

Newsletter

SAFEGUARDING ALL OF GOD'S FAMILY

THIS ISSUE

Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee



Dear Friends,

I would like to focus this newsletter on the responsibilities of mandatory reporting. No child should ever be abused or neglected. Although many people have a legal responsibility, everyone shares the moral responsibility to report suspected child abuse or neglect. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee **all** adults working or volunteering in a Catholic parish or institution are required to comply with reporting responsibilities for any suspected abuse and/or neglect of child, whether or not they are designated as a mandatory reporter under Wisconsin Law.

I'm sure if asked, everyone would say they would speak up if they thought a child was being harmed in any way. As a matter of fact all would probably say they would recognize any sort of maltreatment of a child if it were happening. Most all would agree that they would not allow any abuses of a child to continue if they knew about it.

Yet, the sad truth is that many children are the victims of abusive behaviors such as physical, emotional, sexual abuse and/or neglect. Many of these children do not have a voice to report the abuses that are happening. This is where we, as adults, and protectors of our children and youth have the utmost responsibility.

As members of God's family we have the responsibility and obligation to ensure that all children and young people have the ability to live, learn and play in an environment free from abuse and neglect. We need always to be aware of the situations around us and of our responsibility to speak up immediately. If a child or young person is being harmed in any way or if there is even a suspicion of maltreatment, a report should be made immediately either to the local authorities or to Child Protective Services.

There is never a reason for failing to protect a child who is being harmed in any way. There are no excuses or rationalizations for failure to protect a child.

A full copy of the Archdiocesan Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities can be found at <http://www.archmil.org/Resources/MandatoryReportingResponsibilities.htm>.

God Bless,

Patti Loehrer
Safe Environment Coordinator
Archdiocese of Milwaukee

If You Suspect Abuse:

- Be aware of both physical and behavioral signs;
- Be approachable - Let the child know that you are available to talk; build a relationship with the child that will allow him/her to feel comfortable sharing such difficult information with you;
- Evaluate the situation - Contact local law enforcement if you think there is immediate danger to the child or get medical help immediately if you think the child has been injured;
- Make a report - Remember, you only need to have "reasonable cause to believe" that a child is being abused or neglected for you to make a report - you don't need proof. If you think a child is being hurt in any way, you have a legal (in some cases) and moral responsibility to report it. You can report suspected abuse even if the child does not tell you about it.

If a Child Tells You About Abuse or Neglect

- Listen to and believe the child - Show through your words and actions that you are listening to the child and that you believe what the child is telling you. Encourage the child to talk but don't push him/her to do so. Use open-ended questions (such as, "What happened?") rather than leading questions (such as, "When did she hit you?");
- Be supportive of the child - Tell the child she/he did the right thing in telling you, and stress that the child is not to blame for what happened. Let the child know that you will try to help, but don't make any promises (such as, "I'll make things better") that you may not be able to keep;
- Don't overreact - Try to stay calm; this will help keep the child from becoming more frightened and may encourage him/her to tell you more. Do not talk negatively about the suspected abuser in front of the child; simply reassure the child that it is not the child's fault;
- Write down what the child says and report it - Write down as much of the child's actual words as possible so that you can share those words with the appropriate agency. Describe in writing any signs of abuse and/or neglect you observe.

Making a Report:

- Anyone can make a report - While some people are legally mandated to report, you can report suspected abuse regardless of your profession or relationship to the child.
- Don't delay – A report must be made within twenty-four (24) hours of first suspicion or being informed. Never assume that somebody else will make a report, and don't put off reporting because you're not sure if you should. It is better to make a report and let trained professionals decide what action needs to be taken than to risk further harm to the child. The sooner you report, the sooner the child and family can get help.
- Identify the appropriate reporting agency. You can also call your local law enforcement agency to make a report, especially if you think the child is in immediate danger.

Try to Gather As Much Information As You Can Before You Make a Report, Including:

- Demographic information (child, parents, household members, suspected perpetrator), including full names, addresses, phone numbers, relationships, and dates of birth;
- Specifics of the alleged abuse and/or neglect – time, place, details of injury, specific statements made by child or caretaker, concerns for child's immediate safety;
- Access to alleged perpetrator;
- Any knowledge you have of suspected or known past abuse and/or neglect;
- Names and contact information for any other witness(es);
- Your relationship to the child (friend, teacher, neighbor, stranger, etc.);
- Any other information relevant to the investigation.

Common Questions and Answers about Mandatory Reporting:

Do I need to have proof of abuse and/or neglect in order to make a report?

No. You need reasonable cause to believe abuse/neglect has occurred.

What happens after I make a report?

The agency will first determine whether the information constitutes an allegation of child maltreatment or threatened harm *as defined by Wisconsin law*. If the report is found to meet the definition of child maltreatment, the agency will investigate the case and determine whether abuse/neglect has occurred, what actions need to be taken to ensure the child's safety, and whether the family is in need of any services.

Will my report be confidential?

In most cases, yes. However, your identity may be revealed if you're called to testify in court. If you are concerned about being identified, you can make a report without giving your name.

Will I have to testify in court?

Not in most cases, but it is a possibility.

Can I be sued if I report abuse and/or neglect and it turns out I was wrong?

Wisconsin has a law protecting people who report "in good faith," meaning that the reporter had reasonable cause to believe abuse/neglect had occurred.

Will the child be removed from his or her home if I make a report?

In most cases, child protective services will try to keep the child and family together and provide the needed intervention to prevent the maltreatment from occurring. If the child is in immediate danger, he/she may be removed and placed in protective custody. More often, the alleged perpetrator is required to leave the home.

Statistics

- It is difficult to determine how many children are abused or neglected each year. Many cases of abuse and neglect are never even reported. The most current data shows:
- In 2009, over 3 million reports of child abuse and neglect were made in the U.S.
- Approximately 772,000 children were found to have been victims of abuse or neglect.
- Four children die in the United States each day from abuse or neglect.

In Wisconsin in 2009 there were:

- 38,097 reports of child abuse
- 930 substantiated cases of physical abuse
- 1,406 substantiated cases of sexual abuse
- 62 substantiated cases of emotional abuse
- 2,809 substantiated cases of child neglect
- 23 substantiated cases of a child having died because of child abuse or neglect
- Note: A majority of the children (74%) who died were under the age of 1 year



Patti Loehrer

Safe Environment Coordinator
414-769-3449—loehrerp@archmil.org

Victim Assistance
414-758-2232

A copy of this Newsletter can be found on the Archdiocese of Milwaukee website www.archmil.org under Resources.