



Process for Mandatory Reporters When Concerns Arise

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

Gather Information

Under Wisconsin statute, if a mandated reporter has reasonable cause to suspect child maltreatment, they are required to immediately report to Child Protective Services (CPS) or local law enforcement. If school staff are unsure whether they have reasonable cause, they must gather enough information to make this determination. This includes asking open-ended questions to get the basic facts of the situation and to consider these facts. Information gathering must proceed immediately and expeditiously, and if and when a school staff member has reasonable cause to suspect child maltreatment they must “immediately” report. Learn more about how to gather information in the [Information Gathering and Minimal Facts Interviewing](#) document.

- While the appropriate reporting of suspected child maltreatment is helpful and necessary, unwarranted reports that are not based on reasonable cause to suspect child maltreatment can be harmful and even traumatic. School staff should move away from the mindset of “when in doubt, make a report”, and instead engage in critical thinking to determine whether there is reasonable cause to suspect child maltreatment.

Engage in Critical Thinking

Critical thinking includes a process of slowing down, considering the situation, and reflecting on one’s own worldview, to determine whether there is reasonable cause to suspect child maltreatment. This process can lead to better decision-making related to reporting and supporting.

- Critical thinking may include, as examples: considering if the explanation made sense, if the story changed over time, if there may be barriers to understanding stemming from disability, language, or child’s developmental level, if enough information about the situation has been gathered, if assumptions have been made, and if there are other incidents involving this student that have caused concern. Staff must use professional judgment and avoid split-second decisions.

Consider the Impact of Bias

The process of determining reasonable cause includes considering the impact of bias and worldview that may be impacting the inclination to report. We all have different perspectives and biases based on our life experiences and worldviews. School staff are encouraged to consider how these perspectives impact the way they make decisions about concerns.

- **Demographics, culture, and identity** - Staff should consider whether their view of the situation would be different if the family had different demographics, race, culture, primary language, family structure, socioeconomic status, or if their perspective is based on individual family member characteristics such as identity, gender, sexual orientation or educational level.
- **Parenting style** - Staff can ask themselves if the concern could be explained by a difference in parenting styles from their own; perhaps differences related to hygiene, food choices, youth supervision, or disciplinary practices.
- **Poverty** - Staff should consider whether the concern stems from poverty, as opposed to a true situation of neglect.

Report and/or Support

Report - When mandated reporters have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected, a school employee is legally required to immediately report to county CPS or local law enforcement. This occurs when the employee has reasonable cause to suspect a child they have seen as part of their work has been abused or neglected, or has been threatened with abuse or neglect and the employee believes it will occur.



Process for Mandatory Reporters When Concerns Arise

Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

- **“Reasonable Cause”** - Although the statute does not contain a definition of “reasonable cause to suspect,” there is some case law that discusses how that term is interpreted. The test is whether a prudent person would have had reasonable cause to suspect child abuse if presented with the same totality of circumstances. In other words, the individual should have a “belief, based on evidence but short of proof, that an ordinary person would reach as to the existence of child abuse.”

Support - School staff are encouraged to take on a supportive role with students and families. This may mean directly connecting families to services in the community in appropriate situations, in addition to contacting CPS when there are concerns that maltreatment has occurred. Support may include connecting caregivers to a local [Family Resource Center](#) which can provide and help connect caregivers to economic resources, parenting classes and strategies to support healthy child development as well as connection to other community resources. Staff should continue to support the student at school through check-ins, rapport building, making connections to other supportive adults and peers, promoting a positive school climate, and providing opportunities for engagement and leadership.

- **Continued support at school** - Staff should continue to support the student at school through check-ins, rapport building, making connections to other supportive adults and peers, promoting a positive school climate, and providing opportunities for engagement and leadership whether or not a report is made.