

This message is being sent to all employees from the Offices for Employee Relations and Student Support Programs and Services.

Teachers, support staff, and other school personnel play a critical role in forming a trusting relationship with children and helping to protect them from abuse and neglect. Pursuant to Chapter 39 of Florida Statutes, school personnel are obligated to know and to follow procedures for reporting suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect to Department of Children and Families/Child Protective Investigations (CPI). At the moment there is suspicion, school personnel, as mandatory reporters, are required to call CPI immediately - without delay, without investigation, and without need for approval. This requirement applies to all suspicions, including allegations against parents or other family members, co-workers/school staff, or other students. Best practice is for the person with the most firsthand knowledge to call CPI to make the report. You may not contact the alleged person or persons regarding whom you are reporting alleged abuse, abandonment, or neglect. However, if reports are communicated to school personnel from parents or community members, school personnel should first encourage the reporter to call, but then also to call it in themselves.

There are 4 ways to report child abuse, abandonment, or neglect:

- Call the hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE
- Call TDD (for the hearing impaired) at 1-800-453-5145
- Fax (1-800-914-0004) the completed reporting form
www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/abuse/docs/faxreport.pdf
- Completed the online web report at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/>

Pursuant to Florida Statute 1012.98, most instructional school personnel are required to participate in a Department of Children and Families developed online continuing education training on identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. The required web-based course is approximately one hour in length and can be accessed by visiting <http://www3.fl-dcf.org/RCAAN/>. Once an account has been established, the participant can go through the course at his/her own pace, logging off and logging back on as needed. This is a mandatory one time requirement that must be completed upon being hired, but we recommend, as a best practice, to review the material as a refresher each year.

In addition to the statutory requirement for instructional staff, the District requires all non-instructional employees, including SRP, to watch the *Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse for Non-Instructional* podcast and complete the “Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse for Non-Instructional Acknowledgement” form. The podcast and form can be accessed through the District website at http://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/hreq/resources_for_hiring_managers. Like with instructional employees, this is required one time, upon hire, but it is a best practice and we recommend to review the material as a refresher each year. Current non-instructional employees who have not already watched the podcast and completed the form should do so now and return the form to their administration.

Several resources have been developed including a brochure (attached) with important information about the statute and other issues related to the child abuse reporting and

investigation process, The School Social Work staff will also have supplemental materials, and remain available to assist with this issue. If you have any questions, please contact David Chamberlin, Supervisor, School Social Work at 42442 or Molly Blair, Senior Supervisor, Student Services Division at 42356, from the Office for Student Support Programs and Services. Additionally, the Office for Student Support Programs and Services will be sending copies of posters in English and Spanish regarding Child Abuse reporting to all schools. **Florida Statute 1002.39 requires that a clearly visible sign (in English and Spanish) be posted in a prominent area of each school that is readily accessible to and widely used by students.** This sign must include the statewide toll-free telephone number for the central abuse hotline, instructions to call 911 for emergencies, and directions for accessing the Department of Children and Families (DCF) website for more information on reporting abuse, neglect and exploitation.

It is District procedure for administrators to notify the Office for Employee Relations when reporting an allegation of suspected child abuse relating to a District employee. These investigations are law enforcement investigations, not the District's investigations, though the Office for Employee Relations may be present during the investigation. This is a reminder to all PCS employees that any allegations must be called in to the hotline without notifying the employee or conducting any portion of the investigation until after CPI has completed their investigation or provides clearance to proceed. Please remember that a report of an allegation to the hotline does not mean that the District automatically believes that employee misconduct took place; we are required to follow the law regarding reporting potential child abuse. If you have any questions, please contact Paul Meeker, Tom Neesham or Kathy Scalise, from the Office for Employee Relations at 42322.

In addition to the resources provided on reporting child abuse, a presentation titled *Avoiding Professional Pitfalls* can also be found on the ER website. The purpose of this presentation is to provide awareness about responsible, professional behavior, including but not limited to appropriate student interactions.