

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect within the School System

Georgia Law (O.C.G.A. 19-7-5) requires schoolteachers, administrators, guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists to report cases of suspected child abuse to the proper authority for investigation. Child abuse includes physical injury, neglect, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Child abuse reporting procedures are governed by a county child abuse protocol that coordinates the duties of the various agencies involved in reporting, investigation and prosecution. Within the school setting suspected cases of child abuse should be handled according to the following procedures.

1. Whenever a teacher, administrator, guidance counselor, social worker or school psychologist suspects that a child has been abused, that person should bring this suspicion to the attention of the Principal. The Principal may designate another person within the building to receive these reports. Per Georgia law, the principal or designee must forward on to the investigating authorities any report of suspected abuse/neglect that a mandated reporter brings to his/her attention.
2. The responsibility of mandated reporters is to report **suspected** abuse. It is not to investigate. Therefore, school personnel “should not question or interview the child regarding the details of abuse.” Students may be asked to describe what happened using very open-ended questions but school personnel should never ask a question that suggests an answer. School personnel should not attempt to view injuries on a child’s torso, buttocks or upper legs. Once possible abuse is suspected it should be reported without further inquiry. If a student alleges to have been abused it should be reported.
3. The Principal, or designated staff person, shall immediately, but in no case longer than 24 hours, make an oral report by phone or otherwise to the Department of Family and Children Services.
4. Once the oral report has been made, the reporter should submit written documentation of the report being sure to include the name of the DFCS worker to whom the case was reported, date and time of the report.
5. Written documentation should be sent to the Director of Student Services through school system mail within 24 hours of making the report. This information is highly confidential and should be handled carefully.
6. The principal (or designee) “shall be prepared to share with law enforcement and Child Protective Services (DFCS) information about their involvement with the child regarding the complaint and any other concerns about the child’s behavior, school attendance and appearance that would assist in determining veracity of complaint”.
7. A DFCS Caseworker and Sheriff’s Officer/Police Officer may go to the school to conduct an interview with the child to establish that the child is alleging child abuse as defined by OCGA 19-15-1.
8. The DFCS Child Protective Services caseworker shall take the lead in this interview with assistance from law enforcement. A school representative may sit in on the interview but should not actively participate in the interview as this may adversely affect the case. Concerns from school personnel should be expressed to the investigator(s) at a time when the child is not present.
9. School personnel are mandated reporters and as such shall be immune from any legal liability as long as they report in good faith. A mandated reporter who knowingly and willfully fails to report a case of suspected child abuse shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.