

## Ethics in Education Act Child Abuse Reporting Procedures

**Child Abuse Reporting Obligations:** As educational professionals, we have a responsibility to provide the children we teach with the opportunity to obtain the best education possible. However, our responsibility does not end there. We also have a legal responsibility to protect the children we educate from child abuse, neglect, and abandonment and to report any information that we receive that leads to suspect that a child has been abused, neglected, or abandoned.

Unfortunately, child abuse, neglect and abandonment are all too frequent occurrences in today's society. In our capacities as educators or employees at an educational institution, at some point in our careers we are likely to come into contact with child abuse, neglect or abandonment. This prompts the question, "how do I recognize and deal with such a situation when it occurs?" This policy is designed to provide guidelines for reporting suspected child abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

Florida Statutes require that all school personnel report situations involving potential child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The statute contains these definitions:

**"Abuse":** any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired.

**"Neglect":** when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired.

**"Abandonment":** a situation in which the parent or legal custodian of a child, or in the absence of a parent or legal custodian, the caregiver responsible for the child's welfare, while being able, makes no provision for the child's support and makes no effort to communicate with the child, which situation is sufficient to evince a willful rejection of parental obligations.

If you have any belief, concern, or thought that you have witnessed, heard, or heard about a situation possibly involving abuse, neglect, or abandonment, by any person who is a custodian, is responsible for the child's welfare, or is in a supervisory capacity over the child (parent, uncle, pastor, physician, counselor, instructor, school administrator, babysitter, etc.), you must report your concern to the Director / Principal. The Director / Principal will then discuss the situation with you to ensure that the appropriate reports, if any, are completed. You can also report the situation directly to the state by calling the toll-free Abuse Hotline at (800) 962-2873.

Employees who report concerns of suspected abuse, abandonment, or neglect are expected to cooperate in any investigation by child protective services. In addition, under the provisions of Florida Stat. § 39.203, employees who, in good faith, report suspected child abuse, neglect, or abandonment are immune from civil or criminal liability for reporting such information and participating in any investigation. Other than the report itself and the communication of appropriate information to the Principal / Director (or designee), or as approved by the Principal / Director, the information about the suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect should remain confidential for the protection of the child.

You should also understand that the failure to promptly report suspected abuse, abandonment, or neglect can result in criminal charges for a first degree misdemeanor. In addition, an educator's teaching certificate may be suspended from any person who knowingly failed to report child abuse, abandonment or neglect.

Finally, employees are reminded of their obligations to report employee misconduct that affects the health, safety, or welfare of children, in accordance with our **Conduct and Interaction Standards Required of All Employees**, which is contained in a separate reporting policy. Failure to do so will result in disciplinary action and could result in the suspension of an educator's teaching certificate.