

# Mandatory Reporting: Tips and Tools

Making a report to the child abuse hotline can be stressful for both the reporter and the parent(s), for many complex reasons. Here are some tips and tools that won't guarantee to make it easy, but might help you feel a bit more confident.

## **Multnomah County Child Abuse Hotline: 503-731-3100**

For more information, you can download this guide, "What You Can Do About Child Abuse," which has extensive information about mandated reporting in Oregon:  
<https://apps.state.or.us/Forms/Served/de9061.pdf>

**Tell parents early and often that you are a mandated reporter, and what that means. Your mandated reporter status should never be a surprise.**

## **You can call the child abuse hotline and NOT make a report.**

If you aren't sure if you need to report a situation or not, you can call the hotline and request to run a "hypothetical situation" across the screener, without ever giving your or your client's information. When you call the hotline, you can hang up at anytime, and you are in charge of what you share. Try to keep child safety in the front of your mind when making decisions.

Child welfare is required by law to keep the identifying information of the reporter anonymous, and (barring human error) it will not be shared with families. Some parents believe they know who may have called, but child welfare cannot confirm or deny who called.

## **Always try to consult with a supervisor or colleague before making a report.**

Your agency may have specific protocols about how to make reports, so familiarize yourself with policies and procedures. Additionally, making a report can be difficult for many complex reasons, so seek out a second opinion and ask for support. Two heads are often better than one when it comes to reporting!

## **Try to make reports with the parent, as collaboratively as possible.**

Sometimes we are unable to talk with parents about the reports we need to make before we make them, especially if child safety would be impacted. But, when you can safely inform the parent about your concerns, you can also involve them in the reporting process.

You can share with the parent that you need to report the concern, and then ask them if they are willing or interested in being a part of the process. If parents are willing, they can even call in the report themselves, with your support. The parent may have more complete information than you, which could make the report more accurate. Here is an example of what you can say:  
"I'm glad you shared with me what is going on with your child. That is such a brave thing to do, and I can tell you're worried. I am concerned enough that a report to the child abuse hotline needs to be

made, and I want to help you make sure your child is safe. Are you willing to be part of the process with me? A lot of parents feel less anxious when they get to be part of the reporting process.”

If safety issues don’t prevent you from telling the parent, it is always better for your working relationship if you can include the parent in the reporting. This way, they might be more likely to see you as an ally. Child safety is often better maintained when parents are involved, or make the report themselves.

**Know that sometimes, no matter how hard you try, your working relationships with families may be impacted – and that’s okay.**

As stated, reports to child welfare are complex, especially based on our identities and the identities of those families we serve. It’s normal to feel some sense of anxiety around this issue. Mandated reporters typically feel less anxious about reporting when they get good support and supervision, when they are informed, and when they’ve practiced “collaborative reporting.”

But sometimes, even with our best efforts, some parents may not feel the same way about our work with them after a report has been made. This is probably the exception, as trust can often be maintained with some skill and practice. However, if some families work with you differently after a report, it’s crucial to remember that most of us have experienced that disconnect with clients – it doesn’t mean you “did it wrong” or are a bad support person to families in your community. Abuse to children is a very difficult subject, so we can expect it to be difficult to address. Think about how you would feel if the child were harmed, or continued to be harmed, if you did not report your concerns.

**Remember that you are human, and the reality of child abuse is one of the most difficult aspects of being human. Be kind to yourself.**