

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE 2.3.18

MD

Original Date: 4/2/25	Approved by: Fire Chief
Purpose: To establish procedures for fire department personnel to identify and report suspected cases of child and vulnerable adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation in accordance with Florida law and department policy.	
Intent: To ensure compliance with Florida Statutes (F.S. 39.201 & F.S. 415.1034), which mandate that firefighters, as professionals in emergency response, report any suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children and vulnerable adults to the Florida Abuse Hotline.	

I. RESPONSIBILITY:

A. All personnel shall:

1. Be familiar with and comply with this SOP.
2. Understand their role as mandated reporters under Florida State Statute.
3. Immediately report any suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation encountered in the course of duty.
4. Assess all patients for signs of abuse or neglect, including physical injuries inconsistent with provided history, malnourishment, poor hygiene, fearfulness, or other indicators.
5. Provide immediate medical care as needed.
6. Report any suspicions to their immediate supervisor.

B. Officers shall:

1. Ensure that personnel are aware of and comply with mandated reporting requirements.
2. Ensure that all the patient's medical needs are addressed.
3. Ensure all observations and concerns are documented in the EMS report.
4. Request PD to respond via dispatch when abuse or neglect is suspected.
5. Ensure the patient is transported to the closest appropriate emergency department when necessary.
6. Ensure that the Florida Abuse Hotline (1-800-96-ABUSE) is contacted to report suspected abuse or neglect.
7. Complete a department memo detailing the facts of the incident and forward it to the Operations Division via the chain of command.
8. Immediately notify their Battalion Chief.

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C. Battalion Chiefs shall:

1. Ensure that all necessary notifications have been made, including those to law enforcement and child/adult protective services as required.
2. Confirm that proper documentation, including an EMS report and interoffice memorandum, is forwarded to the Operations Division.
3. Provide any additional support required to ensure compliance with state reporting laws.

II. REPORTING PROCEDURE:

A. When to Report:

1. **CHILD:** An unmarried person under 18, not emancipated, who:
 - a. Is harmed or threatened with harm by a parent, caregiver, or person responsible for their welfare.
2. **ADULT:** A vulnerable adult (18+ with impaired ability to perform daily activities or self-care due to disability, brain damage, or aging) who:
 - a. Is neglected, abused, or exploited by a caregiver or person in trust; or
 - b. Suffers from self-neglect and needs services.
 - c. Reports of exploitation cannot be accepted after the vulnerable adult is deceased.

B. Information Gathering:

1. Callers should have the following information ready for reporting to DCF:
 - a. Name, date of birth (or approximate age), race, and gender, for all adults and children involved.
 - b. Addresses for all subjects, including current location.
 - c. Information regarding disabilities and/or limitations for vulnerable adult victims.
 - d. Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child or adult victim(s).
 - e. Other relevant information that would expedite an investigation, such as directions to the victim and potential risks to the investigator.

C. Notification of Authorities:

1. The Officer shall make notification to the Florida Department of Children and Families via one of the following options, unless otherwise performed by Pembroke Pines PD and/or Hospital Staff:

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- a. Phone (Primary)
 - Call Florida Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)
 - Press 1 to report suspected abuse, neglect, or abandonment of a child
 - Press 2 to report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of the elderly or a vulnerable adult
 - Press 3 to verify the identity of a child protective investigator who recently visited you
 - Press 4 for information/referrals to other services in your local area
- b. Online
 - Should only be used if the child or vulnerable adult is not in immediate danger or at imminent risk of harm
 - Access the Florida Department of Children & Families website at <http://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us> and select "report abuse online."
 - Complete the form as a "guest"; however, you cannot remain anonymous as a healthcare professional

D. Investigator Response:

1. Department of Children and Families investigators of child and vulnerable adult abuse have ID badges and shirts.
 - a. Badges feature a photo, DCF logo, state hologram, and blue (child) or purple (adult) outline.
 - b. Verify identity 24/7 via the state Hotline at 1-800-962-2873 or scan the badge's QR code to call directly.

E. Transport & Handoff:

1. If the patient requires medical attention, they must be transported to an emergency department, with all findings communicated to the receiving medical team.
2. If the patient does not present with any medical need, the scene should be turned over to Pembroke Pines PD for further investigation and reporting.

F. Documentation:

1. Be Objective and Factual
 - a. Document only what you observe, hear, and assess, not opinions or assumptions.

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- b. Use quotes for patient or bystander statements.
 - *Example:* Patient stated, “He hit me with a belt.”
 - c. Avoid subjective language like “the child appeared scared” without objective findings to support it.
2. Detailed Physical Findings
 - a. Describe injuries precisely:
 - Location (e.g., “2 cm bruise on left upper arm”)
 - Size, color, shape, and pattern (e.g., “looped cord-shaped bruise”)
 - Old vs. new injuries (if evident)
 - b. Document any lack of injuries if suspected abuse is reported but none are found.
 3. Scene Description
 - a. Note environmental conditions:
 - Hygiene (e.g., “strong odor of urine in home”)
 - Food availability
 - Temperature (too hot or cold)
 - Unsafe or unsanitary living conditions
 - b. Mention any locked doors, excessive clutter, drug paraphernalia, or other hazards.
 4. Patient Behavior and Interaction
 - a. Document demeanor:
 - Withdrawal, fearfulness, aggression, flinching
 - b. Interaction with caregivers:
 - Hesitation to speak, eye contact avoidance, over-familiarity or detachment
 5. Caregiver/Other Statements
 - a. Include direct quotes from caregivers, especially if they:
 - Contradict each other
 - Appear rehearsed or dismissive
 - Express threats or blame toward the patient

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6. Timeline of Events
 - a. Document what the caregiver says happened and when:
 - *Example:* "Caregiver stated child fell from bed two days ago."
7. Mandated Reporting
 - a. Document that abuse/neglect was suspected and reported according to protocol.
 - Include agency notified (e.g., CPS, APS, law enforcement)
 - Time and date of report
 - Name of person contacted and badge number, if applicable

III. DEFINITIONS:

A. For CHILD reports:

1. **Abandoned or abandonment:** When a parent, legal custodian, or caregiver, while able, fails to significantly contribute to a child's care or maintain a substantial, positive relationship through regular contact or parental responsibilities. Incarceration may support abandonment findings.
2. **Abuse:** Any willful or threatened act causing significant physical, mental, or sexual harm to a child, including acts or omissions.
 - a. **Corporal Discipline:** Does not constitute abuse if it causes no harm to the child.
 - **Corporal Discipline:** the infliction of physical pain upon a person's body as punishment for a crime or infraction
3. **Caregiver:** Parent, legal custodian, permanent guardian, adult household member, or other person responsible for a child's welfare.
4. **Neglect:** Depriving a child of necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment, or allowing an environment that significantly impairs their health, unless caused by financial inability and services are rejected. Religious beliefs limiting medical treatment are not neglect, but courts may order medical services if needed.
5. **Other person responsible for a child's welfare:** Includes legal guardians, foster parents, school or daycare employees, juvenile justice staff, or entrusted sitters/relatives.

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B. For ADULT reports:

1. **Abuse:** Willful or threatened acts by a relative, caregiver, or household member causing significant harm to a vulnerable adult's physical, mental, or emotional health.
2. **Caregiver:** A person responsible for regularly caring for a vulnerable adult, including relatives, guardians, or facility staff.
3. **Exploitation:** Knowingly using deception, intimidation, or a vulnerable adult's lack of consent to obtain or use their funds, assets, or property for another's benefit, including breaches of fiduciary duties, unauthorized asset taking, or misuse of funds.
4. **Neglect:** Failure by a caregiver or vulnerable adult to provide essential care (e.g., food, medicine, shelter) needed for health, or to protect from abuse/exploitation, resulting in serious injury or risk of death.
5. **Vulnerable adult:** A person 18+ with impaired ability to perform daily activities or self-care due to disability, brain damage, or aging.

You may review the Florida Department of Children and Families Guide for "Reporting Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults" for additional material regarding this subject. This can be found on their website <https://www.myflfamilies.com/services/abuse/abuse-hotline/how-report-abuse/what-you-need> as well as S:\Everyone\EMS Shared\Training\Reporting Abuse.