How to Report Suspected Child Abuse

If you have a reasonable suspicion that a youth is being harmed or is at risk of harm, you have a duty to immediately report this information to the local child welfare authorities, including the local police if applicable (the child welfare authorities can inform you of whether police notification is also needed). Locate your own authorities by searching the Internet (e.g., “child protection reporting, my state”) or contacting your local police department.

Note that if the child has been acutely injured or is in medical distress, **your first call should be to 9-1-1**.

If you feel uneasy about reporting on your own, you may inform a co-leader regarding the situation and ask them to be with you when you make the call. Informing a co-leader is optional: if you choose to do so, their presence will help support you through the experience and will provide a second set of ears for the conversation. You may also make the call on your own.

Once you have notified the above authorities, you should also immediately contact your group scoutmaster (GSM). They will take care of notifying the regional commissioner. These notifications are necessary so that proper actions can be taken, possibly including temporary or permanent suspension of a leader or helper from activities involving contact with young people.

It is not appropriate for OSG individuals, groups, or regions to carry out internal investigations into cases of suspected child abuse; our role is to “report and support,” participating as requested by the authorities.

You should carefully record and document all interactions, communications, concerns, and allegations associated with any such case. In other words, keep notes of your phone calls and interactions.

Requirements for reporting reasonable suspicions of abuse can be different from state to state. Here is an example according to the standards set forth in the Oregon Rev. Stat. § 419B.010;

> A report is required when any public or private official has reasonable cause to believe that any child with whom the official comes in contact has suffered abuse. The duty to report under this section is personal to the public or private official alone, regardless of whether the official is employed by, a volunteer of, or a representative or agent for any type of entity or organization that employs persons or uses persons as volunteers who are public or private officials in its operations.

You may want to take a moment to research your own state resources and bookmark them for future use. We hope you’ll never need them, but this way, you’ll be prepared in case you do. You can find this information on the Child Welfare Information Gateway website, provided by the US Department of Health and Human Services.

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