

STATEMENT ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The Franklin Public Schools recognize the local, state, and national problems associated with child abuse and neglect. Reporting suspected cases of child abuse/neglect to the proper constituted authority is understood to be the legal responsibility of school department personnel.

Professional staff members are in a unique position to identify potential cases of abuse/neglect of children. Responsible action by the staff can be achieved through recognition and understanding of the problem, knowing the reporting procedures, and participating in available child abuse information programs.

Based on the legal requirements of Chapter 119, Section 51A of the Massachusetts General Laws, guidelines, procedures and information memoranda have been prepared to provide direction for school staff members in identifying and reporting suspected child abuse/neglect cases. Personnel should be aware that by state statute they are immune from civil or criminal liability when reporting suspected child abuse/neglect cases. Failure to report may result in a fine of up to \$1,000.

Franklin Public School teachers or other employees who suspect a child is being abused or neglected shall report the following information to the Department of Social Services:

1. Name and address of the child and parent/guardian (or guardian)
2. Child's gender
3. Nature and extent of the child's injuries, abuse or neglect
4. Any evidence of prior injuries, abuse or neglect
5. Action, if any, taken to treat, shelter, or assist the child
6. Name of the person or persons making the report
7. Other pertinent information

School employees shall not contact the child's family or any other persons to determine whether the child is in need of protection. However, it should be noted that nurses, and school adjustment counselors should carry out their normal duties in talking with parent/guardians about actions and physical hurts of children.

Any personal interview or physical inspection of the child should be conducted in a professional manner.

Definitions of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse means the infliction, by other than accidental means, of physical harm upon the body of a child. Neglect means the failure to provide necessary food, care, clothing, shelter, or medical attention for a child.

Cases of reported abuse or neglect are to remain confidential. Discussion of these situations is limited to appropriate meetings with school staff members who have a need to know or authorized personnel from the Department of Public Welfare or the Children's Protective Services.

The Franklin Public Schools will cooperate with other appropriate community agencies in providing periodic staff development on the subject of child abuse and neglect.

Statement Modification

Changes will be made, as necessary, to conform with changes and/or revisions in the state statutes.

Guidelines

Child Neglect: The examples cited do not prove that abuse or neglect has actually occurred but do provide evidence for the need for further investigation.

Child Abuse: Examples of observable abuse of a child:

1. Extensive bruises, bruises of different ages; patterns of bruises caused by a particular instrument (belt buckle, wire coat hanger).
2. Burn patterns consistent with forced immersion in a hot liquid (a distinct boundary line where the burn stops), burn patterns consistent with a spattering by hot liquids, patterns caused by a particular kind of implement (electric iron) or instrument (circular cigarette burns).
3. Lacerations, welts, abrasions.
4. Injuries inconsistent with information offered.
5. Sexual abuse in any act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, including but not limited to incest, rape, carnal knowledge, sodomy, or unnatural or perverted sexual practices.

Examples of observable neglect of a child:

1. Malnourished, ill-clad, dirty, without proper shelter or sleeping arrangements, lacking appropriate health care.
2. Unattended, without adequate supervision.
3. Ill and lacking essential medical attention.
4. Irregular school attendance.
5. Exploited, overworked.
6. Emotionally disturbed.
7. Abandonment.
8. Cruel treatment.

Reporting Cases Not Involving Apparent or Obvious Physical Injury

It is not necessary that the reporting employee observe external physical signs of injury to a child. Abuse may be presumed to have occurred when a child complains of having been sexually molested or of pain, which he says resulted from an inflicted injury.

Procedures for Reporting Cases of Child Abuse

The following procedures are to be used in referring suspected child abuse:

1. Any school staff member who suspects that a child has been abused shall report this as soon as possible to the Principal and administrator of Pupil Personnel Services on the day of observation. If reasonable grounds exist that improper conduct may have occurred, all school employees are required to file a report with the district attorney's office at the Dedham District Court.

2. The school staff member who suspects child abuse shall then immediately notify the Department of Social Services Protective Service Unit in Whitinsville (508-234-6213) of the alleged child abuse. The staff member will also inform the Principal of the referral.
 - a. You may request that a children's Protective Services worker be assigned to the case.
 - b. You may request that the case worker maintain contact with a specific school staff member.
 - c. You may ask that the specific identity of the reporter remain confidential (instead, Department of Social Services, if asked, would state that the referral came from the Franklin School Department). (A parent/guardian may learn the name of a referring person only after review by the Department of Public Welfare Commissioner).
3. You are not required to notify the parent/guardians that you are filing a child abuse/neglect report.
4. Within two working days, the school staff member shall submit a written report (Form 51-A) to:

Department of Social Services
185 Church Street
Whitinsville, MA 01588

The 51-A Form is to be sent by certified mail. A photo static copy of the report is to be forwarded to the Director of Pupil Personnel Services. If the Department of Social Services does not respond to your report within 60 days, you are to refile Form 51-A. However, if no response, contact will be made within 20 days of the original notification.

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