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Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline Template

This guide provides a clear, supportive template to help you recognize, respond to and report suspected child abuse or neglect. It outlines what constitutes abuse, the information needed when making a report, guidance for speaking with children, helpful documentation practices, next steps in partnering with DCS and resources to support both your well-being and your reporting responsibilities.

Introduction

Child abuse and neglect can happen in any household of any background, socioeconomic status or region. As a child care provider, you are often the first line of defense in protecting Hoosier children. Reporting child abuse and neglect is mandatory, and it may feel intimidating. This resource can support you with the process, from discovering abuse or neglect and making the call to engaging in protective, necessary self-care.

Child abuse and neglect: “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.” (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g) ([Source](#))

Responding in the Moment

- If the child is verbal:
 - Listen calmly.
 - Ask open-ended, neutral questions.
 - Say: “How did you get that bruise?”
 - Don’t say: “Did daddy hit you?”
 - Assure the child they did nothing wrong and provide comfort.
 - Let them know you will notify authorities.
 - Example: “I will tell someone who protects children.”
 - Document specific language and details.
 - Example: “Child said, ‘Last night, Mom pushed me on the floor after I wet the bed.’ Child pushed other children on the playground last Tuesday, and two weeks ago Thursday. Before that, we had not seen this behavior.”
 - If noting size, use objective measurements.
 - Say: “The cut is a centimeter wide,” or “The burn mark is the size of a dime.”
 - Don’t say: “The bruises are the size of fingerprints,” or “The wound is as long as my cell phone.” (Fingerprints and cell phones vary in size.)
- If the child is not verbal:
 - Provide comfort.
 - Document specific details.
 - Example: “Infant has a bruise on her left thigh the size of a quarter and a cut on her right shoulder about 2 inches long. We have not seen injuries on the infant’s body previously.”
 - If noting size, use objective measurements.
 - Say: “The cut is a centimeter wide,” or “The burn mark is the size of a dime.”
 - Don’t say: “The bruises are the size of fingerprints,” or “The wound is as long as my cell phone.” (Fingerprints and cell phones vary in size.)

Making the Call

Context:

- Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1.800.800.5556. Local law enforcement: 911.
- **Everyone** in Indiana is a mandated reporter. Any person who has reason to believe that a child is experiencing abuse or neglect *must report immediately* to DCS or law enforcement. Reporting to a supervisor or director is not enough. It is not a child care provider's job to investigate; it is a provider's job to report to those who investigate. Failure to report and to do so immediately is a [Class B Misdemeanor](#).
- Your identity will remain confidential. You can report anonymously, but providing your contact information allows a case manager to follow up with additional questions if needed. Additionally, by sharing your contact information and serving as a professional report source, you are eligible to be informed of the report's recommendation.
- When you call, be specific and detailed, and share facts, data and evidence.

Needed Information:

- Parent or guardian information:
 - Name:
 - Address:
 - Phone number:
 - Date of birth or age:
 - Sex:
- Information for the child:
 - Name:
 - Date of birth or age:
 - Sex:
 - Current location:
 - Condition, including injuries:
 - Description of what you saw or what the child shared:
 - Who was involved:
 - What happened:
 - When and where it happened:
 - Additional details such as a log of concerning behaviors or suspected abuse:
- Information about other children in the home, if applicable:
 - Name:
 - Date of birth or age:
 - Sex:

Note: Do not allow missing information to deter you from reporting. If a report is necessary, make it, and share all the information you have.

Script:

I am calling to report suspected [abuse / neglect] .

My name is _____. My phone number is _____. My email address is _____. I have been the child's child care provider for [length of time] .

- *Note: Your identity will remain confidential. You can report anonymously, but providing your contact information allows a case manager to follow up with additional questions if needed.*
-

The child's name is _____. The child was born [date of birth] and is [age] . The child is a [girl/boy] .

There [are/are not] other children in the home. *If applicable:*

- *The child's sibling is named _____. The sibling is approximately [age] . The sibling is a [girl/boy] .*
 - *[Repeat until you have provided information about all children in the home.]*
-

The children are currently at [location] .

The parent(s)/guardian(s) name(s) is/are _____. Their address(es) is/are _____. Their phone number(s) is/are _____. They are approximately [age] . The parent(s)/guardian(s) is/are [male/female] .

I noticed [child's condition, including description of injuries] . *If applicable:*

- *The child shared [who was involved, what happened, when and where it happened] .*
 - *I have a log of concerning behaviors: [details of concerning behaviors] .*
 - [Additional details] .
-

If a DCS worker were to visit the home, I [do/do not] have concerns for that worker's safety.

What is the report number for today's call?

Example:

Indiana Department of Child Services Intake Specialist (IS): Thank you for calling the Indiana Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline. My name is Sonia. How can I help you?

Report Source (RS): I am calling to report suspected child abuse.

IS: Okay. Can we start with your name and contact information please?

RS: My name is Taylor Doe. My phone number is 317.555.7651. You can text this number. My email address is taylortheprovider@emailaddress.com.

IS: Who is the child we're calling about today? And their date of birth?

RS: The child's name is Roman. He was born on Jan. 8, 2022. He is 4 years old.

IS: Are there siblings?

RS: Yes. There are siblings in the home. Roman's older brother, Josh (8 years) and Roman's younger sister, Ella (13 months old).

IS: And who do they live with?

RS: The children live with dad and stepmom. His dad's name is Joe, and his stepmom's name is Laura. Their address is 456 Any Road. Joe's phone number is 317.555.8127, and Laura's phone number is 765.555.3178. Joe and Laura are both about 30 years old.

IS: Do we have school info? And do we know where the children are currently?

RS: Josh goes to Learning Elementary School. Ella and Roman attend Childcare Center and are present today, being picked up at 5:45 p.m. by Laura.

IS: Okay. Can you tell me what's going on?

RS: A few minutes ago, I noticed a burn on Roman's left arm. It is circular in shape and about a half inch around. I asked Roman what happened. He said his dad smokes and put a lit cigarette on his arm. He said this happened at home last night. I have not seen injuries on Roman before.

IS: Has anything like this happened before?

RS: Not that I'm aware. I've never seen anything like this, and I've been providing Roman's care his whole life. He's never said anything like this before.

IS: Have you spoken with the parents about this?

RS: No, we just saw it and haven't had a chance to talk to the parents.

IS: Totally fine! Have you ever noticed concerns regarding how Dad acts towards the children?

RS: Not really, but we don't see him for very long periods of time during pick-up and drop-off.

IS: Alright. Thank you. We just have a few more questions about the home. If a worker were to visit, do we have any concerns for that worker's safety, such as firearms/contagious disease/dangerous animals in the home?

RS: Oh, I honestly don't know anything about that.

IS: No worries. And are you aware of any domestic violence between intimate partners, Dad and Stepmom?

RS: No, I have no idea.

IS: Quite alright! Okay, I'm going to read back what we have. Let me know if anything has been left out or forgotten.

IS Reviews

IS: Does this sound like we got everything correct?

RS: Yes, it does. Thank you!

IS: Okay, great. Now I'm going to write this up and send it to the county. I am going to recommend this be assessed. If the local office disagrees, they will be notifying you as they have the final say on recommendations. Do you need a report number?

RS: Yes, please.

IS: The report number will be 1234567. Thank you for calling today. Please call us back should anything new happen. Have a good day.

RS: Thank you! You too.

Next Steps:

- Reference and follow program policies for child abuse and neglect situations.
- Be ready to answer additional questions, to the best of your ability, if you receive a call from a DCS case manager.

Always be Prepared

Documentation Support:

If you notice new, concerning or unusual behavior from a child in your care, document it. The best documentation system is the one that works for you. If you track attendance and lesson plans in an online system, keep your notes there. If you prepare daily schedules and take notes from parent phone calls in a notebook, keep your notes there. Wherever you put your documentation, here are some helpful items to include:

- Child's name:
- Date and time of incident:
- Location of incident:
- Description of the behavior:
- Any antecedents (something that happened before the behavior):
- Additional notes:

Documenting this information will help you be prepared for conversations with a child's family, for the creation of a behavior plan or in unfortunate circumstances like a DCS report. Below is an example of behavior documentation that became useful when a DCS report was needed later on.

Example:

Fernanda

Feb. 2, 2026, at 2:46 p.m.

- Quiet corner.
- Fernanda threw a book at Alfredo.
- I had just said that recess would be moved inside today because of weather.

Feb. 9, 2026, a little after 10 a.m.

- Water table.
- Fernanda splashed water on three children also playing at the table. I asked her to stop, and she splashed water on two more children.
- No antecedent I can identify this time.

Feb. 16, 2026, during afternoon snack

- At the table.
- Fernanda would not eat any of her snack. She has always eaten her snack, at least parts of it. I asked her if she was hungry, and she was quiet.
- I just noticed that all of these incidents have taken place on Mondays. Fernanda spends weekends with her dad.

Feb. 23, 2026, at 4:03 p.m.

- Imagination station.
- Fernanda would not put down her hood all day and did not play dress up with her friends. I asked her why she wasn't playing, and she started crying. She said she didn't want anyone to see the bruise on her neck and showed me four spots on both sides about 1 inch each in diameter. They looked like finger marks. I asked her what happened, and she said, "Dad put his hands on me." I called DCS immediately and reported this and all the behaviors I've seen this month.
- DCS case number: XXXXXX

Self-Care

Making a DCS report can save lives and protect children from future trauma, but it's not easy. While it's important to remain calm in front of the child, your feelings are valid, and it is okay to let yourself feel them later.

Sometimes, child care providers experience [secondary traumatic stress](#) from the difficult stories they hear and carry. Developed by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, these resources may help you understand and cope with what you're experiencing.

- [Secondary Traumatic Stress: A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals](#)
- [Pause – Reset – Nourish \(PRN\)* to Promote Wellbeing](#)
- [Taking Care of Yourself](#)

Additional Resources

- Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline website: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/hotline/>
- Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline process: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/HotlineProcess.pdf>
- Indiana Family and Social Services Administration Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation fact sheet: <https://www.in.gov/fssa/files/ANE-Fact-Sheet-for-FSSA-Waivers.pdf>
- Indiana Department of Child Services Reporting Abuse and Neglect course: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/Reporting-Abuse-and-Neglect/content/#/>
- Indiana Department of Child Services Community Outreach Presentation request form: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/Community-Outreach-Flyer-with-Link.pdf>
- Indiana Community Partners for Child Safety service area map: <https://www.in.gov/dcs/files/CommunityPartnersProvidersMap.pdf>