

## CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

**Utah child abuse and neglect reporting:** Duty to Notify, Utah Code 62A-4a-403, places a "duty to notify" on every person who has reasonable cause to believe that a child may be neglected or abused. They do not have to prove that abuse is occurring, just that there is reasonable cause to believe abuse or neglect is occurring and it must be reported. Immunity from Legal Action, Utah Code 62A-4a-410, states that "any person making a report in good faith is immune from liability, civil or criminal." Failure to Report, Utah Code 62A-4a-411, states that "any person who willfully fails to report child abuse or neglect is guilty of a class B misdemeanor punishable by up to \$1,000 fine and six months in jail."

### 1. WHY SHOULD I MAKE A REPORT?

- Telling the principal is not enough.
- Because it is the law.
- Child protection is everyone's concern
- Children are potential victims because they are in a vulnerable, powerless position. They need an adult who will act in their behalf.

### 2. WILL I BE HELD LIABLE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE?

- You are a mandated reporter. You may be held liable if you don't report suspected abuse or neglect of a child.
- State law protects you.

### 3. HOW WILL I KNOW IF A SITUATION IS ABUSIVE AND NEEDS TO BE REPORTED?

- Become familiar with the signs and symptoms of abuse.
- Do not hesitate to call Child Protective Services to discuss the situation.
- Remember, you only need to have a reason to believe abuse has occurred to make a report, not actual knowledge of abuse.

### 4. ARE THERE RISK FACTORS THAT PREDISPOSE CHILDREN TO BECOME VICTIMS, OR PREDISPOSE ADULTS TO BE PERPETRATORS?

- Yes, certain children are more vulnerable to becoming victims.
- There are certain characteristics of adults, their current circumstances and living environments that may predispose them to be perpetrators.

### 5. WILL THE PARENTS BE TOLD I MADE THE REFERRAL?

- Every precaution is taken to help keep any and all information confidential.
- Personally identifiable information should not become a public record as is stated in Utah Code 62A-4a-412(2).

### 6. WHAT DO I DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES AN INCIDENT OF ABUSE TO ME?

- Assure him/her that you are concerned and want to help and that it's all right to tell. The child is most likely feeling frightened, guilty or that they may be betraying someone they love.
- Listen carefully, but do not push the child to share more information.
- Interviews of children should be conducted by skilled professionals as soon as possible.
- Any time a child reports abuse, it should be taken seriously.
- Assure the child that you believe what they are saying, even if it does not make sense to you, it makes sense to the child.

### 7. TO WHOM DO I REPORT SUSPECT ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

- Two agencies are responsible for investigating child abuse cases: Child Protective Services (CPS) and law enforcement.
- To report child abuse or neglect, contact: St. George Child Protective Services, 652-2960, or the St. George Police at 634-5000. These agencies are trained to offer advice and help in a sensitive and professional manner.

#### 8. WHAT ARE THE STEPS I NEED TO TAKE TO MAKE A REPORT?

- You need to report promptly to protect the child and yourself. Don't wait until the end of the day or week.
- When you call you will need to provide the child's name, age, sex, address, and telephone number; parent's name(s); parent's employment and telephone number; nature and extent of possible abuse and date(s) when observed.
- Document alleged abuse in your own confidential records.

#### 9. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I MAKE A CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT REPORT?

- The case is assigned a priority depending on the seriousness of the problem and the danger to the child.
- A child protective service worker or police officer will conduct an investigation interview to gather more facts.
- Parents and children are provided with appropriate assistance and services including sexual abuse treatment, mental health resources, and referrals to professionals.
- The goal of CPS is to provide helpful services - not to punish parents. CPS will approach parents with an offer to help. The aim is to keep children in their homes if it can be done safely.

#### 10. WHAT IF I MAKE A REPORT AND NOTHING HAPPENS, OR I FEEL THE REPORT WAS NOT HANDLED CORRECTLY?

- Legal restrictions prohibit Child Protective Services from telling details of an investigation and it is difficult to know what has taken place behind the scenes.
- Contact the CPS caseworker, keeping in mind that the case worker may not be able to reveal certain details of the case.

#### **TIPS ON HANDLING A SITUATION WHERE A CHILD HAS DISCLOSED SUSPECTED ABUSE:**

- *It is not necessary for the child to reveal specific or intimate details right away.*
- *At this initial stage, the child needs warmth and acceptance, not curiosity or interrogation.*
- *Reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling.*
- *Keep your own feelings under control. Be calm and non-judgemental. Do not express emotions such as shock, embarrassment, anger or disgust. Do not criticize or belittle the child's family in front of the child.*
- *Be careful to avoid suggesting to the child that a particular person may have touched or hurt him/her in a n inappropriate way.*
- *Remember, you are not the investigator. Your role is to listen to the child. Certain CPS workers and police officers are trained to conduct investigative interviews.*
- *After listening to the child, immediately write down what the child said. Write who, what, where and when the child states he/she was involved in an abusive incident.*

Adapted from Health and Safety Training for Early Childhood Providers, Utah Dept of Health, Pages 78-80