

# Children First: Safe and Secure



## Section I—Child Abuse Prevention

### Information for Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

**C**hild abuse and neglect are against the law in Texas, and so is failure to report. If you suspect a child has been abused or mistreated, you are required to report it to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services or to a law enforcement agency. Reporters are not expected to prove the abuse or neglect they report.

When you make a report, be specific. Tell exactly what happened and when. Be sure to report all injuries or incidents you have observed, including dates and time of day.

Reports should be made as soon as possible. A delay in making a report may result in serious harm to a child. It is also important for the investigators to be able to see the physical signs such as bruises before they fade to assess the situation.

### What to expect when reporting:

You will be guided through a series of questions aimed at gathering information. Please provide at least the following information in your report:

- ◆ Child's name, age, and address
- ◆ Brief description of the child
- ◆ Current injuries, medical problems, or behavioral problems
- ◆ Parents' names and names of siblings in the home

You will receive a call identification number that can be used by you to follow-up on the report or to add information.

Finally, err on the side of caution. If you have reason to suspect child abuse, but are not positive, make the report. If you have any doubts about whether or not it is abuse, call the hotline. They can advise you if the signs you have observed appear to be abuse.



### Legal Protection

Reports of child abuse or neglect made in “good faith” and “without malice” are confidential and immune from civil liability. The law provides for immunity from civil or criminal liability for innocent persons who report even unfounded suspicions, as long as your report is made in good faith.

### Legal Liability

Failure to report suspected child abuse is a Class B misdemeanor punishable by a fine up to \$1,500 or imprisonment up to 180 days, or both fine and imprisonment. If you are a child's parent or guardian, you have the legal obligation to protect your child. If you permit your child to be placed in a situation where he or she may be injured, you may be prosecuted for child abuse. The fact that the abuser is your spouse or other family member does not affect your obligation to report, or shield you from being involved with the legal proceedings resulting from your responsibility as a parent.

### How to Report

If you feel your situation is a life-threatening emergency, please call 911. The Texas Abuse Hotline is 1-800-252-5400 and is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You may also file a report using a secure web site: [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)