



# Mandatory Reporting of Abuse or Neglect of Children in Wyoming



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# Wyoming School Safety Anonymous Tip Line Fact Sheet

- The anonymous school safety tip line is 1-800-78-CRIME.
- Its sister number specifically for bullying is 1-855-86-BULLY.
- Operators are trained and bilingual (Spanish/English).
- Operators are available 24-7, 365 days a year.
- Calls are better than confidential – operators never know who called.
- A built-in deterrent factor tends to lower crime.
- Kids and parents willing to warn of danger deserve to speak without fear of retaliation.
- Over 523,000 tips have been received since the program's inception.
- Between 2000 and February 2012, 199 tips have been received in Wyoming.
- Tip lines have averted many tragedies and helped solve crimes.
- Avoiding a crisis is the optimal solution.
- Incident-specific flyers or posters can be made for a specific crime.
- We Tip operates in concert with other services, i.e. students uncomfortable with a national line can call the local police number, students who don't want to call the local number can call We Tip.
- Face-to-face training is available from WeTip to schools, districts, and communities.
- Contact Agency – Wyoming Department of Education.

More information can be found on [www.wetip.com](http://www.wetip.com).

Note: If you know of criminal activity or an abusive family situation, you can safely communicate your tip to  
**1-800-78-CRIME.**

No one will know your name. You will remain totally anonymous.

# Mandatory Reporting of Abuse, Neglect or Exploitation

All citizens have a responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Wyoming state law (W.S. 4-3-205 & 35-20-103) mandates that any person who suspects child/vulnerable adult abuse, neglect or exploitation is required to report regardless of their profession. According to Wyoming law, everyone must report suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult if they have reasonable cause to believe that it may be occurring. As abuse/neglect/exploitation has no boundaries according to sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religion, disability, or gender, the reporting of abuse/neglect/exploitation of children and vulnerable adults is a 24-hour obligation.

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# Signs and Symptoms of Abuse or Neglect

The first step in helping abused or neglected children/vulnerable adults is learning to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of a single sign does not prove abuse is occurring, but a closer look at the situation may be warranted when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination.

## Types of Abuse

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, financial exploitation and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child/vulnerable adult, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused child/ vulnerable adult also may be neglected.

### Signs of Physical Abuse

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child or vulnerable adult has one or more of the following indications:

- Unexplained burns, bites, bruises or black eyes
- Bone fractures, broken bones and skull fractures
- Seems frightened of the parents or caretaker
- Favoring or avoiding contact with a body part
- Covering or hiding certain body parts
- Limping that was not noticed before
- Open wounds, cuts, punctures especially those looking similar to items found around the house. (For example, puncture wounds from a hair brush).
- Untreated injuries in various stages of healing
- Sprains, dislocations
- Reports someone physically is hurting them
- Aggressive, disruptive and/or destructive behavior

### Signs of Emotional or Psychological Abuse

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child or vulnerable adult:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Being extremely withdrawn and noncommunicative or not-responsive
- Over/under use of eye contact
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent or caretaker or others important in the life of the child/vulnerable adult
- Child or adult reports the abuse

## **Signs of Neglect (Including Self Neglect)**

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child or vulnerable adult:

- Is frequently absent
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care
- Exhibits malnourishment, dehydration
- Confusion, depression
- Poor hygiene, soiled linens, urine stains
- Unkempt physical appearance
- Bed sores
- Child or adult reports being deprived of essentials (food, clothing, medication, supervision, etc.)

## **Signs of Sexual Abuse**

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child/vulnerable adult:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting Has bruises or other injuries around the breast or genital area
- Suddenly refuses to change clothing or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease
- Runs away
- Torn, stained or bloody clothing
- Reports inappropriate touching
- Reports sexual abuse
- Inappropriately touches others in a sexual way
- Fears being alone with adults, especially if of a particular gender

## If a Disclosure Has Been Made

- Do not express shock or anger at possible perpetrator.
- Support the child for disclosing. Children need to hear from adults that they did the right thing.
- Do not give child false assurances. Explain your responsibility to tell about the abuse to help protect the child.
- Do not make judgmental statements or place blame for abuse on the child.
- You may jeopardize a legal investigation with leading questions. Be an active listener.
- Use age appropriate language.
- Don't indicate doubt or disbelief. Express the belief that child is telling the truth.
- Assure the child that telling you was the right thing to do – they made a good choice for themselves.
- **Ask who, what, where, when questions**
  - **We don't want to tell the child what they are thinking or feeling**
  - **Ask questions that would give facts as answers**
- Questions not to ask:
  - "Tell me more"
  - "Do you think that this happened"

## Reporting Information

- **Contact TLC Staff or Program Manager about suspicions**
- **Write down everything you heard and said**
- **TLC staff will give report to DFS or Police**
- **If after talking with a staff member and writing down your account, you feel like you need to do more, you may contact DFS or the Police to file a report yourself.**

## What Happens After a Report is Made?

A report of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation is not an accusation. It is the link to services for families who would not voluntarily seek the help they may desperately need.

When an incident of suspected child/vulnerable adult abuse/neglect/exploitation is reported, "taking action" is mandated by law. State law also mandates that, promptly after receiving a report of suspected child/vulnerable adult abuse/neglect/exploitation, the local Department of Family Services must make a thorough investigation to protect the welfare of the child/vulnerable adult. DFS and law enforcement may work jointly or law enforcement may take the lead role of the investigation.

Depending on the report the caseworker has three processes to determine the best outcome for the child/vulnerable adult.

1. Investigation
2. Assessment
3. Prevention Services

### What is an Investigation?

Investigation is a process that will result in a finding of either "Substantiated" or "Unsubstantiated".

The Wyoming Department of Family Services has the legal authority and obligation to assess, investigate and evaluate reports of child/vulnerable adult abuse and neglect and to provide services when needed.

*During the early investigation stage, caseworkers are responsible for determining:*

- Whether abuse or neglect has likely occurred;
- Whether there is immediate danger or risk to the child/vulnerable adult;
- What the motivation, capacity and intent of the alleged perpetrator is; and
- What the ability of a non-offending caregiver is to protect the child/vulnerable adult in the immediate future.

*During the investigation a caseworker:*

- Checks for other reports of abuse/neglect/exploitation;
- Talks face-to-face with the child/vulnerable adult involved; and
- Checks the child/vulnerable adult for injuries or signs of abuse/neglect/exploitation
- Checks for other reports of abuse/neglect/exploitation;
- Talks face-to-face with the child/vulnerable adult involved;
- Checks the child/vulnerable adult for injuries or signs of abuse/neglect/exploitation;
- Checks the child/vulnerable adult's home and where the alleged abuse/neglect/exploitation took place;
- Talks face-to-face with the child's parents or with the vulnerable adult and their caregiver;
- Talks with any other person who may have abused/neglected/exploited the child/vulnerable adult;
- And talk with anyone else who may have information pertaining to the allegation.

After the caseworker is satisfied from the information learned through the investigation the caseworker will determine if the allegations are "Substantiated" or "Unsubstantiated."

If the report is "Substantiated", the name of the person who abused the child/vulnerable adult will be entered on the Wyoming Central Registry of Child/Vulnerable Adult Abuse and Neglect. (For more information on the Central Registry please visit our website at <http://dfsweb.state.wy.us/centralregistry.html> . )

Substantiated investigations are also referred to the county/district attorney for possible legal action. For a vulnerable adult substantiation, licensing agencies will be notified.

If the report is determined "Unsubstantiated," this means the caseworker believes there was not sufficient information regarding the allegation to confirm abuse, neglect or exploitation based on the state's legal criteria. Some cases are classified as Unsubstantiated and voluntary services are provided to the child/vulnerable adult, their families and/or caregivers.

### **What are Preventive Services?**

Preventive services such as parent education, counseling or referrals to other services or agencies may be made available even though there appears to be no abuse/neglect/ exploitation.

# Teton County Child Protection Team & Contact Info

## **Teton County Attorney's Office**

(307) 733-4012

## **Department of Family Services**

(307) 733-7757

## **Teton County Sheriff**

911 for Emergencies

Communications Center [307-733-2331](tel:307-733-2331)

TCSO Administration [307-733-4052](tel:307-733-4052)

## **Teton Youth and Family Services**

[307-733-6440](tel:307-733-6440)

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