**Mandatory Abuse Reporting**

Modified: March 2019

**Background:**

State law requires any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect child abuse (Section 39.201, F.S.) or vulnerable adult abuse (Section 415.1034, F.S.) to report such information to the Department of Children and Families.

1. **Q:** As a researcher, am I required to report suspected abuse?

Yes. An individual’s occupation is irrelevant. If abuse of a vulnerable adult is suspected, reporting is mandatory, regardless of occupation.

2. **Q:** What if the alleged victim states they do not want to report the abuse?

Statutorily-mandated reporting requirements override an individual’s wish not to have the suspected abuse reported. If there is reasonable cause to suspect the child or vulnerable adult is being abused, the researcher must report it regardless of the alleged victim’s reluctance.

3. **Q:** Must past child abuse be reported if the alleged victim is now an adult?

No. The DCF Office of Child Welfare has explained that the reporting requirement only applies to situations in which there is reasonable cause to suspect that a current child is in a condition of threatened or actual harm, where the alleged perpetrator is still in a current role of “parent, legal custodian, caregiver or other person responsible for the child’s welfare,” which no longer exists in the now-adult/parent relationship. However, see next question.

4. **Q:** Are there any exceptions to the above circumstance?

Yes. If the Researcher has reasonable cause to suspect that other children are currently being abused by the same alleged perpetrator, they are required to report these concerns.

*When in doubt, report.* The Hotline representatives will determine if there is sufficient information to initiate an investigation based on threatened harm to children currently under the care and supervision of the alleged perpetrator.

For example, if a 26-year-old woman reports she was sexually abused by her paternal uncle from the time she was 11 until she was 15, and she has recently seen significant emotional and behavior changes in her 10-year-old niece in her uncle’s home, reporting is required.

5. **Q:** Am I required to report the suspected abuse if the alleged victim states it has already been reported?

It depends. If the alleged victim was a child, and is now an adult, generally no. If, however, the Researcher has reasonable cause to suspect that a current child is being abused by the same alleged perpetrator, they are required to report the suspected abuse.
6. **Q: If the alleged victim is a child, does it matter when the alleged abuse occurred?**
   No. As long as the alleged victim is still a child, the suspected abuse must be reported.

7. **Q: How do I report suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable adults?**

   A new and improved online abuse reporting tool for the Florida Department of Children and Families’ Florida Abuse Hotline is now available. This new reporting tool is available to the general public as an additional avenue to report suspected cases of abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation of children or vulnerable adults. The new online reporting tool is in addition to the existing toll free line at 1-800-96-ABUSE, TTY 1-800-955-8771, and fax at 1-800-914-0004.

   The Florida Abuse Hotline accepts reports 24 hours a day and 7 days a week of known or suspected child abuse, neglect, or abandonment and reports of known or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult.