

## Child Abuse Symptoms, Reporting, and Responding To Disclosure

Child abuse affects more than one million children each year in the United States. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, and physical neglect are four common types of abuse.

### Symptoms and Signs of Abuse

Many abused children show some of the following symptoms: low self-esteem; anger; guilt; aggressive, hyperactive, or disruptive behavior; withdrawal; delinquent behavior; poor school performance; and abuse of drugs and alcohol.

#### Some possible signs of abuse are:

- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, burns, or fractures
- Excessive fearfulness or distrust of adults
- Abusive behavior toward other children, especially younger ones
- Avoidance of physical contact

In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as 1-877 NJ ABUSE. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.

### What information will I be asked to provide to the hotline screener?

SCR screeners are trained caseworkers who know how to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect. Whenever possible, a caller should provide all of the following information:

- **Who:** The child and parent/caregiver's name, age and address and the name of the alleged perpetrator and that person's relationship to the child.
- **What:** Type and frequency of alleged abuse/neglect, current or previous injuries to the child and what caused you to become concerned.
- **When:** When the alleged abuse/neglect occurred and when you learned of it.
- **Where:** Where the incident occurred, where the child is now and whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.
- **How:** How urgent the need is for intervention and whether there is a likelihood of imminent danger for the child.

### Do callers have immunity from civil or criminal liability?

Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of child abuse or neglect or testifies in a child abuse hearing resulting from such a report is immune from any criminal or civil liability as a result of such action. Calls can be placed to the hotline anonymously.

### Is it against the laws of New Jersey to fail to report suspected abuse/neglect?

Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse or neglect according to the law or to comply with the provisions of the law is a disorderly person and subject to a fine of up to \$1000 or up to six months imprisonment, or both.

### What happens after I make the call?

When a report indicates that a child may be at risk, an investigator from the Division of Youth and Family Services will promptly investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours of receipt of the report.