

CHILD ABUSE

The Terrebonne Parish School Board shall endeavor to ensure that all instances of child abuse and/or neglect are reported in accordance with appropriate state and local laws and regulations. Therefore, the School Board directs that all school personnel be informed of their responsibilities under law as mandatory reporters when performing their occupational duties.

Students shall be provided, age and grade, appropriate instruction relative to child assault awareness and prevention, and how students may report abuse or assault to the child protection toll-free hotline operated by the State Department of Children and Family Services, and where students may locate the number for the hotline.

Each public school shall post the hotline number in a prominent location on its website.

DEFINITIONS

Child, for purposes of child abuse, is defined as a person under eighteen (18) years of age, who prior to juvenile proceedings, has not been judicially emancipated or emancipated by marriage.

Abuse means any one of the following acts, which seriously endanger the physical, mental, or emotional health of the child:

1. The infliction, attempted infliction, or as a result of inadequate supervision, the allowance of the infliction or attempted infliction of physical or mental injury upon the child by a parent or any other person.
2. The exploitation or overwork of a child by a parent or any other person.
3. The involvement of the child in any sexual act with a parent or any other person, or the aiding or toleration by the parent or the caretaker of the child's sexual involvement with any other person or of the child's involvement in pornographic displays, or any other involvement of a child in sexual activity constituting a crime under the laws of this state.

Neglect means the refusal or willful failure of a parent or caretaker to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, care, treatment, or counseling for any injury, illness, or condition of the child, as a result of which the child's physical,

mental, or emotional health is substantially threatened or impaired. In accordance with statutory provisions, the inability of a parent or caretaker to provide for a child due to inadequate financial resources shall not, for that reason alone, be considered neglect. Whenever, in lieu of medical care, a child is being provided treatment in accordance with the tenets of a well-recognized religious method of healing, which has a reasonable, proven record of success, the child shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglected or maltreated. However, nothing herein shall prohibit the court from ordering medical services for the child when there is substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare.

A *mandatory reporter* is any person considered to be a teaching or child care provider performing their occupational duties, such as any person who provides or assists in the teaching, training, or supervision of a child, including any public or private teacher, teacher's aide, instructional aide, school principal, school staff member, bus operator, coach, social worker, or any individual who provides such services to a child in a voluntary or professional capacity.

Caretaker means any person legally obligated to provide or secure adequate care for a child, including a parent, tutor, guardian, legal custodian, foster home parent, an employee of a public or private day care center, an operator or employee of a registered family child day care home, or other person providing a residence for the child.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

Any *mandatory reporter*, notwithstanding any claim of privileged communication, who has cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare is endangered as a result of abuse or neglect, as defined by this policy, or that abuse or neglect was a contributing factor in a child's death, **in accordance with statutory provisions**, shall report immediately suspected abuse/neglect in accordance with the following:

1. When the *mandatory reporter* suspects that a child has been abused/neglected, he/she shall immediately:
 - A. When the suspected abuser is believed to be a parent or caretaker, make the report to the Department of Children and Family Services through the designated state child protection reporting hotline telephone number.
 - B. When the abuse or neglect is believed to be perpetrated by someone other than a parent or caretaker, and a parent or

caretaker is not believed to have any responsibility for the abuse or neglect, make the report to a local or state law enforcement agency.

Dual reporting to both agencies is permitted.

2. If the initial report was in oral form, it shall be followed by a written report on the approved form, which written report shall be delivered within five (5) days to the local child protection agency or the local law enforcement agency to whom the initial report was made.

The report shall contain the following information, if known:

- A. The name, address, age, sex, and race of the child.
- B. The nature, extent, and cause of the child's injuries or endangered condition, including any previous known or suspected abuse to this child or the child's siblings.
- C. The name and address of the child's parent(s) or other caretaker.
- D. The names and all the ages of all other members of the child's household.
- E. The name and address of the reporter.
- F. An account of how this child came to the reporter's attention.
- G. Any explanation of the cause of the child's injury or condition offered by the child, the caretaker, or any other person.
- H. The number of times the reporter has filed a report on the child or the child's siblings.
- I. Any other information, which the reporter believes, might be important or relevant.

The report shall also name the person or persons who are thought to have caused or contributed to the child's condition, if known, and the report shall contain the name of such person if the child names him/her.

INVESTIGATION OF REPORTS

School officials shall not deny admission of the investigator on school premises or access to the child in school.

ALLEGATION AGAINST SCHOOL EMPLOYEES OR VOLUNTEERS

When an employee is accused of the use of impermissible corporal punishment or moral offenses involving students, the principal shall initiate an investigation (see procedures under policy F-12.3, *Employee Investigations*). If the offender is a central office employee, or principal, the immediate supervisor will initiate an investigation.

Upon any school employee receiving a report of, or information about, child abuse, against another school employee or volunteer, and the employee receiving said information has cause to believe the truthfulness thereof, the reporting procedure as outlined in this policy shall be followed, depending upon whether the employee or volunteer is considered a caretaker or someone other than a caretaker.

The school employee shall also, as soon as reasonably possible, notify the appropriate immediate supervisor of the accused individual, and that supervisor in turn will as soon as reasonably possible, notify the Superintendent or designee. The Superintendent and the School Board's attorney will determine what appropriate action the school system may take over and above the investigation being conducted by the appropriate state agency. In any incident involving an employee or volunteer, which is reported to the Superintendent or designee, the person shall be removed from all activities involving direct contact with students until the matter is resolved.

ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL OFFENSES

The Superintendent or his/her designee shall be required to notify the local law enforcement agency of any allegation made by a student of the commission of a sex offense as defined by La. Rev. Stat. Ann. §15:541. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall make such notification within twenty-four (24) hours of the time the student notified the Superintendent or other appropriate personnel. Any school employee who receives information from a student concerning the possible commission of a sexual offense shall immediately inform the Superintendent and/or his/her designee.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The circumstances and information of the initial report, the fact that a report was made to an agency, and the written report shall be held in confidence and shall not be disseminated to third parties other than those persons or agencies designated by this policy or required by state law. Any written report or other written information regarding the report shall be kept in a confidential file separate from the child's routine school records and accessible only by the principal/designee/supervisory employee or by court order.

INSERVICE TRAINING

Teaching or childcare providers shall be required to complete an online training course provided by the Department of Children and Family Services between June first and August thirty-first, annually. A record of completion of the course by the teaching or childcare provider shall be provided to and retained by the School Board. The School Board shall retain a list of all teaching or childcare providers who have not complied with the training requirements provided by State law.

IMMUNITY FROM CIVIL OR CRIMINAL LIABILITY

Any person who in good faith makes a report, cooperates in any investigation arising as a result of such report, or participates in judicial proceedings authorized under the Louisiana Children's Code shall have immunity from civil or criminal liability that otherwise might be incurred or imposed. This immunity, however, does not extend to (1) a person who participates in or conspires with a participant or an accessory to an offense involving the abuse or neglect of a child; (2) any person who makes a report known to be false or with reckless disregard for the truth of the report.

LIABILITY

The Louisiana Children's Code and Louisiana criminal law provide substantial penalties for mandatory reporters who fail to report facts, which would support a reasonable belief that child abuse or neglect, has occurred. Additionally, educators or other employees of the Terrebonne Parish School Board who fail or refuse to report child abuse/neglect as provided by law or by this policy may be subject to disciplinary and/or dismissal proceedings for neglect of duty.

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Ref: La. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§14:403, 15:539, 15:541, 17:81, 17:81.6; La. Children's Code, Title VI, Art. 601 et seq.; Board minutes, 7-20-99, 3-15-04, 12-21-04, 4-15-08, 1-15-13, 6-13-17, Forethought wd. revisions 1-30-18, 12-1-20, 10-4-22.