

Spotting Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect During the COVID-19 Emergency: An Updated Guide for Educational Professionals and Others who Care for Maine Children

SUPPORT FOR MAINE'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:

In our great state of Maine, we are fortunate to have many talented professionals who positively impact the lives of children on a regular basis, and who continue to do so during this time of intense challenge. Teachers, principals, social workers, mental health providers, and countless other professionals have quickly transitioned to supporting youth and families virtually via phone, video, text, email, and other online resources. Maintaining contact with children and their caregivers is critical to supporting our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), relies on professionals, community and family members, and others to recognize and report child abuse and neglect concerns. OCFS recognizes that the current pandemic may increase stress, fear, isolation, financial instability, potentially creating higher risk for both child abuse and domestic violence within families. Professionals, community and family members, and others must continue networking with families to provide needed support, guidance and outreach, so that any observed concerns of suspected abuse or neglect can be reported.

HOW TO IDENTIFY SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT WHILE WORKING WITH FAMILIES:

First, take a deep breath and know that we are all in this together. As “helpers” who work with children and families you may experience added strain and worry for the families you work with, which takes an additional toll on each of you. Don't forget to take care of you and your family, while also being there for those you support – be it in a classroom, therapy session, or other environment.

Even from a distance, there are ways to help to connect with children and families during this time:

Regularly engage with children and their caregivers and make it clear how you can be contacted and when you plan to meet, even if virtually. Children thrive on knowing what to expect, and this is particularly important now as children are surrounded by uncertainty and stress in our world and homes.

Acknowledge when working with children and families that **virtual contact and communication** will look different and is a change for all of us. Explain how video chats, online forums, and phone calls will work and point out what you hope can be familiar for children in these interactions. *See additional resources below regarding how to stay virtually connected to families.

Ensure the ability to **have conversations in private** when talking to children and families.

Talk to children and their caregivers and listen to their stories. It is important that each person can share their experiences and frustrations, and understand that feeling “upside down” right now is normal and to be expected. **Pay attention to the environment** during video chats, changes in child or adult behaviors, and to families with whom you are unable to engage or make contact.

Be **curious and ask questions** of children and caregivers about how they are doing, what is going well, and what concerns them about their current environment. **For example**, ask children: *How are you feeling? What was the best/hardest part of your day? What did you have for breakfast? What do you like best about being home? What do you miss about being at school? What worries you?*

Spotting Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect During the COVID-19 Emergency: An Updated Guide for Educational Professionals and Others who Care for Maine Children

Recognize as educators and professionals that you can't do this alone. It is the responsibility of each of us to collaborate and provide a network of support and resources for families. **Suggest resources** and refer families to additional support as needed. **See additional resources below.*

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: TYPES AND REPORTING

There are four main types of abuse: **PHYSICAL**, **EMOTIONAL**, **SEXUAL**, and **NEGLECT**.

Below are some potential signs of abuse and neglect that could indicate a child may not be safe:

PHYSICAL abuse:

- Child has bruising, welts, burns, bite marks, broken bones or other injuries that are not explained, appear to be inflicted, or are suspicious.
- Child may report having pain caused by parental behavior, though have no obvious signs of injury.
- Child has been directly present in a room where domestic violence incidents have occurred.
- Behaviorally, child may appear to be afraid of caregiver(s) and flinch when around them.

EMOTIONAL abuse:

- Child may appear withdrawn, sad, or emotionally unattached to caregivers.
- Caregiver is known or heard to repeatedly blame, belittle, or berate the child.
- Child is aware of and exposed to domestic violence incidents between caregivers.

SEXUAL abuse:

- Child may describe being sexually touched by a parent, caregiver, or other person in the home.
- Child may demonstrate unusual sexual knowledge or behavior for their age.

NEGLECT:

- Child is witnessing illegal substance use by caregivers, and/or has access to unsafe items in the home.
- Child is not being supervised adequately for their age and developmental ability.
- Child's primary needs for food, education or, medical, dental, or mental health care are not being met

IMPORTANT: Please obtain as much detail as possible regarding any concerns, such as WHEN/WHERE an incident occurred, HOW something made the child feel, or WHAT injuries look like (size, shape, location). Ask open ended follow up questions to clarify information.

Additional information regarding law which defines Maine abuse and neglect can be found here:

<http://mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/22/title22sec4002.html>

ANY person can report abuse/neglect. **Persons who work professionally with children are required by law** to report suspicions of abuse or neglect. It is NOT necessary for a reporter to first verify that the abuse or neglect has occurred. Click here for [Maine's Mandated Reporter Law](#)

Spotting Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect During the COVID-19 Emergency: An Updated Guide for Educational Professionals and Others who Care for Maine Children

The Maine Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) operates the statewide hotline for child abuse and neglect. Trained staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to take reports and answer questions



To report child abuse or neglect:

Call 1-800-452-1999

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Call Maine Relay 711

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR RECOGNIZING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

The role of educators in preventing abuse and neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/educator.pdf>

Child Welfare Information Gateway – Recognizing Abuse & Neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/signs.pdf>

HelpGuide: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect.htm>

Child Help National Resources & Hotline: <https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>

World Health Organization: Covid-19 and Domestic Violence:
<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/emergencies/COVID-19-VAW-full-text.pdf>

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND PROVIDERS TO STAY VIRTUALLY CONNECTED WITH FAMILIES

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE AMERICA: <http://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>

NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>

APA (America Psychological Association): <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/telehealth-children>

NASW (National Association of Social Workers): <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus>

OTHER STATEWIDE RESOURCES IN MAINE

Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services 1-877-452-1999

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/>

2-1-1 Maine, Inc. (Free information & Referral): Dial 211 or 1-877-463-6207 (Out of State) <https://211maine.org/>

Office of Financial Independence (OFI) Support and Services: OFI Main Telephone Line 1-(800)-442-6003

Maine Unemployment Hotline: 1-(800)-593-8660 <https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/>

Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse: 1-800-624-8404 (Voice) or 711 (Maine Relay)

Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222 (Voice) 1-877-299-4447 (TTY) [Northern New England Poison Center](#)

**Spotting Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect During the COVID-19 Emergency:
An Updated Guide for Educational Professionals and Others who Care for Maine Children**

Maine Statewide Crisis Hotline 1-888-568-1112 (Voice/TTY) (Crisis Hotline)
Suicide Prevention: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program
Domestic Violence Hotline 1-866-834-HELP (4357) www.mcedv.org

ON BEHALF OF THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, OFFICE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES, WE APPRECIATE THE ONGOING WORK OF EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN JOINING WITH US TO KEEP MAINE'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE AND HEALTHY.

