



CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

Department of Children's Services

State of Tennessee



The background of the entire image is a blurred American flag, showing the stars and stripes in shades of red, white, and blue.

Reporting Child Abuse

It's everyone's responsibility!





Child abuse is a serious problem in both the United States and Tennessee. The Department of Children's Services is tasked with ensuring the safety and well-being of all children in Tennessee. However, this requires the partnership of communities and concerned citizens just like you.

Thank you for taking the time today to learn about how to recognize, respond, and report child abuse. Your actions and awareness can and will make Tennessee a safer place for children.

Department of Children's Services

- Vision: *Tennessee's children and youth are safe, healthy and back on track for success.*
- Values:
 - *Children Do Best at Home*
 - *Families Can Be Strengthened and Successful*
 - *Children Deserve a Forever Family*
 - *Well-being Matters*



Tennessee Department of Children's Services

Office of Child Safety

- Accepts all reports of alleged child abuse and neglect
- Screens the report to determine if the criteria are met
- Assigns report to Child Protective Services case manager to address the concerns of child abuse and neglect
- Partners with families to keep children safe in the least restrictive settings

Child Abuse & Neglect Statistics In TN

In 2019, 128,611 calls were received by the TN Child abuse Hotline.

In 2019, 14,777 allegations of child sexual abuse were investigated.

In 2019, 169 child deaths were investigated in Tennessee.



In 2019, all 95 counties in Tennessee had open cases for allegations of abuse or neglect.

TN Categories of Abuse & Neglect

- Physical Abuse
- Drug Exposed Child
- Environmental Neglect
- Nutritional Neglect
- Medical Neglect
- Educational Neglect
- Lack of Supervision
- Abandonment
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Psychological Harm
- Abuse or Neglect Death





Recognizing Signs and Symptoms of Child Abuse & Neglect

Educating Yourself & Others

*“The eye doesn’t see what the mind
doesn’t know”*

- D. H. Lawrence

What is Abuse and Neglect?

- According TN Law (T.C.A. § 37-1-102), “Abuse” exists when a person under the age of eighteen (18) is **suffering from, has sustained, or may be in immediate danger of suffering from** or sustaining a wound, injury, disability or physical or mental condition caused by brutality, neglect or other actions or inactions of a parent, relative, guardian or caretaker. Abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual.

How Does TN Define Caregiver?

- Any relative or any other person living, visiting or working in the child's home
- An employee or volunteer at an educational, recreational, medical, religious, therapeutic or other such setting where children are present
- Any person in any caretaking role with children, such as a babysitter
- **Anyone** who has allegedly used the child directly or indirectly for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation of a minor, such as a trafficker



Signs of Physical Abuse

- Unexplained fractures or injuries
- Previous injuries in various healing stages
- Patterned injuries consistent with objects of abuse (cigarettes, belt, hands)
- Burns on extremities, buttocks or genitals
- Frightened of or shrink at approach of adult caregiver
- Emotional turmoil (anxiety, depressed, suicidal); developmental delays
- Self-isolation or undue aggression
- Fear of going home; many school absences
- Abuses animals or pets



Signs of Neglect



- Poor growth or weight gain or being overweight
- Poor hygiene
- Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- Taking food or money without permission
- Hiding food for later
- Poor record of school attendance
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care

Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Delayed or inappropriate emotional development
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Depression
- Avoidance of certain situations, such as refusing to go to school or ride the bus
- Desperately seeks affection
- A decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills



Signs of Sex Abuse



- Soreness or bruising, pain or itching in genital or anal areas
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Nightmares or bedwetting
- Unexplained loss of appetite
- Becoming isolated or withdrawn
- Excessive masturbation or sexual play
- Abuses children, animals or pets
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment
- Obsession with pornography or viewing sexually explicit photos
- Repeated runaway or suicide attempts
- Self-destructive behavior/self-injury/cutting, risky or delinquent behavior

Sexual Behaviors in Children

Normal Development

- Between children of similar age, size, and developmental status
- All children agree to the behavior
- Exploratory, spontaneous, and occurs in the context of play
- Children have light-hearted feelings before, during, and after the behavior
- Children giggling and engaging in the behavior out in the open
- Self-stimulation to explore genitals and sensations
- Engage in mutual touching with similar aged friends or cousins
- Looks at their own bodies and bodies of others
- Tell sexual jokes or use sexual words

Problematic Behaviors

- Behaviors cause physical or emotional pain or discomfort to self or others
- Preoccupation with the behavior
- Sexual behavior geared towards younger children/inappropriate age range
- Forcing others (physically or through intimidation) to do sexual acts
- Tricking others into sexual acts
- Any penetration
- Trying to have sexual intercourse with another child or adult
- Putting mouths on genitalia
- Manual stimulation, oral, or genital contact with animals
- Unresponsive to redirection

Seeking help for children displaying problematic behaviors is crucial for their safety and the safety of other children around them.

Signs of Sexual Exploitation of Minors

- History or presence of emotional, sexual, or other physical abuse
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Evidence of homelessness; no identification and runaway
- Inexplicable appearance of expensive gifts, clothing, or other costly items
- Presence of an older boy-/girlfriend
- Evidence of drug use
- Possesses multiple phones and hotel room cards
- Repeated statement of urgent need to leave or get back home



How do I talk to a child I suspect is being abused?

- ***Pick your time and place carefully.***
- ***Stay calm.*** A child may not talk about abuse if he or she knows that it makes you feel angry, worried or scared.
- ***Avoid judgment and blame.*** For example: “I am concerned because I heard you say that you were afraid to go home. What is making you afraid?” or “I noticed that there is a bruise on your arm today. What happened?”
- ***Listen to the child.*** Let the child talk to you about his or her worries and concerns. Don’t ask a lot of questions.
- ***Reassure the child.*** Make sure that the child knows that they are not in trouble. Let them know you are simply asking questions because you are concerned about them

(RAINN & Our Kids)

What do I say to a child who discloses abuse?

- Thank them for their bravery
- Assure them they did the right thing for telling someone
- Let them know that you believe them
- Let them know what happened is not their fault
- Tell them that you'll need to talk to someone whose job it is to keep them safe
- Tell them you are here to support them

Note: Your response can have a big impact on their ability to seek further help and recover from the trauma.

(Kids Helpline)



During a disclosure, it's important to avoid:

- Filling in the story – by giving them words or asking leading questions like “Did mom or dad hit you?” or “Do they make you afraid”?
- Asking too many questions – leave the investigating and fact finding to trained professionals
- Expressing anger about the alleged abuser – they may be an adult the child loves and cares for
- Confronting the alleged abuser – it could make things worse or unsafe for the child
- Making promises you can't keep – such as promising you will not tell anyone
- Pressuring the child for information – or for details beyond what they want to say
- Questions that infer blame – like “Did you try to stop them?” or “Did you scream or call out for help?”

(Kids Helpline)

Why do some kids not disclose their abuse?

- Threats have been made by their abuser
- They are afraid of the consequences that could come with disclosing
- There is a lack of opportunity (no one has ever asked!)
- There is a lack of understanding that they are being abused
- Despite the abuse, they have a relationship with and even love their abuser. Many children love their abuser but hate the abuse.

(Jacob Wetterling Resource Center)

I have concerns that a child is
being abused or neglected.
What do I do now?



Who Is Mandated to Report?

- **Any person** who has knowledge of or suspects abuse or neglect of a child must report it.
- The law makes no distinction between professionals and non-professionals on the issue of reporting.
- The law also protects the identity of all mandated reporters

The Law

T.C.A. 37-1-403 (a) (1) requires all persons to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect:

“Any person who has knowledge of or is called upon to render aid to any child who is suffering from or has sustained any wound, injury, disability, or physical or mental condition shall report such harm immediately if the harm is of such a nature as to reasonably indicate that it has been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect or that, on the basis of available information, reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse, or neglect.”



Here are Some Examples:

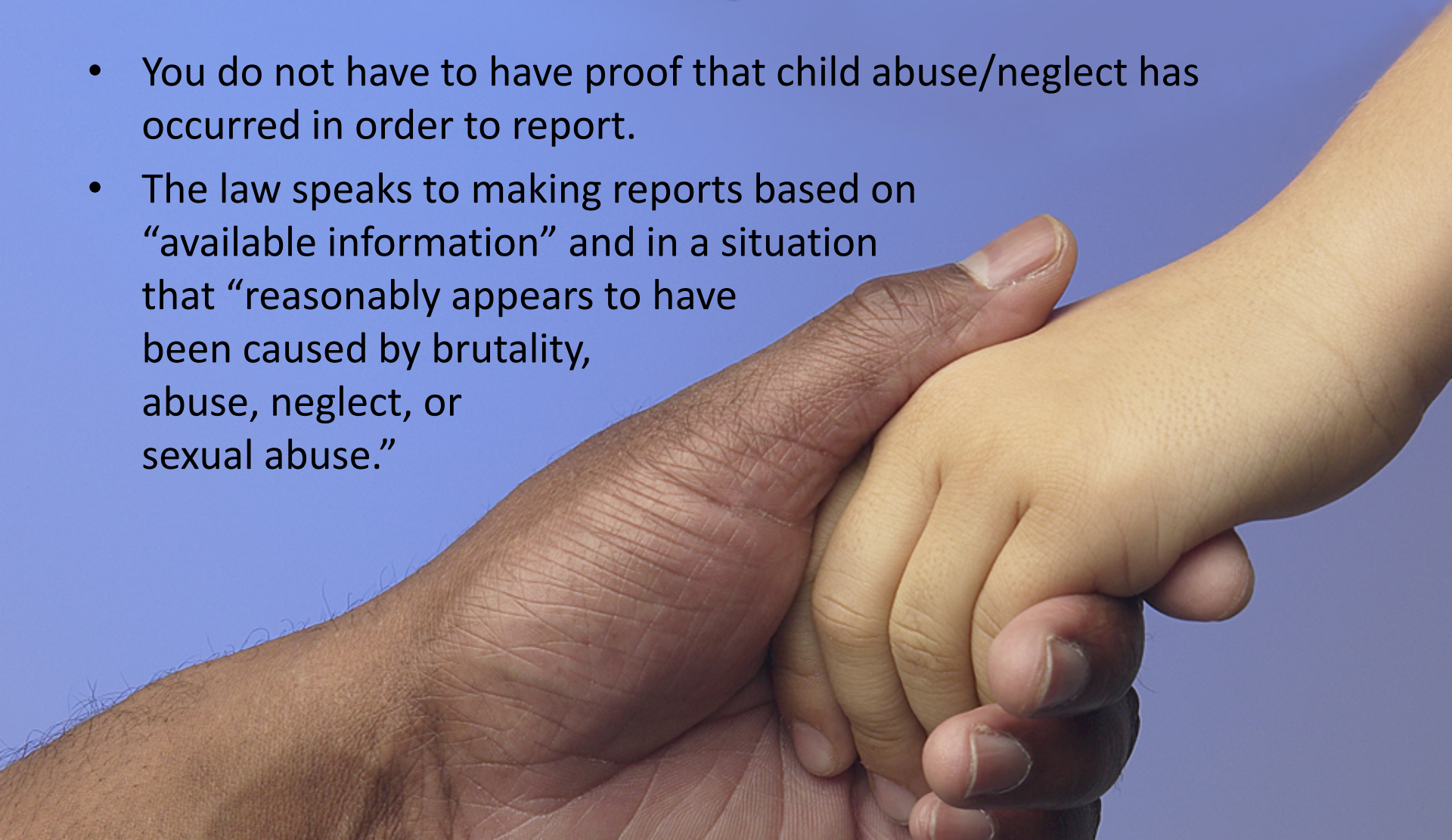
- If a child tells his school teacher that someone has abused him, that teacher has the responsibility to make the report to the proper authorities.
- If a child who lives in a residential treatment center tells her therapist that she has been a victim of child abuse, then that therapist is responsible for making the report.
- If a neighbor witnesses a child being abused or neglected, it is the responsibility of the neighbor to make a report.
- If a daycare provider observes signs of abuse or neglect, is that provider's responsibility to make the report.



When is it Appropriate to Make a Report?

What if I'm "just concerned"?

- You do not have to have proof that child abuse/neglect has occurred in order to report.
- The law speaks to making reports based on "available information" and in a situation that "reasonably appears to have been caused by brutality, abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse."





Where Can You Report Child Abuse?

- The TN Child Abuse Hotline takes reports by phone **1-877-237-0004**
- In non-emergency situations, reports can also be made online through the web tracking system **apps.tn.gov/carat**

Note: The Hotline is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year



***CALLING THE
CHILD ABUSE
HOTLINE:
WHAT DO I NEED
TO KNOW?***



Tennessee Child Abuse Hotline

- Takes your information.
- Screens the information to determine if the situation will require an investigation or assessment and the timeliness of response.
- Assess for other services (i.e. resource linkage).
- All calls are recorded for Quality Assurance.

Protection to Those Who Report

- Referents have the right to make a report anonymously per state law;
- Their personal information may remain confidential and is protected by state law;
- They have freedom from civil and criminal liability for reports of suspected abuse and neglect made in good faith;
- They have freedom from detrimental change in employment status for reports of suspected child abuse and neglect made in good faith;
- The reporter may be notified by mail, email, or web tracking system whether the case was screened out or assigned.

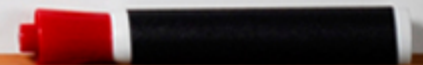


What Reporters Can Expect from DCS

- Any person who makes a report has the right to know if DCS will investigate/assess the report or screen out the report. When you call you will be asked if you want to receive information about whether or not DCS will investigate the information you provided. You will have the option to receive a letter giving this decision.
- If there is an investigation or assessment, you may be contacted by DCS staff to obtain additional information.

When you call in a report, the DCS Hotline assesses for these decisions:

- Is the child currently safe?
- Does the information meet criteria for a track assignment?
- Are other risk factors present in the family?
- What are the strengths of the family?
- How fast should DCS respond?



A person in a dark suit is holding a black leather briefcase. Inside the briefcase, a document is visible with a red stamp that reads "TOP SECRET". The document is being held by a hand, and the briefcase is open, showing its interior. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the briefcase and the document.

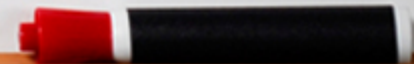
Giving Information to the Child Abuse Hotline

The case manager who takes your call will ask many questions about the situation. Do not be concerned if you do not know the answer to every single question.

The following slides list the types of information that DCS will try to gather.

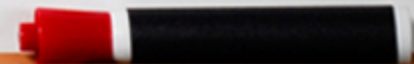
Information the Child Abuse Hotline will ask you:

- Demographic information on the child, including date of birth, address, and phone number
- Name of child's parents/caregiver
- Name of siblings of the child
- Details of the abuse or neglect — any physical evidence — injuries, behaviors, or environmental conditions
- Name of the alleged perpetrator/person and relationship to the victim who may have abused or neglected the child and if that person currently has access to the child
- Child's current whereabouts




Information the Child Abuse Hotline will ask you continued...

- How did you come to know about the abuse/neglect?
- Is there any danger for the DCS investigator?
- Who else knows the circumstances?
- Are you aware of anyone or available resource for the child or family ? (e.g. friend, relative, mentor, etc.)
- What is the non-offending parent or caregiver feelings toward the child and reaction to the abuse?





**When Will
DCS
Respond?**



DCS Follows a 1-2-3 Priority System

- **Priority 1—Immediate – 24 hours**
Reports that indicate imminent threat of serious harm or death
- **Priority 2—Two (2) business days**
Injuries or risk of injuries that are not life threatening and do not require immediate medical care
- **Priority—Three (3) business days**
Reports that indicate a low risk of harm



Will Someone Respond to the Family Before the End of the Day?

When there is an imminent threat of serious harm, DCS will send a case manager out immediately.

If you feel strongly that a child must be seen that day, then be sure to discuss your specific concerns with the case manager at the Child Abuse Hotline when you make the report.

Internet Referral and Tracking Process



Child Abuse Referral And Tracking

Child Abuse Referral And Tracking

Referrals

Do you need to report the abuse, neglect or exploitation of a child or children?

Please follow the link below to report suspicions of abuse/neglect of children when the suspected abuse/neglect took place in Tennessee. [TCA 37-1-403](#) and [TCA 37-1-605](#) law requires all persons to make a report when they suspect abuse, neglect or exploitation of children.

[Report Abuse or Neglect](#)

Tracking

Did you previously submit a referral and want to know the status?

If you have the **Referral ID**, you can search the referral and find out the status.

[Track a Referral](#)

apps.tn.gov/carat/



Why Are Some Reports Not Assigned?

- The information provided does not meet a definition of abuse/neglect as dictated by TN state law.
- The family already has an open case with the department and your concerns are to be addressed in the current open case.
- There is no locating information for the family.
- The information reported has already been investigated by the department in a previous case.
- With sex abuse allegations, the alleged child victim is over the age of 13 and the alleged perpetrator is not a parent, relative, caregiver, or household member. This will be sent to law enforcement.
- The alleged child victim does not reside in the state of TN and will not return to the state of TN in a timeframe that the case could be investigated and concluded.
- The alleged child victim is over the age of 18 who considered an adult in TN and not in DCS Custody.
- Involves alleged physical abuse or neglect by an alleged perpetrator who is not a relative or caregiver.

Do employees have an **obligation to tell their employers** that they have made a report?

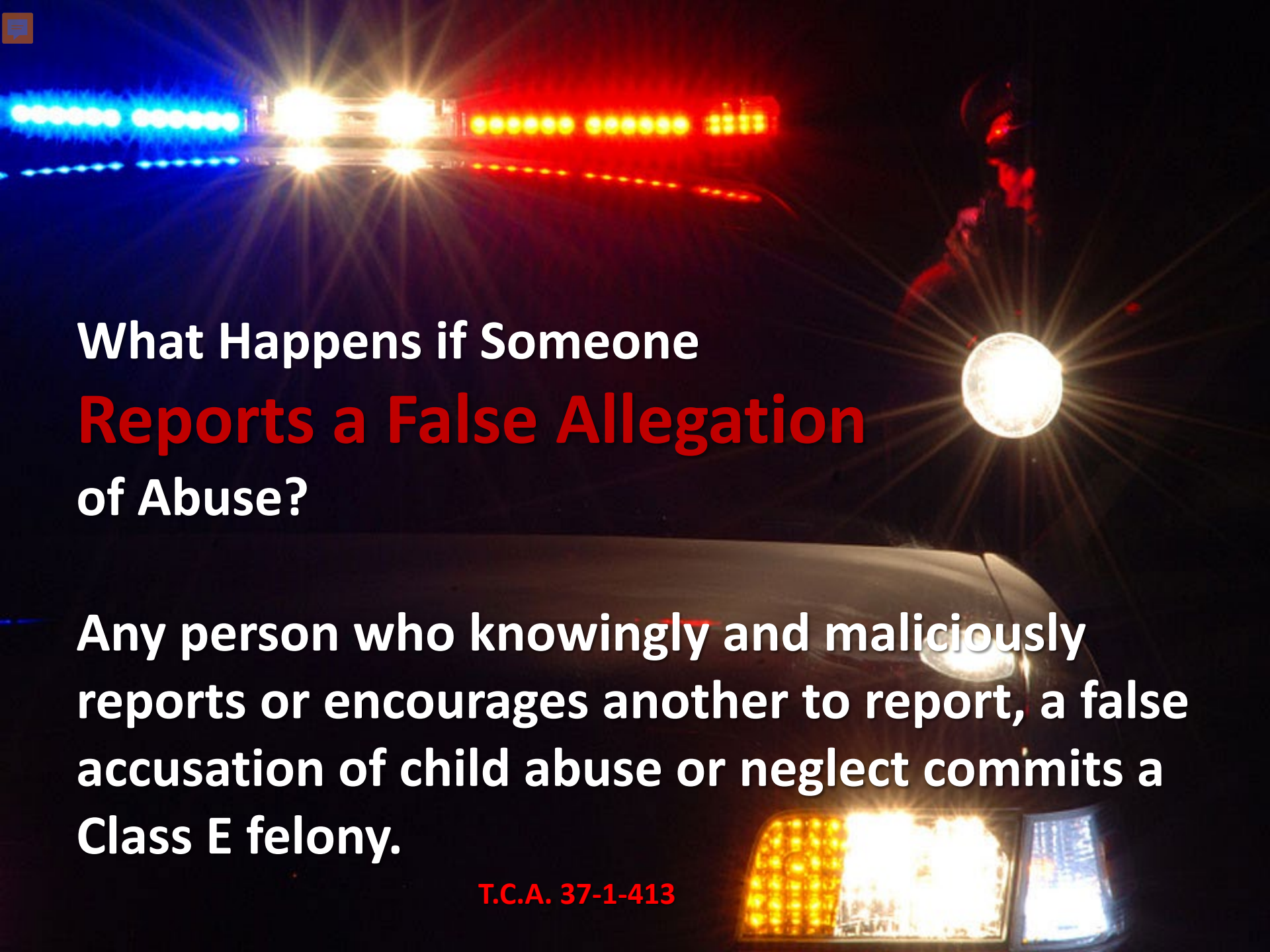
- Employees do have the right to make a report without having to report that information to their organization.

Organizations can develop internal procedures to track, report, and monitor reports of child abuse and neglect made by their staff.

However, it is against the law for anyone to impede or prevent a report from being made.

T.C.A. 37-1-403 (h)



A police car is shown at night with its emergency lights flashing. The lights are arranged in a horizontal line across the top of the car, with blue lights on the left, yellow lights in the middle, and red lights on the right. A single, bright white light is visible on the right side of the car, possibly a spotlight or a headlight. The background is dark, and the overall scene is illuminated by the car's lights.

What Happens if Someone **Reports a False Allegation** of Abuse?

Any person who knowingly and maliciously reports or encourages another to report, a false accusation of child abuse or neglect commits a Class E felony.

T.C.A. 37-1-413

What Happens if Someone Fails to Report a Suspected Case of Child Abuse and Neglect? (T. C. A. 37-1-412)

- Failure to report is a Class A misdemeanor.
- Fine for “failure to report” is not to exceed \$2,500.



How does DCS Respond
to **Allegations** of
Maltreatment?



When DCS Responds, They Will Do the Following:

- ✓ Child Protective Services and the family will work to develop true partnerships to ensure the safety of the child.
- ✓ A holistic approach will be used, looking at all the strengths and needs of the family.
- ✓ A safety assessment is conducted. The case manager and family gather information together from several sources.
- ✓ Services will be identified to help the family and create a safe environment in the home.
- ✓ For severe abuse allegations, cases will be worked with Child Protective Investigative Teams, including law enforcement, child advocacy centers, and district attorneys.



Is the Child Safe?

If not,
can we make
the child safe
without
removing
the child
from the
family?


If we must
remove the child,
how can we
preserve his/her
relationships with
family, friends,
school, and
the community?

Are there State Laws that Dictate How DCS Responds to Abuse?

Yes. In 2005 legislation was passed providing for the implementation of a Multiple Response System (MRS).

Child welfare is not a one-size fits-all approach. That's why DCS uses the multiple response system to child maltreatment.

Different situations require different responses. DCS has a variety of ways of looking into and responding to allegations. They look at the severity of the alleged maltreatment, and take into account a family's needs. Using the Multiple Response System, child protective services case managers offer a variety of approaches that can be more helpful to families and promise more lasting change.





The MRS Approach:

- Ensures children are safe
- Avoids negative labels for parents
- Sets aside the issue of fault
- Asserts that families are the experts at solving their own problems
- Works in partnership with parents to identify the family's strengths and needs





The **Resource Linkage** Track:

This track is a network of available resources to assist children and families in need of services without further intervention of the formal child welfare system.

Families with resource needs but no safety concerns can be connected to resource linkage by making a call to the child abuse hotline.





Rights of the Family

- An important part of working with families in need is acknowledging their rights:
 - Families have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
 - Families have the right to know DCS's legal authority and right to intervene.
 - Families have the right to know DCS's expectations of them, and in turn what they can expect from us.
 - Families have the right to have their phone calls returned within one working day. If the case manager is unavailable, please call the case manager's supervisor.

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say “It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.” Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

- Fred Rogers

Taking a Role in Prevention

5 strategies to prevent child abuse & neglect



Strengthen economic supports for families



Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting



Provide quality care and education early in life



Enhance parenting skills to promote healthy child development



Intervene to lessen harms and prevent future risk

Stewards of Children: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse



- ***Child sexual abuse is not waiting for a cure. Prevention is possible if communities are willing to take necessary steps.***
- Steps for Prevention
 1. Learn the Facts
 2. Minimize Opportunity
 3. Talk About It
 4. Recognize the Signs
 5. React Responsibly

“We are never going to investigate our way out of child sexual abuse cases. The tide changes only with prevention.”


Hold Agencies Accountable for Prevention

- Schools, daycares, camps, faith based communities, sports, and other child serving agencies
 - Do they have a policy around child abuse and neglect?
 - Have their staff been trained in child sexual abuse prevention & mandated reporting?
 - Would you let your child attend a school that didn't have a plan in case of a fire or active shooter?

Partner with Parents



Don't be afraid to engage the families around you in your neighborhoods and communities. Helping families get connected with resources and building up local supports can help child abuse and neglect from ever occurring.

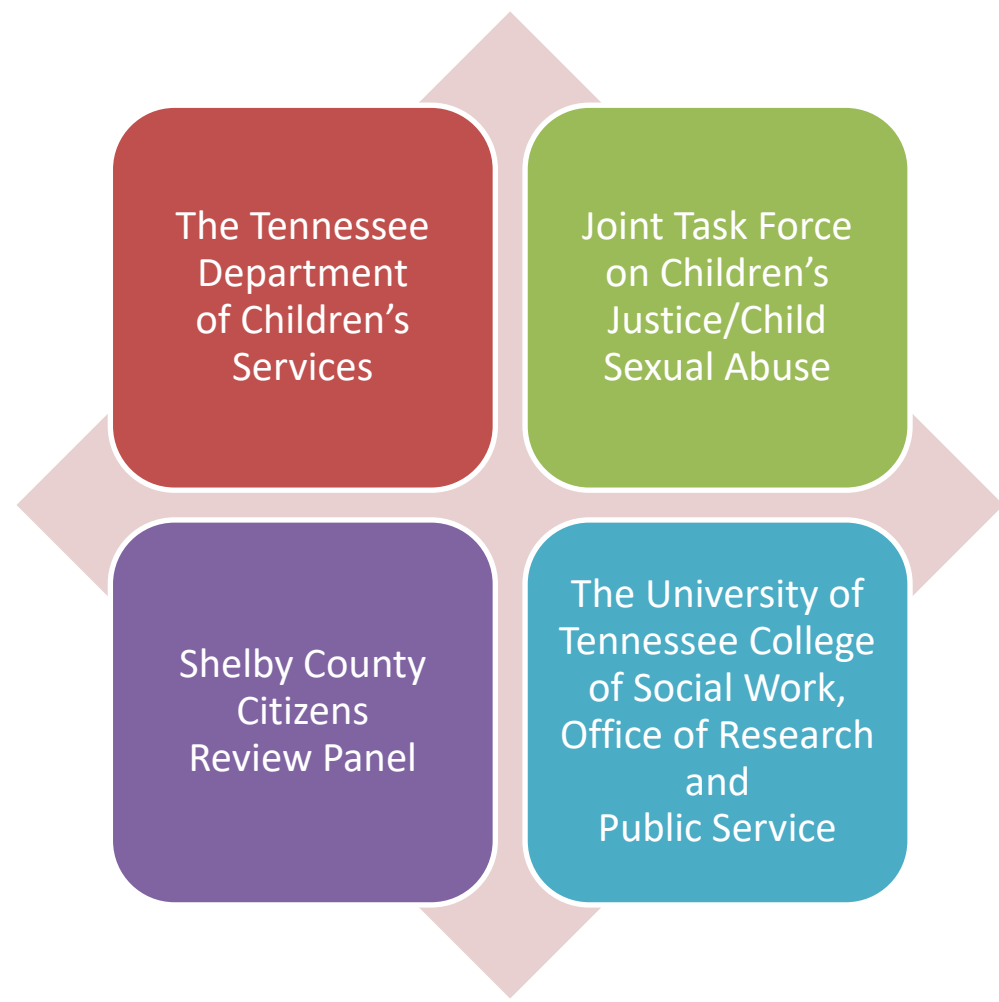


Knowledge is Power Learning Resource Tools

- **DCS Child Abuse Reporting Presentation**
(Adobe .pdf with slide notes)
 - **DCS Child Abuse Reporting Presentation**
(Adobe .pdf for additional note taking)
 - **DCS Child Abuse Reporting Quiz**
(Adobe .pdf)
 - **DCS Child Abuse Reporting Answer Key**
(Adobe .pdf)
 - *Click the “ATTACHMENTS” link located in the upper right hand corner of this presentation to download the resource files.*
- **DCS Child Abuse Hotline**
 - 1-877-54ABUSE (1-877-542-2873) OR 1-877-237-0004
 - Someone is available 24/7.



This
presentation
is produced
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The Tennessee
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Joint Task Force
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Shelby County
Citizens
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If you have any additional training needs or would like to request and in person training for your agency, please visit:

https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/office_of_child_safety_training_requests