a report:

By Telephone	1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)
By Fax	1-800-914-0004
By TDD	1-800-453-5145
Web Reporting	http://www.state.fl.us/cf_web

INFORMATION NEEDED

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:

- Name, date of birth (or approximate age), race, and gender, for all adults and children involved.
- Addresses for all subjects, including current location.
- Information regarding disabilities and/or limitations for vulnerable adult victims.
- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child or adult victim(s).

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.

Do not delay in contacting the Abuse Hotline even if you do not have all the necessary information. The Abuse Hotline Counselor will make an assessment based on the available information, and will decide if it is sufficient to accept a report.

WHAT TO DO IF ALL LINES ARE BUSY

There are times when all Abuse Hotline Counselors are either taking calls or entering reports. Please be patient, and do not hang up. Your call will be answered by the next available counselor. Counselors are trained to handle each call as quickly as possible, while ensuring that each caller is afforded quality service.

However, if the situation is an emergency or the victim is in imminent danger, the caller should hang up, dial 911, and then follow-up with a call to the Abuse Hotline.

MAKE A RECORD OF YOUR CALL

Abuse Hotline Counselors are required to identify themselves by giving their first name and their identification number. Reporters may want to document this information along with the date and time of the call. Counselors are expected to inform the caller whether the information meets the statutory requirements for a report and whether a report has been accepted. They may also provide you with information on available services, whether those services are provided by the Department of Children and Families staff or other state and community agencies.

REPORTING VIA FAXES

Transmittal of the fax form to the Florida Abuse Hotline is one reporting option; **however, the preferred option for the Department of Children and Families is for you to call 1-800-96-ABUSE, and talk to a Hotline counselor.** This second option must be used in all cases of abuse, neglect and/or exploitation that involve emergency or critical situations.

The information in the fax will be assessed to see if it meets the legal criteria as a report for investigation. It is extremely important that all information be completed. Add extra pages if this format is too limited in the space provided for response. Your fax cannot be properly assessed for a report without the requested information. A means to locate the victim is required. By law (Chapters 39, Florida Statutes), your identity as the reporter will be protected. Also, identify others who might be aware of the abuse/neglect/exploitation of the victim. **Please type or print legibly.** Indicate if you want notification whether or not a report was accepted and your preferred method.

For faxed information, notification of whether or not an abuse report was accepted will only be provided if you request it. The two options are telephone and U.S. Mail. If you check telephone and provided your phone number, we will attempt to call you to advise you if we accepted a report. We will only leave a message if we reach your personal voice mail. If you request notification by U.S. Mail and provide your address, we will mail you a form indicating whether or not a report was accepted.

Courtesy and Professionalism at the Florida Abuse Hotline

WHEN YOU DISAGREE WITH THE HOTLINE COUNSELOR'S DECISION:

Hotline counselors accept reports on the basis of specific criteria. Counselors must ask questions to gather information, but may not ask leading questions of the caller. Each call is accepted or refused as a report based only on information provided during the call. If the counselor indicates a report will not be accepted and you disagree with the decision, you may ask to speak to a Supervisor. The counselor will briefly summarize the situation to the supervisor who will then speak with you regarding your concerns. The supervisor will make a determination of whether the counselor's decision was appropriate and will provide you with further explanation about the decision.

TO LODGE A COMPLAINT ABOUT THE HOTLINE:

We understand that reporting abuse or neglect is not an easy thing to do and we commend all callers who make the effort to assist in family situations. The Department of Children and Families does not always have the authority to intervene in family situations that are of concern to the persons calling the Hotline. We appreciate callers who use the same courtesy and professionalism expected from the Hotline staff, and we want to know if you have a concern about the quality of service or professional courtesy that you received at the Hotline. During the call, the counselor is required to provide you with his/her first name and ID number and you are encouraged to share your concerns with the:

Hotline Supervisor,
Call Floor Manager, or
Director of the Hotline.

You may ask to be transferred to any of these administrators or you may telephone (850) 487-6100 during regular office hours. All complaints are carefully evaluated and will be responded to in a timely manner.