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Appendix D: Protocol for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Under the Child Protective Services Law of Pennsylvania (CPSL) "child abuse" is not limited to sexual abuse. It includes inflicting or creating physical injury, mental injury, sexual abuse, or harmful physical neglect. A "child" is any individual who is under the age of 18.

As interpreted by the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, any individual in the parish (paid/volunteer) who comes into contact with children in the course of his or her work/ministry and has "reasonable cause to suspect" that the minor has been abused is considered to be a mandated reporter. Reasonable cause is not limited to first hand knowledge only, but also second hand information as well. In all instances, the abused child must actually be "under the care, supervision, guidance or training of (the mandated reporter), the parish, school or diocese."

The CPSL specifically grants legal immunity to any individual who, in good faith, makes a report of suspected child abuse.

While school employees and administrators (which include pastors who oversee parochial schools) are required to follow the general reporting mandates of the CPSL, they are also subject to different reporting procedures when the perpetrator is another individual who works in the school. School personnel should follow the Catholic School Protocol for reporting suspected child abuse. All others should adhere to the following protocol:

- ❖ *If you suspect that a crime has been committed or the suspected victim is in imminent danger:* call 911 or local law enforcement authorities and report the incident immediately
- ❖ *If a child voluntarily discloses abuse:* control your emotions and do not look shocked or disgusted.
 - Listen: let the child talk at his/her own pace.
 - Reassure: let the child know it's not his/her fault and that you are going to help them.
 - Document: write down the date, time and specific circumstances of the disclosure including who was present and what prompted the child to reveal the abuse.
- ❖ **Do Not:**
 - Force the child to talk. Let the child know that you are concerned and that you are available if they need to talk to someone
 - Ask the child to disclose abuse separately to different staff members
 - Keep asking questions because you want to prove child abuse.
 - Touch the child without their permission
 - Prohibit the child from returning to their home.
- ❖ Report the suspected abuse to your immediate supervisor or the staff person designated by the pastor to report the abuse. In all instances the pastor/administrator/parish life collaborator should be informed.
- ❖ If the designated person for reporting abuse is not available, call Childline at 1-(800) 932-0313 and report the suspected abuse immediately. Then complete a written report within 48 hours and submit it to the Child Protective Service Agency in your county. Guidelines for the written report are available at: <http://www.pennsylvaniafamilysupportalliance.org/cy47.pdg>

Volunteer

Date

Effective Date: July 1, 2004	Revision Date: March 10, 2008	Number of Revisions: 1
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