

# Child Abuse and Neglect Careline

Careline

Policy 33-1

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**Policy**

The Department of Children and Families shall operate a Child Abuse and Neglect Careline as the centralized unit that receives all telephone calls or written information alleging that a child is suspected of being abused or neglected and initiates appropriate action.

The Careline's hours of operation shall be 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

The Careline shall also respond to other types of calls related to services for children.

**Cross reference:** Careline Practice Guide.

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**Public Policy of the State of Connecticut**

The public policy of the State of Connecticut is to protect children whose health and welfare may be adversely affected through injury and neglect; to strengthen the family and to make the home safe for children by enhancing the parental capacity for good child care; to provide a temporary or permanent nurturing and safe environment for children when necessary; and for these purposes to require the reporting of suspected child abuse, investigation of such reports by a social agency, and provision of services, where needed, to such child and family.

**Legal reference:** Conn. Gen. Stat. [§17a-101](#) *et seq.*

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**Definitions**

**Expunge** means the deletion from the LINK system of certain child protective services reports and investigations, including associated case participants, allegations and documents.

**Report** means a verbal or written communication to DCF that alleges a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect of a child under 18 years of age (or a person aged 18-21 if he or she is in the care of DCF) by a caregiver or a person entrusted with the care of the child.

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**Careline Collaboration with Other DCF Units**

The Careline shall collaborate with the Area Office investigations units, the Special Investigations Unit and ongoing service units to provide a comprehensive and continuous service delivery system which is responsive to the needs of client families 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Such collaboration shall ensure:

- the accurate receipt and processing of reports of suspected child abuse or neglect; and
- the commencement and completion of investigations in accordance with prescribed timeframes.

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## Who Makes a Report

Anyone may cause an oral or written report to be made to the Careline (or a law enforcement agency) when that person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the age of 18, or any youth over the age of 18 who is still in DCF care, is in danger of being or has been abused or neglected.

Mandated reporters are those persons (listed below) who are specifically required by statute to make a report when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child under the age of 18 years:

- has been abused or neglected;
- has had non-accidental physical injury, or injury which is at variance with the history given of the injury, inflicted upon the child; or
- is placed at imminent risk of serious harm.

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## What Must Be Reported

The following suspected child abuse or neglect situations must be reported to DCF:

**Child abuse:** Any child or youth who has a non-accidental physical injury, or injury which is at variance with the history given of the injury, or who is in a condition that is the result of maltreatment such as, but not limited to, malnutrition, sexual molestation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

**Child neglect:** Any child or youth who has been abandoned or is being denied proper care and attention, physically, educationally, emotionally or morally or is being permitted to live under conditions, circumstances or associations injurious to his or her well-being or has been abused.

**Child under age 13 with a venereal disease:** A physician or facility must report to Careline upon the consultation, examination or treatment for venereal disease of any child under the age of 13 years.

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## List of Mandated Reporters

The following persons are mandated reporters:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Battered women's counselors</li><li>▪ Chiropractors</li><li>▪ Dental hygienists</li><li>▪ Dentists</li><li>▪ DCF employees</li><li>▪ Licensed/certified alcohol and drug counselors</li><li>▪ Licensed/certified emergency medical services providers</li><li>▪ Licensed marital and family therapists</li><li>▪ Licensed or unlicensed resident interns</li><li>▪ Licensed or unlicensed resident physicians</li><li>▪ School employees (teachers, substitute teachers, school administrators, school superintendents, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, physicians, school paraprofessionals or coaches employed by a local or regional boards of education or private elementary, middle or high schools or working in public or private elementary, middle or high schools; any other person who, in the performance of his or her duties, has regular contact with students and who provides services to or on behalf of students enrolled in a public elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with a local or regional board of education, or a private elementary, middle or high school, pursuant to a contract with the supervisory agent of such private school)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Medical examiners</li><li>▪ Members of the clergy</li><li>▪ Mental health professionals</li><li>▪ Optometrists</li><li>▪ Parole officers</li><li>▪ Pharmacists</li><li>▪ Physical therapists</li><li>▪ Physician assistants</li><li>▪ Podiatrists</li><li>▪ Police officers</li><li>▪ Probation officers (juvenile or adult)</li><li>▪ Psychologists</li><li>▪ Registered nurses</li><li>▪ Sexual assault counselors</li><li>▪ Social workers</li><li>▪ The Child Advocate and any employee of the Office of the Child Advocate</li><li>▪ Department of Public Health employees responsible for the licensing of child day care centers, group day care homes, family day care homes or youth camps</li><li>▪ Any person paid to care for a child in any public or private facility, child day care center, group day care home or family day care home which is licensed by the state</li></ul>
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## Reporting Requirements

A mandated report must make an oral report of suspected abuse or neglect by telephone or in person to the DCF Careline or to a law enforcement agency as soon as practicable, but not later than 12 hours after having reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child has been abused or neglected or placed in imminent risk of serious harm.

If a law enforcement agency receives an oral report, it shall immediately notify the DCF Careline.

Within 48 hours of making an oral report, a mandated reporter shall submit a written report to the Careline (DCF-136, "Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect.")

If the reporter is a member of the staff of a public or private facility providing care for children or a public or private school, then the reporter shall also submit a copy of the report to the person in charge of the facility or school or that person's designee.

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## Contents of Written Reports

All oral and written reports shall contain the following information if known:

- the names and addresses of the child and the parents or other person responsible for the child's care;
- the age of the child;
- the gender of the child;
- the nature and extent of the child's injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- the approximate date and time the injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect occurred;
- information concerning any previous injury or injuries to, or maltreatment or neglect of, the child or the child's siblings;
- the circumstances in which the injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect came to be known to the reporter;
- the name of the person or persons suspected to be responsible for causing such injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- the reasons such person or persons are suspected of causing such injury or injuries, maltreatment or neglect;
- any information concerning any prior cases in which such person or persons have been suspected of causing an injury, maltreatment or neglect of a child; and
- whatever action, if any, was taken to treat, provide shelter or otherwise assist the child.

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**Reporter  
Liability and  
Protections**

Any person, institution or agency which, in good faith, makes or does not make a report shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability provided such person did not perpetrate or cause such abuse or neglect.

No employer shall discharge, or in any manner discriminate or retaliate against, any employee who in good faith makes a report, testifies or is about to testify in any proceeding involving child abuse or neglect. The Attorney General may bring on civil suit against any employer who violates this provision.

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**Penalty for  
Not  
Reporting**

If there is reason to believe that a mandated reporter has failed to make a report of suspected child abuse or neglect, including a failure to report within the time frames set out in the statute, the Commissioner of DCF or designee shall notify the Chief State's Attorney. Any mandated reporter who fails to report or who delays reporting may be fined not less than \$500 or more than \$2500 and may be required to participate in an educational and training program concerning mandated reporting.

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**Penalty for  
Making a  
False Claim**

Any person who knowingly makes a false report of child abuse or neglect shall be fined not more than \$2000 or imprisoned not more than one year or both.

The name of a person determined to have made a false report shall be disclosed to the appropriate law enforcement agency and to the person alleged to have committed the abuse or neglect.

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### Police Notification

DCF shall notify the appropriate law enforcement agency (DCF-737, Notification to State or Local Police of Suspected Child Sexual Abuse, Severe Physical Abuse or Severe Neglect") within 12 hours of receipt of a report alleging sexual abuse or serious physical abuse including, but not limited to, a report that a child:

- has died;
- has been sexually assaulted;
- has suffered brain damage or loss or serious impairment of a bodily function or organ;
- has been sexually exploited; or
- has suffered serious non-accidental physical injury.

**Sexual assault** includes vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse and oral intercourse (fellatio or cunnilingus), as well as contact with the intimate parts (genital area, groin, anus, inner thighs, buttocks or breasts) of the victim's body for the purpose of sexual gratification of the perpetrator.

- Vaginal intercourse includes penetration, however slight, and includes manipulation of an object by the perpetrator into the genital or anal opening of the victim's body.
- Anal intercourse and fellatio do not require emission of semen.
- Indecent exposure to a child also constitutes sexual assault.

**Sexual exploitation** includes incest, selling the child to others for sexual purposes and human trafficking.

**Non-accidental serious physical injury** includes significant burns, wounds from a stabbing or shooting, severe lacerations, ruptured viscera, broken bones, brain damage, loss or serious impairment of a bodily function or an organ, or any series of injuries. Also falling into this category are:

- a child suffering from serious illness who must be moved immediately to ensure his or her safety but the provider or parent will not cooperate; and
- demonstrated threats of violence or death to a child.

DCF shall also notify law enforcement (DCF-737), whether or not the report is accepted for investigation, in situations that involve possible criminal acts, such as:

- assault on a child by a person who is not the child's caregiver;
- a child under the age of 12 left unsupervised in a place of public accommodation or in a motor vehicle for a period of time that presents a substantial risk to the child's health or safety (*e.g.*, stores, restaurants, parks, malls);
- domestic violence; and
- human trafficking.

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## At Risk

"At risk" is a status for reporting and report acceptance purposes only. A report that is accepted as "at risk" must be substantiated pursuant to one of the current operational definitions of child abuse or neglect. There is no separate "at risk" substantiation.

"At risk" substantiations enter before October 1996 shall not be disclosed by DCF in response to a request for a background check unless a Program Manager or designee, after review of the case, determines that the facts of the case support a finding of neglect or abuse under current operational definitions.

**Cross references:** DCF Policy, 34-2-7, "Operational Definitions;" DCF Policy 34-3-6, "Conducting the Investigation."

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## High Risk Newborns

"High risk newborn" is a descriptive category that applies to certain cases that meet the criteria set forth in the DCF High Risk Newborns policy.

Although a child may be identified as a "high risk newborn" for purposes of reporting and report acceptance purposes, the child's parent can only be substantiated if the facts of the case support a finding of neglect or abuse under current operational definitions.

**Cross reference:** DCF Policy 34-12-2, "High Risk Newborns."

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## Drug Endangered Child

A "drug endangered child" is a child who is at risk of suffering physical or emotional harm as a result of illegal drug use or the possession, manufacture, cultivation or distribution of illegal drugs, or whose caregiver's substance misuse interferes with his or her ability to parent and provide a safe environment.

Although a child may be identified as a "drug endangered child" for purposes of reporting and report acceptance, the child's caregiver can only be substantiated if the facts of the case support a finding of neglect or abuse under current operational definitions.

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## Expungement

DCF shall expunge non-accepted and unsubstantiated reports of abuse and neglect in accordance with the standards set forth below.

**Legal Reference:** Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-101k.

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### Non-Accepted Reports

Reports of neglect and abuse that are not accepted by the DCF Careline shall be kept for 60 days from the date the report is received and then expunged.

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### Unsubstantiated Reports

Reports of neglect and abuse that have been investigated and not substantiated shall be kept for five years from the completion date of the investigation.

If DCF has received more than one report about a person, and all reports are unsubstantiated, they shall be expunged five years from the completion date of the most recent investigation.

If at any time an investigation is substantiated, then none of the unsubstantiated investigations shall be expunged.

Unsubstantiated investigations shall not be expunged if the person has been substantiated as a perpetrator in any other case.

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### Substantiated Reports

Reports of neglect and abuse that have been investigated and substantiated shall be retained indefinitely.

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### Central Registry

DCF shall maintain a Central Registry of Substantiated Perpetrators of Child Abuse or Neglect.

The primary purpose of the Central Registry is child protection through prevention and identification of abuse or neglect of children.

**Legal references:** Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-28 and §17a-101; R.C.S.A. §17a-101-1 through §17a-101-10.

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## Access to the Registry

Information in the Central Registry is confidential and shall be limited to duly authorized persons or entities, including:

- DCF employees for purposes of obtaining information for the investigation of child abuse and neglect, background checks and other uses permitted by law; and
- prospective employers, licensing authorities and other public agencies permitted by law to request background checks for a person, provided the request is submitted the DCF-3031, "Authorization for Release of Information for DCF CPS Search," and is signed by the subject of the background check.

**Note:** Pursuant to state statute, the Connecticut Departments of Public Health, Education and Social Services may request background checks under certain circumstances without the signature of the person

**Legal references:** Conn. Gen. Stat. §17a-28(f) and §17a101k(b).

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## Perpetrator's Information on Central Registry

The following information is displayed in a perpetrator search of the LINK system:

- perpetrator's name, address, gender, date of birth and race;
- case name and number;
- date of investigation;
- substantiated allegations; and
- whether the information is discloseable or not discloseable.

## Information That May be Disclosed

The DCF Careline shall disclose only the following information in response to a request for a background check:

- perpetrator's name;
- substantiated allegations of abuse or neglect; and
- the date(s) of the investigation(s).

The Careline may also refer the requestor to the Area Office that conducted the investigation for further information as authorized by law.

If the requestor is the Department of Public Health or Social Services, DCF shall provide the investigation file if requested.

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**Information That May Not be Disclosed**

The DCF Careline shall not disclose:

- the existence of an unsubstantiated allegation of abuse or neglect;
  - a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect that has been appealed pursuant to DCF Policy 34-15-1 or 22-12-2 if the appeal is pending, except as noted below; or
  - a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect if the time frame for requesting an appeal has not yet expired.
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**Exceptions**

DCF may disclose that a person is on the Central Registry before the time for requesting an appeal has expired or while an appeal is pending if the child abuse or neglect resulted in or involves:

- the death of a child;
  - the risk of serious physical injury or emotional harm to a child;
  - serious physical harm to a child;
  - the arrest of the person due to abuse or neglect of a child;
  - a neglect or termination of parental rights petition filed by the Commissioner; or
  - sexual abuse of a child.
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**Deferred Appeals**

A substantiated allegation of child abuse or neglect that has been appealed and deferred because of a pending court or administrative proceeding shall not be disclosed while the court matter is pending except as provided in the "Exceptions" section above.

It shall be the appellant's responsibility to notify DCF that the court or administrative proceeding is no longer pending and that the appellant would like to proceed with the appeal.

If the appellant does not notify DCF that he or she is ready to proceed with a hearing on a deferred case, the appellant's name shall appear on the Central Registry three years after the date of the deferral.

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**Notification to Subject of Background Check**

If the name of the subject of a background check for purposes of licensing or employment appears on the Central Registry, the DCF Careline staff shall instruct the person or entity requesting the background check that:

- the requestor must inform the subject of the background check that he or she is listed in the Central Registry as a perpetrator; and
  - that the subject may be able to appeal the substantiation pursuant to DCF Policy 34-15-1 or 22-12-2.
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**Access to LINK** The LINK system contains most of the information about a family gathered during investigations and through the provision of services. This information is confidential.

Data from cases that preceded the introduction of the LINK system is stored in the Case Management System (CMS).

Authorized persons (see next section) whose identity has been verified may access information about a family on an emergency basis by calling Careline and requesting a query and immediate response over the telephone.

Calls to Careline for routine access to family information shall be referred to the Area Office Social Worker (for information over the telephone on an open case) or the DCF Office of Legal Affairs (for documents). **See** DCF Policy 31-10-3, "Confidentiality."

Access to victim information for research purposes must be approved by the DCF Institutional Review Board. Calls to Careline for information related to research shall be referred to the DCF IRB. **See** DCF Policy 26-8-1, "Institutional Review Board."

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**Emergency Access to LINK**

The following persons or entities shall be eligible for emergency access to information in LINK:

- DCF employees after hours for work-related matters;
- a legally mandated public or private child protection agency investigating a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect;
- a law enforcement agency investigating a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect;
- a physician who has before him or her a child whom he or she reasonably suspects may be abused or neglected; and
- a person legally authorized to place a child in protective custody when such person:
  - has before him or her a child whom he or she reasonably suspects to be abused or neglected; and
  - requires the information to determine whether to place the child in protective custody.

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**Verification  
of Persons  
Requesting  
Emergency  
Access**

Careline staff shall use a callback system to verify that emergency telephone requests for information are from persons and agencies authorized for such access.

Information shall be withheld pending verification of the caller's identity.

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**Information  
and Referral  
Calls**

Careline shall also receive calls for general information and referrals to services or other agencies. **See** the Careline Practice Guide for more information.

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