

## SCHOOL EMPLOYEES: REPORT ABUSE IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE

In times of crisis and economic instability, child abuse and neglect rates increase. However, reports of child abuse and neglect in Missouri have declined dramatically. As children begin to come out of isolation and re-engage with their communities, school staff need to know what to do if they observe abuse or if a child discloses abuse. Schools are #Essential4Kids!

**Legal Responsibilities** All school staff are mandated reporters. You do not need proof. If you reasonably suspect abuse/neglect, you must directly report it immediately to the hotline.

**Making a Report is Asking for Help and Services** You are not making an accusation when you report, you are requesting professional help for a child and their family.

**If a Child Discloses Abuse to You** Stay calm and listen with compassion. Tell the child, "I believe you." Only ask open ended questions ("Tell me more"). Avoid digging for details and do not have multiple school staff question the child's story. This re-traumatizes the child and damages the investigation and/or prosecution.



### Where To Report

Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline  
1-800-392-3738 or 1-844-CAN-TELL  
Online at [dss.mo.gov/cd/can.htm](https://dss.mo.gov/cd/can.htm)  
Child in immediate danger, call 911.

### Effectively Reporting

Explain how the suspected abuse has impacted the child.  
Be precise with dates, times, and locations, if available.  
Describe specific changes in behavior/emotions: expressions of fear, interactions with other children and adults, impact on grades, and/or impact of an unsafe environment.

### Concerning Signs

Lack of virtual/in-person attendance or homework not completed over a long period of time.  
No contact at all with a family after many repeated attempts.  
Child communicates feeling unsafe.  
Observing a child in a dangerous environment.  
Noticing significant changes in a child's mood/behavior.

### Protecting Children Virtually

Let students know you are a supportive, caring adult in their lives by checking in regularly and providing encouraging messages.  
Ask engaging questions. Ex: "Give me one word that describes how you feel today?"  
Make in-person/virtual one on one interactions with children observable and interruptible.

### Make an extra effort with children who:

Have a history of emotional, sexual, physical abuse or neglect, drug use or discussed/attempted suicide.  
Are responsible for the care of other children or live in a highly stressful family situation with limited support systems.  
Require assistance due to physical, mental, behavioral, or medical disabilities or delays.

**TRUST YOUR GUT: If something does not look safe, sound safe or feel safe – report.**