

Reporting child abuse is your responsibility – as well as your doctor’s responsibility*

Indiana takes child abuse seriously. So seriously, that everyone – including physicians, nurses, teachers, grandparents and neighbors – who suspects child abuse is required by law to report it either to the police or to the local Child Protective Services office (IC 31-330501).

According to Indiana law, child abuse is defined as occurring when “the child’s physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury by the act or omission of the child’s parent, guardian or custodian” (IC31-34-1). In other words, abuse is the non-accidental infliction of physical or emotional injury on a child.

Anyone who knows about an abused child and fails to report it can be charged with a Class B misdemeanor – a penalty resulting in a jail term of 180 days and a fine of up to \$1,000 (IC 35-503-3).

What to include in a report

The information you provide to authorities may be made anonymously and are confidential. A report should be specific and include such details as:

- Exact name, address and telephone number of the parent, guardian or custodian
- The age of the child
- Exact description of what you saw or what the child said to you
- A log or history of behaviors that have concerned you

Immunity

Indiana law also protects those who report suspected child abuse and who act in good faith from any civil or criminal liability. That includes:

- Anyone who files a report about a suspected victim of child abuse or neglect
- Health care providers who detain a child for purposes of taking photographs, x-rays or a physical medical examination related to suspected abuse
- Persons who participate in any judicial proceeding or other proceeding resulting from a report that a child may be a victim of child abuse or neglect, or relating to the subject matter of the report (IC 31-33-6 (1)-(3) (Michie 1997))

Words of caution

Never confront the alleged abuser about the situation. By doing so, you may place the child in more danger, encourage the abuser to force the child to tell a different story or flee the area, advises Prevent Child Abuse Indiana.

Make reports of suspected child abuse by calling the local police department or Child Protective Services (CPS) office, or by calling the CPS toll-free number at (800) 800-5556.

**Information in this article is current as of Nov. 2003 and is subject to change.*

Find additional information about child abuse on these sites:

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana www.pcain.org

Childhelp USA www.childhelpusa.org

National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse
& Neglect Information www.nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/index