

KEEPING OUR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN SAFE DURING COVID-19

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), relies on professionals, community and family members, and others to recognize and report child abuse and neglect concerns. OCFS recognizes the current pandemic may increase stress, fear, isolation, financial instability, potentially creating higher risk for both child abuse and domestic violence within families. Professionals, community and others must continue networking with families to provide needed support, guidance and outreach, so that any observed concerns of suspected abuse and neglect can be reported.

Regularly engage with children and their caregivers

- Make a clear plan on how you can be contacted and when you plan to connect.
- Ensure the ability to have conversations in private when talking to children and families.
- Support families to access the tools they need for virtual contact.
- Explain how video chats, online forums and phone calls will work.

When a child discloses abuse/neglect

- If children are safe to answer your questions, obtain as much detail as possible, such as WHEN/WHERE an incident occurred, HOW something made the child feel, or WHAT injuries look like (size, shape, location).
- Ask open ended follow-up questions to clarify information.

Ask questions and be curious

- Talk regularly to children and their caregivers. Ask questions about what is going well, how they are feeling, what worries them, what they like best about being home and what they miss about not being in school, etc.
- Listen to what children are saying and notice any changes in the way they respond to questions.
- Ask if they are in any need of support and work with them on solutions to finding that support.



Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

- ANY person can report abuse/neglect. **Persons who work professionally with children are required by law** to report suspicions of abuse or neglect. It is NOT necessary for a reporter to first verify that the abuse or neglect has occurred. Click here for [Maine's Mandated Reporter Law](#).
- To report Child Abuse and Neglect, please call 1-800-452-1999, we are open 24/7.

Observe the environment

- Monitor the environment closely during video chats for changes in any behaviors, as well as any sounds heard during your virtual contact, e.g. yelling.
- Observe and document any bruises or marks on the child during your virtual contacts.
- Ask who is in the home, pay attention to the environment and who may be listening in to the call.

Resources available

- Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services
1-877-452-1999
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/>
- Domestic Violence Hotline
1-866-834-HELP (4357)
www.mcedv.org

To Report Child Abuse or Neglect, Call 1-800-452-1999

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Call Maine Relay 711

April 15, 2020

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT: TYPES AND REPORTING

PHYSICAL

- Child has bruising, welts, burns, bite marks, broken bones or other injuries that are not explained, appear to be inflicted, or are suspicious.
- Child may report having pain caused by parental behavior, though have no obvious signs of injury.
- Child has been directly present in a room where domestic violence incidents have occurred.
- Behaviorally, child may appear to be afraid of caregiver(s) and flinch when around them.

EMOTIONAL

- Child may appear withdrawn, sad, or emotionally unattached to caregivers.
- Caregiver is known or heard to repeatedly blame, belittle, or berate the child.
- Child is aware of and exposed to domestic violence incidents between caregivers.

SEXUAL

- Child may describe being sexually touched by a parent, caregiver, or other person in the home.
- Child may demonstrate an unusual sexual knowledge or behavior for their age.

NEGLECT

- Child is witnessing illegal substance use by caregivers, and/or has access to unsafe items in the home.
- Child is not being supervised adequately for their age and developmental ability.
- Child's primary needs for food, education or medical, dental, or mental health care are not being met.

Examples of when you might follow-up for more information or call the Office of Child and Family Services with a concern include:

- Anything the caregiver or child told you raised concerns for the child's safety
- The child or caregiver has concerning injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, or cut
- You observe evidence of illegal substance use in the home (e.g., drug paraphernalia) or other hazards that could lead to child injury/illness (e.g., weapons in reach, extremely unsanitary conditions)
- The caregiver appears to be impaired to the extent it impacts their ability to safety care for their child
- The child looks or behaves significantly different than is typical for them or would be reasonably expected
- You are repeatedly unable to get in touch with the family (unrelated to barriers like internet, phone access) and are seriously worried for their safety (e.g. prior safety concerns due to domestic violence or substance use)

Please call Maine's Office of Child and Family Services at 1-800-452-1999 to report any suspected Child Abuse and Neglect

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR RECOGNIZING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

The role of educators in preventing abuse and neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/educator.pdf>

Child Welfare Information Gateway – Recognizing Abuse & Neglect: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/signs.pdf>

HelpGuide: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect.htm>

Child Help National Resources & Hotline: <https://www.childhelp.org/childhelp-hotline/>

World Health Organization: Covid-19 and Domestic Violence:
<https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/emergencies/COVID-19-VAW-full-text.pdf>

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS AND PROVIDERS TO STAY VIRTUALLY CONNECTED WITH FAMILIES

PREVENT CHILD ABUSE AMERICA: <http://preventchildabuse.org/coronavirus-resources/>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Children-Tips-for-Caregivers-Parents-and-Teachers-During-Infectious-Disease-Outbreaks/PEP20-01-01-006>

NAEYC: <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/tips-video-chatting-young-children>

APA (America Psychological Association): <https://www.apa.org/topics/covid-19/telehealth-children>

NASW (National Association of Social Workers): <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus>

OTHER STATEWIDE RESOURCES IN MAINE

Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services 1-877-452-1999
<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/>

2-1-1 Maine, Inc. (Free information & Referral): Dial 211 or 1-877-463-6207 (Out of State) <https://211maine.org/>

Office of Financial Independence (OFI) Support and Services: OFI Main Telephone Line 1-(800)-442-6003

Maine Unemployment Hotline: 1-(800)-593-8660 <https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/>

Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse: 1-800-624-8404 (Voice) or 711 (Maine Relay)

Poison Control Center: 1-800-222-1222 (Voice) 1-877-299-4447 (TTY) [Northern New England Poison Center](#)

Maine Statewide Crisis Hotline 1-888-568-1112 (Voice/TTY) (Crisis Hotline)

Suicide Prevention: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) [Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program](#)

Domestic Violence Hotline 1-866-834-HELP (4357) www.mcedv.org

Sexual Assault Support: 1-800-871-7741 (Voice) 711 (TTY) <https://www.mecasa.org>

ON BEHALF OF THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, OFFICE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES, WE APPRECIATE THE ONGOING WORK OF EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN JOINING WITH US TO KEEP MAINE'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE AND HEALTHY. (4/15/2020)

