

# PROTECTING CHILDREN

## How to Report Abuse or Neglect

The job of protecting children starts in the community. While certain people are required by law to report child mistreatment, anyone can make a report of suspected abuse. The sooner the authorities know about a child, the faster they can move to help.

### Things to Look For

Children who are maltreated are

- often left home alone
- in the neighborhood for long periods without supervision
- frequently hungry
- dressed inadequately for the weather
- absent from school frequently
- bruised or have other marks of physical violence
- withdrawn or overly aggressive
- not receiving needed medical attention

If a relative, friend or neighbor sees one or more of these signs or suspects that the children are in danger, the situation should be reported to the county Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

### How to Report

If a child is in immediate danger (obviously being beaten or left alone overnight, for example), the police should be called immediately. In all other cases, reports should be made to the DFCS office in the county where the child lives.

People who call to report suspected abuse do not have to be sure maltreatment has occurred. They simply report what they have seen or heard. The authorities will investigate and confirm whether or not abuse has occurred. People who call are asked to give the name and location of the child and the name of the suspected perpetrator. Reports are confidential and those who call do

not have to give their name. However, it is most helpful to the child in the long run if the reporter is willing to give his or her name and address and, if necessary, testify in court.

### What Will Happen Next

If a child is under age 18 and appears to have been abused or neglected by a parent or caretaker, DFCS will begin investigating immediately.

If the child is not in imminent danger, a caseworker will visit the family within 5 days.

If the person who makes the original report wants to know what DFCS did, he or she can call the department and find out whether the maltreatment was confirmed.

### Who is Required to Report Suspected Abuse or Neglect?

Georgia law requires people in certain professions to report. Mandated reporters include

- physicians, nurses and hospital personnel
- school and day care personnel
- social workers and counselors
- dentists



*Division of Family and Children Services*