



POLICY AND PROCEDURE

NO.545

Abuse/Neglected Children

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GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES:

Under Massachusetts law, M.G.L. C.119, sec.51A, police officers are one of certain professions required in relation to performing their duties to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. As mandatory reporters, police officers are to make a report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) if, during the course of their activities, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under eighteen has been abused, neglected, or is physically dependent on an addictive drug at birth.

When, in good faith, an officer reports a suspected case of abuse or neglect, they will be immune from civil or criminal liability. Failure to report abuse or neglect could enact a penalty of a fine up to \$1,000.00.

DEFINITIONS:

Abuse means the occurrence of at least one of the following acts between family or household members:

- a. attempting to cause or causing physical harm;
- b. placing another in fear of immediate serious physical harm; or
- c. Causing another to engage involuntarily in sexual relations by force, threat of force, or duress.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Anytime a case of child abuse or neglect is suspected, the Department of Children and Families must be contacted immediately. A written report must then be filed with DCF within forty-eight (48) hours. The written report should contain:

- a. names and addresses of the juvenile and parents, if known;
- b. the juvenile's age and sex;
- c. the nature and extent of the injuries, including evidence of prior incidents;
- d. the circumstances under which the juvenile's injuries became noticed;
- e. whatever action, if any, taken to assist the juvenile; and
- f. The officer's name.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING:

In all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect the information mandated by M.G.L.119, s.51A will be telephoned to DCF as soon as possible.

From the hours of 0845hrs until 1700hrs, reports should be made to the local D.C.F. offices in Worcester:

- Reports regarding an incident that occurred on the East Side should be made to D.C.F., located at #151 West Boylston Drive, Worcester, MA 01606, (508) 793-8000.
- Reports regarding an incident that occurred on the West Side should be made to D.C.F., located at #5 Brussels Street, Building #C, Worcester, MA 01610, (508) 929-2000.

After normal business hours, on holidays and weekends, Judge Baker Hotline # 1-800-792-5200 should be contacted to provide services for the reported abused and neglected children and for families in times of crisis. When notified Judge Baker Hotline personnel will evaluate the situation and determine what type of service are necessary, including taking children into temporary custody.

The telephone numbers of these agencies and preprinted forms to facilitate making the formal written to DCF are available in the Service Division, Operations, and/or through DCF online portal.

SPECIAL INSTANCES:

Police officers frequently encounter a child without parental or custodial supervision either due to the absence or because of an arrest. When this occurs, the police officer should attempt to place the child with a responsible family member. If this is not possible, the Department of Children and Families, located at 151 W. Boylston St. can be notified, and they will provide care for the child.

When the child's caretaker is arrested and is to be released within a reasonably short time, the child may be temporarily cared for at the police department. If the child needs medical care, it should be provided immediately.

HANDLE WITH CARE:

The purpose of the Handle with Care program is to notify school officials when a school age child has been exposed to a traumatic event. School personnel will then be able to monitor the students and offer services if needed.

If an Officer or Detective goes to a call or scene and he/she believes a child has been exposed to or witnessed a traumatic event then the Officer will send an email to Handlewithcare@worcesterschools.net. The email will consist of the Child's name, age, and the school they attend. No other information will be given. Officers will also add a line to their report stating the Handle with Care email was sent.

The following link can also be used to submit the Handle with Care: [WPD - HWC](#) (CTRL and click link)

Per:

Edward P. Gardella
Chief of Police

EG:mb

Revisions

September 4, 2025

- *Department of Social Services and DSS has been removed and changed to Department of Children and Family and DCF throughout the policy*
- *Judge Baker Hotline phone number updated*
- *Address and Phone Numbers for Department of Children and Family updated*
- *Addition of Handle with Care Section and instructions*