



DELAWARE 4-H POLICY REPORTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Introduction

As members of a youth serving organization it is important that adults are aware of their responsibility for child safety. Our hope is that all children will live in a safe environment but we know that children are exposed to abuse and neglect. We have a responsibility to educate ourselves and the children, to teach and to learn about the risks to the welfare of a child.

As a volunteer with the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension you should report suspected child abuse cases to your Extension Agent even though you are not mandated under the Delaware Child Protective Services Law to report abuse and neglect. The Extension Agent will follow through with the necessary and established reporting requirements.

Yet, as you interact with youth in your role as a volunteer, you may become aware of situations in which you would like to take some action to protect the welfare of a child. Although local children and youth services employ experts who will investigate any reports, they rely on people who have direct contact with youth to report their suspicions of abuse or neglect. This brochure has been developed to answer some common questions that volunteers have concerning the reporting of child abuse and neglect. If you have further questions, please contact the Extension Agent at your local Delaware Cooperative Extension Office.

What is Child Abuse?

According to the Delaware Child Protective Services Law there are three items that must be present in order to substantiate abuse. Those items identified by the law are a child, a perpetrator and a situation that meets the criteria for one of the five types of child abuse. A child is a person under 18 years old. The person committing the abuse (perpetrator) must be a parent of the child, a person responsible for the child's welfare, a person living in the child's home or a person with an ongoing intimate relationship with the parent who does not necessarily live in the home. The child should show evidence of serious physical injury, serious mental injury, serious physical neglect, sexual abuse or exploitation or imminent risk.

Do I have to prove child abuse exists in order to make a report?

No, you can make a report when you have a good faith belief that a child you have contact with may be abused. Only suspicion, not proof, is needed. A person who makes a report is given immunity from civil and criminal liability.

In my role as an Extension volunteer, what steps do I need to take to make a report?

University of Delaware Cooperative Extension has an established policy for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect of youth involved in its programs. If you suspect child abuse or neglect while functioning as an Extension volunteer, you should call your local Extension Agent. The Extension Agent will follow the necessary and established policies for reporting the suspicion. Your report is voluntary and you may do so anonymously. It is helpful to those investigating the case to have the name and phone number of the reporter in the case there is a need for additional information or clarification. Once the Extension Agent has made an oral report, he or she will also need to file a written report. The Extension Agent may request your assistance in completing that report.

If you suspect child abuse or neglect when working with youth outside your role as an Extension volunteer, you may report your suspicions directly to the confidential Child Abuse Report line at 1-800-292-9582.

What can I do if I believe a child is being harmed, but not being considered abused?

- If you have concerns about the care and safety of a child, those concerns should be submitted online at the following link:

https://kids.delaware.gov/fs/fs_can_report.shtml

What precautions can I take to deter false accusations against me for child abuse?

- Since you work with children, you are vulnerable to charges of child abuse. You can protect yourself from false accusations by always being in view of others. If you need to speak alone with a child, move away from the ears of others but remain in their sight. Do not use private rooms with shut doors.
- Supervise private activities in pairs. During swimming outings, residential camps or overnight trips, situations will occur where participants need to change clothes, put on bathing suits or shower. At these times, more than one person who is the same gender as the children should supervise children.
- It is important to complete all appropriate accident/incident report forms whenever accidents or incidents occur.
- Children are naturally curious, but do not share personal dating or sexual experiences with them. Also do not ask youth personal questions regarding their dating or sexual experiences.
- Do not force yourself on a child. As a volunteer you may be drawn to youth who are shy or discouraged. Support them in a way that respects their level of comfort with physical and emotional displays of affection.