

## Detecting Sexual Abuse

Most cases of sexual abuse go undetected. There might be no apparent physical signs, or there might be physical signs detected only through medical examination. The cases that are reported are generally reported by abused children to their parents, siblings or other “caretakers” — often in the form of casual remarks that lead the listener to query deeper. But most children say nothing. They might not realize that what was done to them was wrong. Or, they might be too embarrassed or frightened to speak up. And they might not want to get the offender in trouble — especially if a “friendship” has developed between offender and victim.

In some cases, there are “telltale” physical or emotional signs that may arouse your suspicion. In its publication *The Educator’s Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect*, the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect outlines certain indicators of sexual abuse.

### Physical indicators:

- Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
- Pain or itching in the genital area.
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas.
- Venereal disease, especially in pre-teens.
- Pregnancy.

### Behavioral indicators:

- Unwilling to change for gym or participate in physical education class.
- Withdrawal, fantasy or infantile behavior.
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge.
- Poor peer relationships.
- Delinquency or running away.
- Reports sexual assault by caretaker.

From Church Mutual Insurance Company, "Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse" <<https://www.churchmutual.com/media/safetyResources/files/SafetyTipsSenSubject.pdf>> (10/12/17)

## Mandated Reporting

- A clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or religious organization.
- An adult paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child.

### Who Must Report Suspected Abuse?

- UNDER THE NEW LAW, EVERY VOLUNTEER IS NOW A MANDATED REPORTER. THIS IS A MAJOR CHANGE!!

### How must allegations of abuse be reported?

Reporting of an allegation of child abuse is required whenever there is “reasonable cause to suspect” that abuse has occurred, according to PA Child Protective Services Law, Title 23 Pa. C.S.S. Chapter 63.

Reasonable cause to suspect abuse can occur:

- 1) when any staff or volunteer personally witnesses an incident of abuse,
- 2) when an allegation of an event of abuse is made to a staff or volunteer by a third party, and/or
- 3) when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses abuse to staff or a volunteer which meets the criteria of the above PA Law.

The mandated reporter observing the behavior or receiving the allegation or disclosure must immediately file the report to the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline. A mandated reporter who fails or delays reporting may be charged with a misdemeanor or a felony, depending on whether the non-reporting is willful and how serious the abuse is.

### Reports of suspected child or youth abuse are made to:

Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24/7 service) at **800-932-0313**.

Immediately after filing the report, the person filing the report must inform the pastor or a designated church leader.

Persons making reports have immunity from civil and criminal liability. It is presumed that reports are made in good faith.

Releasing the identity of the person making the report is prohibited. This applies to law enforcement, the child welfare workers, and the church.

Adapted from the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance < <http://www.pa-fsa.org> > and the United Methodist Church Discipleship resources <<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries>> (10/12/17).