

Atlanta Independent School District
Plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children
as Required by HB 1041

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I.A. Methods for increasing awareness regarding sexual abuse of children for teachers:

Teachers will be trained annually in all content areas addressed in the *Atlanta ISD Plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children*. Training may be provided through campus staff, district staff, or outside agencies as appropriate at the discretion of campus administration. Training will include contents of the adopted board policy FFG (LEGAL) and pertinent FFG exhibits.

I.B. Methods for increasing awareness regarding sexual abuse of children for students:

District counseling staff will address issues to increase awareness regarding sexual abuse of children and antivictimization programs with age appropriate conversations and materials no less than once each semester in classroom group lessons in grades Pre-K through 8. Awareness regarding sexual abuse of children will be addressed with students in grades 9-12 through health and PE classes no less than once per year.

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I.C. Methods for increasing awareness regarding sexual abuse of children for parents:

The district has established a plan for addressing child sexual abuse, which may be accessed at

<http://www.atlantaisd.org/data/pdf/forms/AddressAbuse.pdf>

As a parent, it is important for you to be aware of warning signs that could indicate a child may have been or is being sexually abused. Sexual abuse in the Texas Family Code is defined as any sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare as well as a failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct with a child. Anyone who suspects that a child has been or may be abused or neglected has a legal responsibility, under state law, for reporting the suspected abuse or neglect to law enforcement or to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Possible physical warning signs of sexual abuse could be difficulty sitting or walking, pain in the genital areas, and claims of stomachaches and headaches. Behavioral indicators may include verbal references or pretend games of sexual activity between adults and children, fear of being alone with adults of a particular gender, or sexually suggestive behavior. Emotional warning signs to be aware of include withdrawal, depression, sleeping and eating disorders, and problems in school.

A child who has experienced sexual abuse should be encouraged to seek out a trusted adult. Be aware as a parent or other trusted adult that disclosures of sexual abuse may be more indirect than disclosures of physical abuse, and it is important to be calm and comforting if your child, or another child, confides in you. Reassure the child that he or she did the right thing by telling you.

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As a parent, if your child is a victim of sexual abuse, the campus counselor or principal will provide information regarding counseling options for you and your child. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS) also manages early intervention counseling programs. To find out what services may be available, see:

http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Prevention_and_Early_Intervention/Programs_Available_In_Your_County/default.asp

The following Web sites might help you become more aware of child sexual abuse:

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index.aspx?id=2820>

<http://savn.nonprofitoffice.com/>

<http://www.taasa.org/member/materials2.php>

http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/txts/childabuse1.shtml

http://www.oag.state.tx.us/AG_Publications/txts/childabuse2.shtml

Reports may be made to:

The Child Protective Services (CPS) division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (1 800-252-5400 or on the Web at <http://www.txabusehotline.org>).

You are responsible for your child's safety

If you permit your child to be in a situation where he or she may be injured, then you may be prosecuted for child abuse. The fact that the abuser is a parent or other family member does not remove your obligation to protect the child.

If you are frightened for your own safety or that of your child, call 911 or 1-800-252-5400.

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You are legally responsible for the care of your child. You must provide your child with safe and adequate food, clothing, shelter, protection, medical care and supervision, or else you must arrange for someone else to provide these things. Failure to do so may be considered neglect.

II. Likely warning signs indicating that a child may be a victim of sexual abuse, using resources developed by the agency under Section 38.004

Section 38.004. CHILD ABUSE REPORTING AND PROGRAMS (a) The agency shall develop a policy governing the child abuse reports required by Chapter 261, Family Code, of school districts and their employees. The policy must provide for cooperation with law enforcement child abuse investigations without the consent of the child's parents if necessary, including investigations by the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. Each school district shall adopt the policy. (b) Each school district shall provide child abuse antivictimization programs in the elementary and secondary schools. Added by Acts 1995, 74th Leg., chapter. 260, Section 1, eff. May 30, 1995.

Texas Education Agency resources under this section can be found at the following links:

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index.aspx?id=2820> and
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing>

Possible Psychological and Behavioral Signs of Sexual Child Abuse:

Changes in sleeping patterns

- Bedwetting
- Nightmares or bad dreams
- Depression, irritability, or anger
- Low self-esteem, guilt, shame
- Avoidance of people or places
- Sexual advances or "touching" inappropriately
- Sexual drawings
- Changes in socialization (social withdrawal or social isolation)

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Warning Signs in Children and Adolescents of Possible Child Sexual Abuse

Any one sign doesn't mean that a child was sexually abused, but the presence of several suggests that you begin asking questions and consider seeking help. Keep in mind that some of these signs can emerge at other times of stress such as:

- During a divorce
- Death of a family member or pet
- Problems at school or with friends
- Other anxiety-inducing or traumatic events

Behavior you may see in a child or adolescent

- Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits
- Refuses to eat
- Loses or drastically increases appetite
- Has trouble swallowing.
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Leaves “clues” that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Talks about a new older friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge

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Signs more typical of younger children

- An older child behaving like a younger child (such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking)
- Has new words for private body parts
- Resists removing clothes when appropriate times (bath, bed, toileting, diapering)
- Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- Mimics adult-like sexual behaviors with toys or stuffed animal
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

Signs more typical in adolescents

- Self-injury (cutting, burning)
- Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Compulsive eating or dieting

Physical warning signs

Physical signs of sexual abuse are rare. If you see these signs, bring your child to a doctor. Your doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases.

- Pain, discoloration, bleeding or discharges in genitals, anus or mouth
- Persistent or recurring pain during urination and bowel movements
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

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Suspect physical abuse when you see...

- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes or burns, especially when the child cannot adequately explain their causes
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate the use of an instrument or a human bite; cigarette burns on any part of the body
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Aggressive, disruptive and destructive behavior
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Fear of going home or seeing parents
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Unseasonable clothes that may hide injuries to arms or legs

Suspect neglect when you see...

- Obvious malnourishment
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn and/or dirty clothes
- Obvious fatigue and listlessness
- A child unattended for long periods of time
- Need for glasses, dental care or other medical attention
- Stealing or begging for food
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school

III. Actions that a child who is a victim of sexual abuse should take to obtain assistance

In student awareness sessions concerning sexual abuse issues referenced in section I.B. of this plan, students will be encouraged to tell a trusted adult in a private and confidential conversation if they have been a victim of sexual abuse or have been in situations which make them feel uncomfortable in any way. Adults will be trained as addressed in section I. C. of this plan to take appropriate actions to help the child obtain assistance and to follow proper reporting procedures. Older students will also be provided with local crises hotline numbers to obtain assistance.

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IV. Available counseling options for students affected by sexual abuse

Advocacy Center for Crime Victims & Children

<http://www.advocacycntr.org>

The Children's Advocacy Center is a centralized clearing house for investigation of suspected sexual and physical abuse. CAC provides a safe nurturing place for children to tell their stories.

Texarkana Children's Advocacy Center

517 Main Street

Texarkana, Texas 75504

Phone: (903) 792-2215 Fax: (903) 793-7946 Email Us:

djabernathy@casatexarkana.org

- See more at: <http://www.cactx.org/find-a-local-center/texarkana-childrens-advocacy-center#sthash.tphXI3qC.dpuf>

The Victims Center responds immediately to survivors of violence through hotline advocacy and therapeutic services. While seventy percent of those served by the program are affected by sexual assault, the agency works with all victims of all crimes.

The Victims Center offers free brief therapy (8-10 sessions) for primary & secondary victims of crime beginning at age 3 as well as group & family therapy. Clients are assigned a case manager to assist them in assessing needs & finding resources in the community. Additionally, the Victims Center offers a 24 hour crisis hotline and a SANE program for victims who need to be examined at the hospital following a sexual assault.

The Children's Advocacy Center offers forensic interviews & on-site medical exams for children who have alleged abuse or abuse is suspected. The CAC & clinical staff work with various agencies through a multi-disciplinary team approach.

When You Suspect Child Abuse or Neglect:

A General Guide

We all have the responsibility to protect our children from harm. If you suspect the abuse or neglect of a child, it is your duty to report it immediately.

Anyone having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect **MUST** report the case immediately to a state or local law enforcement agency or the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

DFPS has a toll-free, 24-hour Family Violence Hotline: 1-800-252-5400

For Atlanta, Cass County, Texas contact the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services at 305 East Thomas Street, Atlanta, Texas 75551, 903-799-7003.

Your legal obligation

Current law requires that professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, or child daycare workers must make a verbal report within 48 hours. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment of up to 180 days and/or a fine of up to \$2,000 (Texas Family Code, Chapter 261).

Reporting suspected child abuse to your principal, school counselor or superintendent will **NOT** satisfy your obligation under this law. Local school district policy cannot conflict with or supersede the state law requiring you to report child abuse to a law enforcement agency or DFPS.

Your legal Protection

Your report of child abuse or neglect is confidential and immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in "good faith" and "without malice."

“In good faith” means that the person making the report took reasonable steps to learn facts that were readily available and at hand. Without malice means that the person did not intend to injure or violate the rights of another person. Provided these two conditions are met, you will also be immune from liability if you are asked to participate in an judicial proceedings that might result from your report.

If you suspect abuse:

DON'T try to investigate

DON'T confront the abuser

DO report your reasonable suspicions

It is not up you to determine whether your suspicions are true. A trained investigator will evaluate the child's situation. Even if your report does not bring decisive action, it may help establish a pattern that will eventually be clear enough to help the child.

The following indications don't by themselves necessarily indicate abuse. You might talk to the child a little to see if there is a simple or innocent explanation for what you have observed.

A disclosure

If you are the first person the child tells about sexual abuse, your testimony as "outcry witness" may be especially important in future legal proceedings. What you say the child told you is not considered hearsay but is admissible evidence in a trial involving a sexual offense against a child. This exception applies only to the first person the child approaches.