

RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE:

- **Evaluate the situation** - contact local law enforcement if you think there is immediate danger to the child or get medical help immediately if you think the child has been injured.
- **Do not investigate** – that is not your job. The child protection agency will investigate and determine whether abuse has occurred.
- **Make a report** - remember you only need to have “reasonable cause to believe” that a child is being abused or neglected for you to make a report – you don’t need proof. If you think a child is being hurt in any way, you have a legal (in some cases) and moral responsibility to report it. You can report suspected abuse, even if the child doesn’t tell you about it. Waiting for proof may mean further risk to the child.

IF A CHILD TELLS YOU ABOUT ABUSE OR NEGLECT:

- **Listen to and believe the child** – show through your words and actions that you are listening to the child and that you believe what the child is telling you.
- **Avoid questioning the child** – do not ask questions, leave the questioning and investigating to the professionals.
- **Avoid overreacting** – try to stay calm, don’t display shock, disgust or talk negatively about the suspected abuser. Respond with compassion.
- **Respect the child’s privacy** – make sure no one else can hear the conversation but avoid placing yourself or the child at risk with seclusion.
- **Write down details** - write down as much of the child’s actual words as possible so that you can share those words with the appropriate agency.
- **Reassure the child** – let the child know you take them seriously and they did the right thing by telling you. Thank the child for telling you, and it is not their fault.
- **Identify the appropriate reporting agency** – report to the county agency the child is living (see *Reporting Abuse and Neglect* sheet). You can also call your local law enforcement agency to get the correct number. If you think the child is in immediate danger, call 911 immediately.
- **Report immediately** – never assume that somebody else will make a report, and don’t put off reporting because you’re not sure if you should. It is better to make a report and let trained professionals decide what action needs to be taken than to risk further harm to the child. The sooner you report, the sooner the child and family can get help.

Responding to a child’s disclosure of abuse has three primary goals:

1. Protect the child from further abuse.
2. Stop the abuser from exploiting or hurting other children.
3. Address the child’s symptoms and the harm done to the child and the child’s family.

INFORMATION NEEDED FOR REPORTING (as soon as known or suspected):

(The report needs to be first hand – from the person who suspects or knows the child is being abused or neglected.)**

- ✓ Child’s name, age and address (if known).
- ✓ Name and address and telephone number of parent or guardian.
- ✓ What you observed or were told about the child’s abuse/neglect.
- ✓ Any information known about the suspected abuser.
- ✓ Present whereabouts of the child.
- ✓ Your relationship to the child.

**You can make a report without giving your name.

**You do not need to inform the child’s parent or guardian you are making a report.

**The name of the reporter (if given) cannot be revealed to the child’s parent or guardian.

**Wisconsin law states those reporting in good faith are not held liable, even if the report is unsubstantiated.

***NEXT CALL:** Jayne Stefanic, Diocesan Assistance Coordinator, 920-272-8174