



8 - How Teachers Should Report Suspected Abuse of Children

It's one of the most difficult and heartbreaking parts of being a teacher: observing signs of abuse or neglect in our students. Teachers are legally and morally obligated to report our suspicions (or confirmed knowledge) of child abuse to the proper authorities for investigation.

While details vary from province to province, here's a general guide on how to report suspected abuse with your student's well being in mind. The most important tip is to stay strong and know you are doing the right thing, no matter how challenging it may feel for a time. It takes a community of conscientious adults in order to protect our children. Teachers are a key part of this equation.

Teachers are state-mandated reporters. This means that if you observe signs of suspected child abuse or neglect (find below), you are legally required to take action and report your suspicions to the proper authorities, usually Child Protective Services.

Although these situations can be challenging for all parties involved, it's important to keep your student's best interests at the forefront of your mind and to act in accordance with your district's requirements. Here's how you should proceed.

Difficulty: Hard

Time Required: 1-5 days or more

Here's How:



1. **Do Your Research** - You need to take action at the first sign of trouble. If this is your first time reporting suspected abuse or you are working in a new school district, **arm yourself with information**. You must follow the requirements specific to your school and province. So go online and find your province's site for Child Protective Services, or similar. Read about how to file your report and make a plan of action.
2. **Don't Second-Guess Yourself** - Unless you witness abuse firsthand, you can never be 100% certain about what occurs in a child's home. But don't let that sliver of doubt cloud your judgment to the point where you ignore your legal or moral responsibility. Even if you simply suspect a problem, you must report it. You can clarify in your report that you suspect abuse, but are not certain. Know that your report will be treated with care so that the family will not know who filed it. The government experts will know how best to proceed, and you must trust their ability to weed through the suspicions and find out the truth.



3. **Keep a Watchful Eye on Your Student** - If you suspect that one of your students **is in a vulnerable situation**, make sure to pay special attention to his or her behavior, needs, and schoolwork. Notice any major changes in his or her habits. Of course, you wouldn't want to go overboard by coddling the child or making excuses for poor behaviour. However, it is important to remain vigilant and report any further suspicions

to authorities again, as many times as is necessary in order to protect the child's well being.

4. **Remain Committed to Protecting Children** - Dealing with child abuse, suspected or confirmed, is one of the most serious and stressful parts of being a classroom teacher. No matter how unpleasant the experience may be for you, don't let the process deter you from reporting each and every case of suspected abuse that you observe during your time in this profession. Not only is it your legal obligation, but you can rest easily at night knowing that you took the tough actions required to protect the students under your care.



Tips:

1. Document all of your concerns, with dates and times, in order to support your claims.
2. Gather tips and support from veteran colleagues.
3. Procure the support of your principal and ask him or her for advice if needed.
4. Remain confident that you are doing the right thing, no matter how hard it may be.

What You Need:

- Knowledge of Province and Municipal Requirements for Mandated Reporting

State-

7 Signs of Possible Trouble at Home

As teachers, we aren't only in charge of our students' assignments and spelling tests. We also need to be aware of possible trouble at home. Our vigilance and responsible action young students be happy and healthy both at home and in the



homework signs of help our classroom.

It can feel uncomfortable to bring up touchy subjects with a student's parents. But as responsible adults in our students' lives, it is part of our duty to look out for their best interests and help them live up to full potential.

Sleeping at school:

Sleep is exceedingly important to the health and well-being of young children. Without it, they can't concentrate or perform to the best of their abilities. If you notice a student regularly catching up on sleep during school hours, consider talking to the school nurse for help in formulating a plan of action in conjunction with the parents.

Sudden change in student behavior:

Just like with adults, an abrupt change in behavior usually signals a cause for concern. As teachers, we get to know our students very well. Keep an eye out for sudden changes in behaviour patterns and work quality. If a formerly responsible student completely stops bringing his or her homework, you may want to broach the subject with the student's parents. Working as a team, you can enlist their support and implement strategies to get the student back on track.

Lack of cleanliness:

If a student shows up at school in dirty clothes or with sub-standard personal hygiene, this can be a sign of neglect at home. Again, the school nurse may be able to support you in addressing this concern with the student's guardians. Not only is dirtiness a health issue, it can also cause isolation and teasing from classmates if it's readily noticeable. Ultimately, this can contribute to loneliness and depression.

Visible signs of injury:

As mandated reporters, teachers are legally required to report any suspected child abuse. There is nothing more noble (and morally imperative) than saving a helpless child from harm. If you see bruises, cuts, or other signs of injury, don't hesitate to follow the procedures for reporting suspected abuse.

Not prepared for school:

Observant teachers can notice the outward signs of neglect at home. These signs can come in many forms. If a student mentions not eating breakfast each day or you notice the student doesn't have lunch (or money to buy lunch), you may need to step in as an advocate for the child. Alternatively, if a student doesn't have basic school supplies, make arrangements to provide them, if at all possible. Small children are at the mercy of adults at home. If you notice a gap in care, you may need to step in and help make it right.

Inappropriate or inadequate clothes:

Be on the lookout for student who wear the same outfit virtually every day. Similarly, watch out for students who wear summer clothes in the winter and/or lack a proper winter coat. Worn-out or too-small shoes may be additional signs that something isn't right at home. If the parents aren't able to provide an appropriate wardrobe, maybe you could work with a local church or charity to get the student what he or she needs.

Student mentions neglect or abuse:

This is the most obvious and clear sign that something is wrong (or maybe even dangerous) at home. If a student mentions being home alone at night or getting hit by an adult, this is definitely something to investigate. Again, you should report these comments to a child protective services agency in a timely manner. It is not your job to determine the veracity of such statements. Rather, the relevant government agency can investigate according to procedure and figure out what's really going on.

