

# SELF-STUDY COURSE

## Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Revised 5/18

2.0 Hours Credit

### **CREDITS:**

The State of Alaska DHSS Office of Children's Services Website. *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect in Alaska*. <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/pages/publications/reportingchildabuse.aspx>

*Report Child Abuse in Alaska* Web Based Training [www.ReportChildAbuse.alaska.gov](http://www.ReportChildAbuse.alaska.gov)  
Developed by the Alaska Children's Justice Act Task Force in collaboration with the Department of Health & Social Services



If you wish to receive training credit for reading this self-study, please fill out the “CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING” Questionnaire” at the back of this course. Return the questionnaire to the Alaska Center for Resource Families for 2.0 hours of training credit. The course is yours to keep for further reference.

This self study course was developed by Aileen M. McInnis for the Alaska Center for Resource Families.

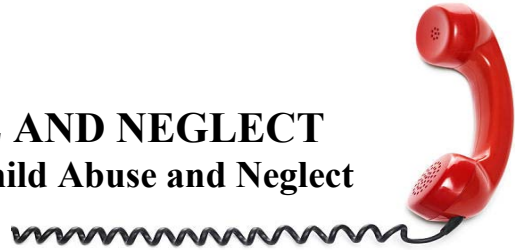
### **RETURN YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Ave Suite 202  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
1-800-478-7307  
479-7307 (Fairbanks/North Pole)

[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)

# REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

## PART 1: The Mandate to Report Child Abuse and Neglect



### ***Introduction***

To protect children from abuse and neglect, Alaska law (AS 47.17) requires certain persons to report suspected maltreatment of children. This self-study will explore this law and explore the responsibilities of the licensed foster parent to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. What is abuse? When would a foster parent report? How should a foster parent respond to the disclosure of abuse by a child? All of these will be discussed in this self-study.

### ***Who Is A Mandated Reporter?***

Certain persons are required under Alaska State Statutes (A.S. 47.17.020) to report suspected child abuse, usually people who tend to come in contact with children on a regular basis. These persons are considered “mandated reporters” and they include:

- Practitioners of the healing arts, including emergency medical technicians, chiropractors, mental health counselors, social workers, dentists, dental hygienists, health aides, nurses, nurse practitioners, certified nurse aides, occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, optometrists, osteopaths, naturopaths, physical therapists, physical therapy assistants, physicians, physician assistants, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychological associates, audiologists, speech-language pathologists, hearing aid dealers, marital and family therapists, religious healing practitioners, acupuncturists, and surgeons
- Administrative officers of institutions, including public and private hospitals or other facilities for medical diagnosis, treatment or care
- Paid employees of domestic violence and sexual assault prevention programs, and crisis intervention and prevention programs
- Paid employees of an organization that provides counseling or treatment to individuals seeking to control their use of drugs or alcohol
- School teachers and school administrative staff members (public and private schools)
- Athletic coaches of both public and private schools
- Peace officers and officers of the state Department of Corrections
- Child care providers, ***including foster parents***, day care providers and paid staff
- Members of child fatality review teams, and multidisciplinary child protection teams
- Volunteers who interact with children in a public or private school for 4 or more hours a week

Federal law (25 U.S.C. 3202, 18 U.S.C. 1169) generally states that individuals who have a legal or other responsibility for an Indian child's welfare through an Indian Tribe or organization, Tribal consortium, or on Tribal lands, including village corporations, lands held by incorporated Native groups, or regional corporations, and reservations, are mandated reporters.

In addition to this list of mandated reporters, any concerned citizen is encouraged to report instances of known or suspected abuse and neglect.

### ***When am I required to report suspected abuse or neglect?***

State law requires that persons who are mandatory reporters who, in the performance of their occupational duties have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered harm as a result of child abuse or neglect, shall immediately report the harm. Alaska Statute 47.17.290 defines "reasonable cause to suspect" as "based on all the facts and circumstances known to the person, that would lead a reasonable person to believe that something might be the case." It is not your responsibility to determine if the information you receive is accurate or whether the child is a reliable source. It does not matter how long ago the act happened, where it happened, or whether or not you believe it happened.

### ***Who Should These Mandated Reporters Report Their Suspicions To?***

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) is the State of Alaska agency that investigates suspected child abuse and neglect. OCS has recently moved to a central unit that receives reports from across the state called the OCS Central Intake Unit. This allows trained workers to take information about the child and ask specific questions to get a complete picture as to what is going on. Wherever you are in the state, you can call this number or email this information. There are three ways to contact the OCS Central Intake Unit.

***Central Intake Toll Free Number: 1-800-478-4444***

***Email: [reportchildabuse@alaska.gov](mailto:reportchildabuse@alaska.gov)***

***Fax: 907-269-3939***

The OCS intake worker will take the information and ask follow up questions. It is advised that foster parents make all child abuse reports to the Central Intake Unit. This means that the information will get documented properly and that the foster parent reporter will be asked thorough questions. Be sure to let the Intake Worker know right away that you are a foster parent and indicate if the child is currently in your care and who the ongoing caseworker is.

If you are unable to reach OCS, you must contact the law enforcement agency responsible for your area. If you live in an urban area with municipal police department, the responsible agency would be the municipal police department. If you live in an area covered only by Alaska State Troopers, they would be the responsible agency. If you live in a village with Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) and Village Police Officers (VPOs), you should contact both the local law enforcement (VPSO and VPOs) and the Troopers covering your village. (From *Report Child Abuse in Alaska On Line Training*. 2017)

## ***Highlights Of The Reporting Law***

Under Alaska law, child care providers, **including foster parents**, are required to report child abuse and neglect. Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, sexual exploitation and neglect. These reports should be made immediately (as soon as reasonable possible, but no later than 24 hours) to the Office of Children’s Services. Reports of child abuse are to be made when, from the indicators and behaviors of a child, it is suspected that a child is or was being maltreated. Don’t play investigator and get “proof”. Leave that to those who are trained to determine whether a child is being abused. Keep your relationship intact with the child so that you can provide support.

The “Good Faith Clause” in the law protects persons from liability when a child abuse report is made but proves to be unfounded or unsubstantiated. If the report was made in good faith and without malice, the reporter is protected from successful lawsuit or prosecution. A caller may make an anonymous phone call if he feels he does not want to give his, however citizens are encouraged to give their names for several reasons. It gives the report more weight, it establishes that a mandated reporter did make a report. If a person makes a malicious or intentionally false report of abuse or neglect in order to hurt or harm someone, they do not fall under the Good Faith Clause. Mandated reporters are especially encouraged to give their name so that they can prove that they fulfilled their obligation to report.

## ***What Is Considered Child Abuse And Neglect?***

In Alaska, the definitions of child abuse and neglect are aligned with federal legislation that lays the groundwork for our state laws. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA, 42 U.S.C. § 5101) provides the federal minimum definition of child abuse and neglect as “at a minimum, any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

Alaska State law defines child abuse or neglect to include the following actions by those responsible for the child’s welfare:

- \* Physical injury which harms or threatens the child’s health or welfare;
- \* Failure to care for a child, including neglect or necessary physical needs (food, shelter, clothing and medical attention), emotional, mental and social needs;
- \* Sexual abuse, including molestation or incest;
- \* Sexual exploitation including prostitution or pornography;
- \* Mental injury or emotional abuse which is defined as *an injury to the emotional well being or intellectual or psychological capacity of a child, as evidence by an observable and substantial impairment in the child’s ability to function in a developmentally appropriate manner; or*

- \* Maltreatment which is defined as *a child having suffered substantial harm as a result of child abuse or neglect due to an act or omission not necessarily committed by the child's parent, custodian or guardian.*

### ***The Role Of Licensed Foster Parents In Reporting Abuse And Neglect***

As a foster parent, you care for children who may have come to your home because of abuse or neglect. Yet, you may not know about other abuse that has happened to the child. Parts of a child's history may be unknown at the time of placement. For example, offenders often coerce or threaten children who they have sexually abused to stay silent about the abuse. A child may be placed in your home for a reason other than sexual abuse. You, as a foster parent, may find out about additional abuse in several ways.

- \* As a child feels safer in the foster home and learns to trust the foster parents, he or she may start dropping “hints” to judge how the foster parent reacts.
- \* A child may show behavior that will cause a foster parent to suspect that additional abuse has occurred. These behaviors may happen during times of naps, sleeping, baths, hygiene, and in play.
- \* A child may fully “disclose”, which means to tell an adult about abuse that has happened to him or her.
- \* A child or parent may give you information about abuse of a child in the family.

You need only to suspect abuse. It is not your responsibility to investigate or get evidence to prove the abuse has occurred. Whenever a foster parent suspects abuse that may be new or abuse that has happened in the past, it is important to follow the reporting responsibilities defined by Alaska Statute.

### ***How Should Foster Parents Make A Report Of Suspected Child Abuse?***

Foster parents are encouraged to call Central Intake to report child abuse or neglect related to the child in their home. Document the call and the information you shared, and share that information with the child's caseworker as well. If a child is in imminent danger and you are unable to reach the Office of Children's Services immediately, contact a local law enforcement agency for assistance.

## ***What To Do If You As A Foster Parent Suspect Abuse Or Neglect...***

- If a child discloses any kind of information about past abuse to you, listen carefully and stay calm. It's more difficult for a child to talk about abuse than it is for an adult to hear about it. Tell the child she did the right thing in telling you. You can tell her that you believe she is telling the truth and that you need to share this information with the social worker.
- Never assume the social worker has the same information you do. You see the child on a day to day basis during the normal day to day routines. You see actions that cannot be gleaned from an office interview. Share these concerns with the caseworker.
- New information about abuse is important to case planning. A more complete history of the child assists the caseworker in permanency planning and determination of the child's risk in his natural home.
- Document your concerns in writing. If a child discloses, write down the exact words she used. Memories often become faulty with time. Written records may also show patterns. Document when you make a report, who you talked to and what response you got. This helps if you need to follow up and document that you fulfilled your reporting responsibility.
- If a child comes back from a visit and shows new signs of injury or if you suspect that the child has been abused or molested after a visit, *contact the OCS worker immediately!*

### ***What NOT to do***

(From *Report Child Abuse in Alaska On Line Training*. 2017)

It is important to provide OCS and law enforcement accurate information. At the same time there are some things that mandatory reporters and anyone reporting neglect or abuse should not do:

- Do not investigate the situation yourself
- Do not question the child about the abuse
- If the child has made a statement do not paraphrase or change it — use exactly the words the child has said
- Do not bargain with the child
- Do not report only to your supervisor (that does not relieve you of your reporting duties)
- You are not required to notify the parent that you are reporting to OCS
- Do not make the report in a public place where others can overhear you
- Do not share the information in the report with others in the community
- If a child discloses to you or gives you information, do not promise to keep it secret

## **REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

### **PART 2: Indicators of Abuse and Neglect**



Indicators are signs or “red flags” that a child may be being abused. Indicators may include vague signs of stress or upset, such as eating or sleeping problems, or anxiety. Indicators may be more suspicious, such as explicit sexual behavior or a direct disclosure. Indicators do not prove abuse has occurred but are signals to consider the possibility. Children often do not tell of abuse through words, but tell us through actions.

Following are a list of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect indicators. Read through to familiarize yourself with them.

### **SIGNS THAT MIGHT INDICATE SEXUAL ABUSE**

- ◆ Sexual knowledge beyond the child’s age (for example: knowledge on erection, ejaculation, oral-genital contact, anal penetration, etc.).
- ◆ Acting out sexually on toys, other children, or adults. Excessive masturbation, frantic or unusual rubbing or the genitals.
- ◆ Difficulty in walking or sitting; pain, itching or discharge from the genitals; torn, stained, bloody underwear; cuts, swelling, bruises or bites in the genital area.
- ◆ Sexually transmitted diseases (e.g., syphilis, gonorrhea) at a young age.
- ◆ Reports of sexual assault; fear of going home; fear of a particular person; fear of all persons of a particular sex.
- ◆ Depression; sudden sleeping or eating disturbances, sudden changes in school behavior; poor peer relationships (prefers to be with older or younger children).
- ◆ Extreme fear around toilets, bathtubs or napping; night terrors and nightmares.
- ◆ Pregnancy at a young age, promiscuity, self-destructive behavior, prostitution.

## **SIGNS THAT MIGHT INDICATE PHYSICAL ABUSE**

- ◆ Unexplained bruises and welts on face, lips or mouth, in various stages of healing; on large areas of back, buttocks or thighs; Clustered or forming regular patterns as if made with a board, belt, cord; Regularly noted as fading marks when child returns to home after an absence, weekend or vacation; Injuries on several different surface areas, indicating child was hit from different directions.
- ◆ Bite marks that look adult size.
- ◆ Unexplained burns or fractures in various stages of healing.
- ◆ Burns on soles of feet, palm of hand, back or buttocks that look like cigarette burns, immersion, steam iron, etc.
- ◆ Injuries such as cuts and fractures with explanations that don't fit the injury.
- ◆ Afraid of adult contact or the other extreme of indiscriminately seeking affection, “lap hungry”.
- ◆ Extremes in behavior from withdrawal to aggressiveness and/or hyperactivity.
- ◆ Afraid to go home.
- ◆ Reports injury from parents.
- ◆ Vacant or frozen stare, detached, no affect.
- ◆ Odd bruising or cuts on a baby or young child such as burns or bites in genital area. Bruises circling the wrist, black eyes.
- ◆ Extreme aggressiveness in play with other children; Destructiveness towards toys or household items; Cruelty in play with pets and animals.



## SIGNS THAT MIGHT INDICATE NEGLECT

- ◆ Constant hunger, child who is constantly begging or stealing food; underweight, poor growth patterns, or non-organic failure to thrive.
- ◆ Poor hygiene or inappropriate clothing.
- ◆ Lack of supervision especially when engaged in dangerous activities or over an extended period of time; abandonment, states there is no caretaker at home; young children inappropriately left with responsibilities for younger children.
- ◆ Unattended physical problem, medical needs, such as untreated or infected wounds or ear infections; bald patches on the scalp; children left lying in cribs for long periods; recurring rashes from diapers not being changed.
- ◆ Delaying speech; gross motor delays.
- ◆ Flat affect, inability to play, lethargic, apathetic.
- ◆ Constant fatigue or listlessness.
- ◆ Seeks attention or affection inappropriately such as through aggression or indiscriminate contact.
- ◆ Lack of social or interaction skills; delay in cognitive skills.

**REMEMBER!** Remember not to confuse poverty with neglect. For example, a family who lacks access to housing, utilities, food, or other necessities may be in need of information or assistance.

Also in Alaska, be aware of community standards. For example, in some communities running water or electricity is an expensive option beyond many people's means. High cost of housing materials can result in unfinished homes or homes in disrepair. Alaska has a large, diverse population where community standards, customs, and cultural conventions can differ dramatically from one home, town, or village to the next. (From *Report Child Abuse in Alaska On Line Training*. 2017)

# REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

## PART 3: Reacting to a Child's Disclosure of Abuse



### ***Reacting To A Child's Disclosure Of Abuse***

Disclosure is when a child reveals she/he has been abused. **Direct disclosure** is when a child speaks directly of the abuse. **Indirect disclosure** is when she/he tells another child who reports to you, or when the child tells you hints or unintentionally. Hints may include phrases like “he does icky stuff” or “he had lots of holes in his underwear.” These phrases should be explored in a gentle, non-threatening matter. If a child shuts down, tell her you are willing to listen to whatever she/he needs to say. The child may disclose at a different time. Children often test the waters and gradually tell the story. Some are very open about what happened to them.

### **GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH DISCLOSURE:**

- 1. Stay calm and open.** Be non-judgmental toward a child's words or behavior. A child may interpret anger or upset as directed at him. Or he may think that what happened was his fault.  
**NOT:** “*That's terrible!*”  
**TRY:** “*I'm listening, John. Go ahead.*”
- 2. Ask open-ended gentle questions.** “What do you mean by icky? Can you tell me what kind of games?” Do not press a child for information, lead them, or put words into their mouths.  
**NOT:** “*Did he try to kiss you, too?*”  
**TRY:** “*Can you tell me what happened next?*”
- 3. If a child tells you something, tell him/her that he/she did the right thing in telling.** Children are often reluctant to tell for fear they will get in trouble, or they did something wrong, or they were not supposed to tell anybody.  
**NOT:** “*This is a very serious accusation. Are you sure?*”  
**TRY:** “*It is important to tell an adult when something's wrong. You did the right thing.*”
- 4. Be hopeful and honest, but never promise something that you can't deliver.** Promises that are broken merely serve to (again) break the child's trust.  
**NOT:** “*You can stay with me. You don't have to go back home.*”  
**TRY:** “*I don't know what will happen. But I'll do my best to see you through it.*”
- 5. Never promise to keep something a secret.** If a child says, “If I tell you something, will you keep it a secret?” answer “I'll keep it a secret if I can, but if someone's being hurt or in danger, I can't keep that a secret.” Sometimes kids may shut down at this point, but let the child know that you are there to help. Keep the door open to talking to you.  
**TRY:** “*I want to help you if you are hurt or need to tell me something. I'll be here to listen when you are ready to talk about it.*”

6. **Don't speak badly of the offender.** The offender is often known and liked by the child. Focus on the fact that what he did was wrong and breaks a law that keeps kids safe from hurtful action. Kids understand rules and they understand safety.

**NOT:** *"He was very bad for doing that."*

**TRY:** *"What happened to you was unfair. There are laws against people hurting children because he wants to keep them safe. I'm sorry that happened to you."*



## ***Other Resources:***

The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and the Alaska Children's Justice Task Force has also developed a good training resources for learning about reporting child maltreatment for mandated reporters. Foster parents can earn 3.0 hours of training credit from completing this self-study and submitting the certificate to the Alaska Center for Resource Families.

**Report Child Abuse in Alaska** Online Training Module. 2017

[www.ReportChildAbuse.alaska.gov](http://www.ReportChildAbuse.alaska.gov)