

RESOURCE GUIDE

Personal Responsibility
Education Program

Mandatory Reporting and Keeping Youth Safe

November 2022

OVERVIEW

An important first step in preventing abuse and keeping youth safe is to proactively prepare adults who work with youth to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect. Anyone can report suspected child abuse or neglect to law enforcement or local Child Protective Services (CPS). All U.S. states and territories have laws identifying persons who are required to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Mandated reporters may include social workers, teachers and other school personnel, childcare providers, physicians and other health-care workers, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officers. Some states and territories require any person who suspects child abuse or neglect to report it. A permissive reporter is any person, regardless of their profession, who voluntarily reports any suspicions or concerns of abuse, neglect, or imminent danger to a child or youth (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019b, 2019c; Mandated Reporter, 2022).

It is critical for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (APP) Grantees and frontline staff (staff who work directly with youth) to understand state laws and receive ongoing training on mandatory reporting and proper reporting protocols. Grantees and staff need to know who is responsible for reporting suspected abuse and neglect and how to ensure youth safety and confidentiality. It is also very important that staff are able to recognize the signs of youth who may be experiencing a mental and emotional health crisis (including suicidal ideation or self-harm), dating violence, or bullying. This resource guide provides practical guidance for frontline staff who may encounter potentially reportable situations when delivering APP programming.



TIPS FOR PLANNING FOR AND IMPLEMENTING MANDATORY REPORTING PROTOCOLS

TRAINING

- **Identify who is required to report and train staff on protocols** for reporting abuse and neglect and the consequences for not reporting. Refer to state laws.
- **Train all levels of staff to recognize signs and symptoms** of abuse, neglect, an imbalance of power in relationships, signs of trafficking, bullying, emotional and mental health crises, and nonverbal behaviors that are signs of abuse or harm to the self or others.
- **Train staff on protocols** for reporting abuse and neglect and the **consequences** for not reporting or not following established reporting procedures.

PLANNING

- **Engage in proactive planning** and develop policies and procedures with community partners as part of Memoranda of Understanding that address mandatory and permissive reporting of abuse and neglect based on your state's laws and develop plans for possible disclosure or reaction to the content being presented during programming.
- **Adopt culturally responsive and equitable** policies and procedures for reporting suspected abuse and for referrals to community resources.
- **Get to know the staff in your local CPS unit** to gain a better understanding of how your local program is structured and to develop relationships and rapport before emergencies occur.
- **Develop a checklist of protocols and an emergency contact list in case a mandatory reporting situation occurs.** The checklist should include school or agency reporting procedures, state laws and guidelines for what to document and how long to maintain documentation, local numbers for CPS, law enforcement, national child abuse hotlines, and designated onsite contact (e.g., supervisor, school counselors, social workers) who can support staff and youth before making a report to authorities—unless a youth is in imminent danger.

IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

- **Let youth know that you are a mandated reporter**, what level of confidentiality they can expect from you, and what types of information you are required to report. *Take disclosures seriously.*
- **Engage program participants** in the development of group agreements to increase trust and empower youth's voices and clarify youth's understanding regarding confidentiality and your role as a mandated reporter. Be prepared to respond and follow your plan if a participant has a negative reaction to the content being presented during programming and needs support or discloses abuse to staff.
- **Be aware** that students may be dealing with challenges in their home lives. If sessions are conducted virtually, privacy may be limited, and they may be uncomfortable sharing information they might otherwise share in an in-person discussion.
- **Designate staff** to support youth as needed during implementation and let youth know how to reach out to these trusted adults during in-person or virtual programming.
- **Share a list of national hotline numbers and community-specific resources** throughout programming in an accessible format. Distribute resources in person or post them in the chat function of your videoconferencing platform.

UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE REPORTING LAWS (FEDERAL AND STATE)

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), passed by the federal government in 1974 has been amended and reauthorized many times to expand protections for youth. It provides funding, federal laws, standards, and guidelines to address child abuse prevention; however, most child abuse issues are governed by state laws and regulations.

Regardless of where you live or your profession, you have a duty to protect youth from abuse and neglect. Reporting concerns and suspicions of abuse is a community responsibility.

Notably, the [2015 Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act](#) further amended CAPTA to include specific language about sex trafficking, stating that “a child shall be considered a victim of child abuse and neglect’ and of ‘sexual abuse’ if the child is identified... as being a victim of sex trafficking... or a victim of severe forms of trafficking in persons” (Child Welfare Gateway, 2019a, p. 2). The 2015 CAPTA amendment also allows states flexibility to consider young adults up to age 24 when identifying victims of child abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse (Child Welfare Gateway, 2019a).

However, not all state laws require reporting of “extrafamilial” abuse and a requirement to report children victimized and trafficked by third parties would require an amendment to state specific mandatory reporting laws. Many states have adopted “safe harbor” laws to treat trafficked youth as victims in need of a traumainformed approach to care and support services and provisions that they should not be prosecuted for commercial sex (English, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2021).

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 is a federal law that governs the out-of-home placement of Native American children and termination of parental rights to protect the best interests of Native American children and keep them connected to their families and Tribes (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021).

All U.S. states and territories have enacted laws for the protection of children from abuse and neglect. Among the issues addressed in state laws are mandatory reporting, responding to child abuse and neglect, statutes of limitations for criminal and civil prosecution, and consequences of not reporting abuse. Refer to [state or territory laws](#) for guidance (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019c)

EQUITY AND BIAS IN REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

“Racial disproportionality is ubiquitous within the child welfare system. Families of color are more likely to be investigated by child protective services, and children of color are overwhelmingly more likely to be placed in foster care. There are myriad causes for this disproportionality, including racial bias and system factors. Recognizing implicit bias enables child welfare professionals to consciously make more equitable decisions, thereby creating more equitable child welfare practices” (Child Welfare Gateway Information, n.d.).

A key strategy to address racial disparities is to use a prevention approach that provides community-based resources and support to reduce the involvement of families of color with the child welfare system. Offering ongoing implicit bias training can equip staff with the resources to make more equitable decisions when reporting child abuse and neglect. Explore additional racial equity resources for child welfare professionals (Child Welfare Gateway Information, n.d.).



KEY DATA: ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND MENTAL HEALTH CRISES

A snapshot of data from 2020–2021, across multiple national sources, reveals that adolescents in the United States are experiencing and are at risk for **abuse, neglect, and mental health crises**.

2020 National Hotline data from the Polaris Project (Polaris, 2020)

- Although the Internet was reported as the top recruitment location for all forms of trafficking, 42% of victims of sex trafficking or sex and labor trafficking combined were brought into trafficking by a member of their own families.
- Traffickers frequently friend or follow victims on social media, often becoming romantically involved with them before forcing or manipulating them into prostitution.

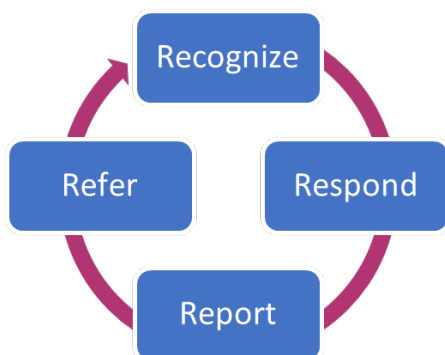
2021 Adolescent Behavior Experiences Survey (CDC, 2022a)

The Adolescent Behavior Experiences Survey (ABES), a nationally represented sample of approximately 8,000 students in grades 9–12 across 128 public and private schools collected from January to June 2021, illuminates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth's daily lives and shows that the disruption did not affect all students equally. Many populations that experienced inequity before the COVID-19 pandemic also had greater risks during the pandemic related to mental health, suicide, substance use, abuse, and racism (CDC, 2022a).

ABES study data highlights include the following:

- More than half of students reported emotional abuse by a parent, and more than 10% reported physical abuse by a parent.
- LGB (lesbian, gay or bisexual) students were twice as likely to report physical abuse as heterosexual students, with 20% of LGB students reporting that they had been physically abused by a parent or other adult in their home, compared with 10% of heterosexual students.¹
- More than 1 in 3 high school students reported experiencing poor mental health during the pandemic and nearly half of students felt persistently sad or hopeless.
- Female students and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, other, or questioning (LGBQ) reported experiencing disproportionate levels of poor mental health and suicide-related behaviors. In 2021, 12% of female students, more than 25% of LGB students, and 17% of other or questioning students reported attempting suicide during the past year compared with 5% of their male peers and 5% of their heterosexual peers.

Experts raise concerns that the impact and disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic may have lasting impacts on the physical, mental, and emotional health of our nations' youth for years to come, which will have implications for public health programming to address trauma-informed approaches to identification and mandated reporting of youth at risk for abuse and neglect.



Adults have a responsibility to take action to keep youth safe. Be prepared to **RECOGNIZE** the signs, **RESPOND** using trauma-informed approaches to handling disclosures, document and **REPORT** in a timely manner, and **REFER** youth to appropriate vetted resources and support services within your community.

¹Note the acronyms used here reflect ABES data groupings.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

One in seven children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States (CDC, 2022b).

Abuse and neglect come in many different forms and can sometimes be hard to see. Some signs or clues of physical abuse or neglect are obvious while others are not. Some types of maltreatment occur in isolation, and others occur in combination. It is particularly important to be able to recognize the potential signs of abuse and neglect among marginalized populations (e.g., youth experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with disabilities). It is especially important for staff to recognize extreme or bizarre behavior as a potential sign of abuse rather than mislabel such behavior as simply “acting up.” In addition to recognizing signs of abuse and neglect, ensure that staff are able to identify and recognize signs of trafficked youth and youth at risk of being trafficked. As noted by English (2017), the inclusion of mandatory reporting of human trafficking to Child Welfare and law enforcement agencies poses both benefit and risks to victims and survivors. The identification of trafficked youth may help provide essential referrals to services to meet their needs. However, trafficked victims and survivors may be hesitant to seek help or disclose information for fear of retaliation by their trafficker, being prosecuted, or being deported.

Most states and territories recognize the **four types of abuse and neglect**: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Many states identify abandonment, parental substance use, and human trafficking as abuse or neglect. Some state laws also include a child’s witnessing of domestic violence as a form of abuse or neglect (Child Welfare Gateway Information, 2019d).

Signs of abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation may include the following (Child Welfare Gateway Information, 2019d):

- Unexplained injuries or bruises
- Extreme behaviors (excessive crying, truancy, running away)
- Sudden change in behavior
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate clothing
- Excessive fear of parent(s), caregiver(s), or going home
- Depression
- Threats of self-harm, or harm to others
- Poor peer relationships or inability to relate to peers
- Constant hunger, tiredness, or lack of energy
- Attention-seeking behavior/inappropriate sexual behavior
- Potential signs of sex trafficking: new or expensive clothing or material items

For more detailed information on recognizing signs of abuse, neglect, and sexual exploitation, refer to the [resources](#) provided at the end of this resource guide.



RESPOND USING TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES WHEN HANDLING DISCLOSURES

For many youth, a class presentation about sexual health, healthy relationships, online safety, or responding to a survey about sexual activity and dating violence may be the first time they recognize that they are being abused. This can be a trigger cue.

If youth disclose that they have experienced or are currently experiencing abuse (physical, emotional, sexual) or neglect or are in a mental health crisis (harm to self or others) it is important to respond using a [trauma-informed approach](#), to listen, and to take action to support them. It is important to recognize clues of disclosure so further questions can be asked. If the disclosure is “missed,” youth may continue to give additional hints, but the window of opportunity may often be gone.




Types of disclosures

Disclosures can be direct or indirect. In most cases, the disclosure will be indirect. Youth may share details about abuse in an indirect way by disguising it or using hints or gestures (ChildHelp, n.d.).

- “Sometimes my stepdad keeps me up at night.”
- “I have a cousin who is being abused.”
- “My friend told me...”



Tips for Handling Disclosures¹

<p>LISTEN</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay calm and patient. Avoid showing shock or fear on your face or in your body language. • Provide a safe and private environment. • Let youth use their own words. Avoid asking leading questions. • Avoid “quizzing” youth about details of the abuse. • Listen for what happened, who did it, and when and where it happened. Don’t make assumptions, give advice, or problem solve. • Don’t be afraid to say the wrong thing.
<p>REASSURE</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure youth that they did nothing wrong, that you believe them, and that it is okay that they have told you what has happened or what is happening. • Be supportive and non-judgmental. • Address any concerns about the youth’s safety. Assess whether they are in imminent danger and report and refer accordingly.
<p>RESPECT</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect that youth may only reveal some details. • Acknowledge their bravery and strength. • Do not make promises you cannot keep. Tell youth exactly what you are going to do and what is going to happen next and who else they may need to talk to. Explain that to keep them safe you will need to report their experience to someone else (e.g., CPS, mental health professional, law enforcement) who can investigate further.

¹(Adapted from Childhelp, n.d.; Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d.)

REPORT AND DOCUMENT ABUSE

Childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect can have lifelong implications for a young person’s well-being and development and can negatively impact mental and physical health into adulthood. Standards in reporting vary by state but typically require a mandated reporter to file a report when someone “suspects or has reason to believe” that a youth has been abused or neglected.

Mandated reporters should report the facts and are not required to show proof that abuse, or neglect has happened; permissive reporters should follow the same standards. (Child Welfare Gateway Information, 2019c). If you suspect, witness, or receive a disclosure about abuse or neglect, it is critical to document and **REPORT** it and continue to report each recurrence.

The following tips may be helpful as you train staff in reporting requirements and procedures:

- **Remain calm and get help.** If necessary, take youth to a designated mental health professional or supervisor on site. Do not leave distressed youth unsupervised.
- **Avoid probing for details** of the situation or incident, investigating, or discussing the situation with anyone not directly involved in helping support the youth, including parents/caregivers, before discussing it with your supervisor.
- **Remind staff** that the reporter need only have a reasonable suspicion that someone is in danger. (Hard evidence is not required, because the case will be investigated by law enforcement or child welfare services.)
- **Document important information** to report to authorities: *what happened, when it happened, where it happened, and who did it and their relationship to the child.* Refer to state laws and school district and setting-specific guidance, as applicable, for what should be included when documenting, reporting, and storing reports.
- **Immediately contact your supervisor** or a designated contact person at your site. Frontline staff with direct knowledge of the disclosure and their supervisor(s) should place a joint call to authorities so complete, accurate information is conveyed.
- **If needed, call the local law enforcement agency** and request a law enforcement welfare check. A law enforcement welfare check occurs when a report is made to law enforcement about an individual who may be in danger, and law enforcement is able to enter a residence to determine the safety of the individual.
- **Call 911 for an emergency, 988 for an emotional or mental health crisis,** or other appropriate local CPS if you are concerned about a youth's immediate safety and a supervisor or designated, trained medical or mental health professional from your agency is unavailable.

REFER YOUTH TO APPROPRIATE VETTED RESOURCES AND SUPPORT SERVICES WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY OR TO NATIONAL RESOURCES

It is required that you establish and maintain safe, youthfriendly, and fully vetted referral systems that provide a wide range of services for youth and families served by your APP program. Some important reminders to keep in mind include the following:

- **Develop local referral networks and community partnerships** with social service and community-based organizations that can meet needs of youth (e.g., mental health, medical services, food and housing, crisis support). Ensure that referral resources for victims and survivors of trafficking are adequate and can provide trauma-informed approaches to care and support services to meet their needs.
- **Establish protocols** for connecting youth to appropriate local referral networks and community resources (e.g., incorporate clinical linkages as part of programming, provide clinic tours, provide names of community contacts, introduce contacts in person or virtually).
- **Develop a resources handout of important phone numbers and hotlines** and share with youth and families throughout program implementation. Refer to this sample [Resources and Referral Information Handout \(hhs.gov\)](#) as a guide.
- **Annually review referral resources** and ensure they remain appropriate and current. If you receive negative feedback about a particular referral source from youth, take that into account when you revise your list.



NATIONAL HOTLINES

NEW: 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

How is 988 Different than 911?

988 was established to improve access to crisis services to meet our country's growing suicide and mental health-related crisis care needs. 988 provides easier access to the Lifeline network and related crisis resources. **911 is for public safety** (where the focus is on dispatching Emergency Medical Services, fire, and police as needed). For more information go to [the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website page on 988 Frequently Asked Questions](#).

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 or chat <https://www.988lifeline.org>

Childhelp National Abuse Hotline

1-800-422-4453

<https://www.childhelp.org>

National Human Trafficking Hotline

1-888-373-7888 Text INFO or HELP to BeFREE (233733)

<https://www.humantraffickinghotline.org>

National Runaway Safeline

1-800-786-2929 or 1-800-RUNAWAY Chat and email available via the website

<https://www.1800runaway.org>

The National Dating Abuse Hotline

1-866-331-9474 TEXT LOVEIS to 22522

<https://www.loveisrespect.org>

TREVOR Project

1-866-488-7586 or TEXT "START" to 678-678

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/crisis-services>



RESOURCES

Materials, Trainings, State Laws, and Fact Sheets from Child Welfare Information Gateway

[What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?](#) This fact sheet provides an overview of the legal definition of child abuse and neglect; the different types of abuse and neglect; and the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect, including human trafficking.

[Identification of Child Abuse and Neglect.](#) This site offers resources to raise awareness of recognizing common signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect.

[Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect.](#) This publication provides a summary of laws that designate mandated reporters and address reporting by other persons.

[State and Territory Statutes Search.](#) This allows you to access the laws/statutes for a specific state or territory.

[How to report abuse and neglect.](#) This web page provides steps for reporting and national hotlines.

[State Training Resources for Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect.](#) This page links to state agencies, university-sponsored, and child welfare partner websites featuring online training courses, videos, toolkits, guidelines, and protocols to assist mandated reporters.

[Equity and Inclusion for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention.](#) This offers resources to promote and advance equity in prevention.

[Training Resources for working with American Indian and Alaska Native Families.](#) This site includes links to additional resources for working with American Indian and Alaska Native Families, including youth support and community building.

[Tip Sheet for children and youth 10 and older.](#) This tip sheet defines child abuse and neglect and provides information to help children understand signs of abuse and neglect and what to do if they think someone needs help.

[Responding to Child Victims of Human Trafficking.](#) This resource covers state agency responsibilities, training requirements, “safe harbor” laws, services and support for victims, and support for anti-trafficking efforts.

Materials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for further learning

[Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

[Preventing Teen Dating Violence](#)

[Resources on Recognizing Signs of Sex Trafficking](#)

[Adolescent Mental Health](#)

Materials from The Exchange for further learning

[A Facilitator’s Guide to Trauma-Informed Programming for Youth in Optimal Health Programs](#)

[Adverse Childhood Experiences: Implications for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs](#)

[Resources and Referral Information Handout](#)

[Practical Strategies for Creating Welcoming & Supportive Environments for All Youth](#)

[\(PREP\) Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for LGBTQ+ Youth](#)

[Youth Voices: Helping Facilitators of APP Programming Create Safe Spaces for Young People](#)

[Sex Trafficking and Adolescents: What Adults Need to Know](#)

[SOAR to Health and Wellness: Human Trafficking Training](#)

[Developing & Implementing a Human Trafficking Protocol in PREP Programs](#)

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