

Suspected Abuse

The Steps to Act

Step 1: Recognize signs of abuse.

Abuse is not always obvious. It can manifest in physical, emotional, and behavioral ways. Common warning signs of abuse may include:

- Unexplained or unusual injuries
- Withdrawal from friends, community, or activities
- Fear of certain people or places
- Anxiety and depression
- Mood swings or regressive behavior
- Flinching, aggressive behavior, nightmares, or avoiding touch
- Difficulty walking or sitting

Remember: This list of signs is not exhaustive, and these signs can have many explanations that do not necessarily indicate abuse. Abuse can manifest in many ways. Trust your instincts and observe any changes in your child's behavior closely.

Step 2: Document Concerns

Keep a clear, written record of observed signs of suspected abuse, dates, conversations with your child, and any statements made by school staff members, caregiver personnel or your child. Take photos of any injuries or marks and videos of your child recounting the suspected abuse.

Step 3: Consider your options for reporting the abuse.

There are several different ways you can report suspected abuse:

- Call the police or local law enforcement.
- Report the suspected abuse to your local department of social services or Child Protective Services (CPS). [Find your local Maryland CPS office here.](#)
- Report the suspected abuse to the Maryland Department of Human Services at 1-800-332-6347
- Report the suspected abuse to the Child Help National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453.
- Keep a request that your child's school or relevant authority preserve materials related to the suspected abuse, as they may be critical for investigation and legal proceedings.

Materials may include:

- Video recordings from school cameras or buses
- Photographs of physical injuries
- Any documentation or records that may be relevant

Remember: Educators and school staff members are considered mandated reporters. This means they are legally required to report suspected or known instances of abuse or neglect as soon as possible.

Step 4: Seek Immediate Medical Evaluation

It is important to seek prompt medical attention for your child, preferably at a pediatrician's office or an emergency room experienced in evaluating cases of abuse. Medical professionals can document injuries and collect evidence, if necessary.

Step 5: Follow up and Know Your Rights

Maintain communication with the investigating agencies, cooperate as needed, and consider professional support, such as counseling, for your child. Additionally, understand that reporters of abuse, including parents and guardians, typically have their identity protected during investigations unless legally required to disclose.

Remember: Acting quickly to report and preserve evidence helps ensure your child's safety.