

ACF Administration for Children and Families	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES	
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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Head Start and Early Head Start Grantees and Delegate Agencies

SUBJECT: Mandated Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

INFORMATION:

Reporting suspected abuse or neglect can protect a child—it can even save a child's life. Additionally, such reports can result in families benefiting from needed social services.

All Head Start and Early Head Start staff persons are "mandated reporters." As mandated reporters, staff members working for Head Start and Early Head Start programs are legally obligated to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate state child protection agency (see below for information about reporting requirements for Tribes*).

Staff persons are required to report incidents where there is a reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect has occurred or there is a substantial risk that abuse or neglect may occur, either in the care of a Head Start agency or outside of the program. It is not the responsibility of the staff person or the program to investigate whether abuse or neglect actually occurred, but rather to report probable incidents. In fact, programs and individuals must not attempt to investigate; to do so can jeopardize the accuracy of the official investigation conducted by child protective services. Any employee who is the subject of a reported case of abuse or neglect must be removed from contact with children during the state investigation and until the charge is fully resolved.

To make a report, employees of non-tribal Head Start programs must first call the state's designated reporting hotline. Most [states have toll-free numbers](#) designated to receive and investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. Tribal Head Start programs must identify the reporting agency for their jurisdiction.

Individuals reporting suspected child abuse or neglect will be asked for specific information, such as:

- The child's name and location
- The name and relationship (if known) of the person you believe may have abused or is abusing the child
- What you have seen or heard regarding the abuse or neglect
- The names of any other people who might know about the abuse
- Your name and phone number (voluntary)

Staff who need help identifying the correct agency to place the report can call the [National Child Abuse Hotline](#) at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). It is important to note that calling the National Hotline does not substitute for mandated state reporting to the appropriate agency.

*American Indian Tribes must report child abuse to the local child protective services agency or the local law enforcement agency. Whether the local agencies are tribal, state, or federal depends on the local jurisdiction divisions in the area. There is also a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Indian Country Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-633-5155, but this number does not replace calling the local child protective services agency or the local law enforcement agency.

All Head Start programs must have internal procedures in place for staff to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. Procedures should also include notification to the program's Regional Office immediately when a staff member or volunteer causes an incident or suspected incident. Agencies must provide training in methods for identifying and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect (45 CFR 1304.52(1)(3)(i)). Agencies may find it useful to provide employees and volunteers with an instruction sheet about the types of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and neglect), signs of abuse, the agency's policy of reporting, as well as a summary of the state child abuse reporting statute. To see how your state addresses this issue, visit the [State Laws on Child Abuse and Neglect page](#) of the Child Welfare Information Gateway website.

Head Start programs are strongly reminded that staff, consultants, and volunteers are prohibited from engaging in corporal punishment, emotional or physical abuse, or humiliation of children at any time (45 CFR 1304.52(i)(1)(iv)). Head Start children should feel safe in the program setting at all times. Disciplinary action towards children cannot involve isolation, the use of food as punishment or reward, or the denial of basic needs (45 CFR 1304.52(i)(1)(iv)).

Early childhood development practices encourage staff to use prevention and redirection methods for disruptive behavior. In addition, Head Start Programs should determine the root cause of the behavior to ultimately resolve the matter. All Head Start and Early Head Start programs must have mental health consultants available who can assist them in identifying the causes of children's challenging behavior and implement appropriate strategies to ensure children and staff are safe.

Please contact your Office of Head Start Regional Office for more information on child abuse and neglect.

/ Blanca E. Enriquez /

Blanca E. Enriquez
Director
Office of Head Start

Resources:

- [National Organizations that Protect Children and Promote Healthy Families](#)
- [Preventing Abuse of Children with Cognitive, Intellectual, and Developmental Disabilities](#)
- [When Children Are at Risk: Promoting Healthy Families in Your Community](#)