

# CHILD ABUSE

## I. POLICY STATEMENT:

In order to safeguard Vermont children, school district employees are required by state law to report all suspected child abuse or neglect. The Department for Children and Families (DCF) is the agency charged with receiving those reports, investigating the cases, and, if the report is founded, developing a plan of services that will strengthen and provide a safe environment for children.

School personnel play a vital role in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Because of their consistent daily contact with students, educators have the unique skills, experience, and special relationships with children that afford opportunities to identify indicators of possible abuse or neglect. Making a referral to DCF is one important (and required) way an educator can protect a child from further harm.

It is further the purpose of this policy to make clear to school district employees that it is not their role to be investigator, judge, and jury in cases of suspected abuse or neglect. Rather, it is the role of school district employees to be faithful and timely reporters of suspected abuse or neglect so that allegations can be brought to the attention of objective, trained, and experienced investigators.

## II. RATIONALE:

To comply with 33 V.S.A. & 4913, it is the policy of the St. Johnsbury School District that any employee who has reasonable cause for suspecting child abuse or neglect must report or cause a report to be made to the district Family Services Office of DCF. As mandated reporters, any school employee who in good faith makes a report, shall be immune from any criminal or civil liability, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed as a result of making a report. In some cases, reporters may be required to appear in court. Any designated employee who fails to report suspected abuse may be fined not more than \$500.

## III. GENERAL POLICY:

Any staff member, regardless of whether they are mandated reporters, who suspects child abuse or neglect is required to report this to the principal. The school nurse and guidance counselor will also act as resource people for the district and will report the incident no later than 24 hours after the abuse or neglect is suspected.

If the staff member has reason to believe the suspected abuse has not been reported, then she/he has the obligation to make an independent and confidential report directly to DCF. If the child's safety or health is considered to be in jeopardy, an oral report should be made immediately. A written record of all reports shall be on file at the school for one year.

## IV. DEFINITIONS:

"Suspect" means the school district employee has reasonable cause to believe such abuse or neglect occurred. This does not mean that the employee must be convinced the abuse or neglect occurred; only that it might have occurred. Any doubts the employee may have shall be resolved

in favor of reporting the suspicion. Further, the employee shall not refrain from making a report under this policy for the reason that there may be retaliation against the child, the employee has a confidential relationship with the child, or for any other reason no matter how well-intentioned.

“Abused or neglected child” means a child under the age of 18 whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened by acts or omissions by the child’s parent or caregiver. Harm can be caused by the actual infliction of harm, by allowing such harm to occur, by failing to provide the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, or health care, or by abandonment of the child.

“Sexual abuse” means any act by a person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts sexual conduct, sexual excitement, or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

NOTE: SEXUAL ABUSE MAY ALSO BE SEXUAL HARASSMENT, HOWEVER, FOLLOWING THIS SCHOOL DISTRICT’S POLICY ON HARASSMENT DOES NOT FULFILL A MANDATORY REPORTER’S LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THE DCF REPORTING LAW. SEXUAL ABUSE MUST BE REPORTED TO DCF.

#### **V. TRAINING:**

All staff shall receive training once each school year in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. Such training shall include assistance in recognizing the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.

<b>DATE WARNED:</b>	<b>JULY 6, 2001</b>
<b>DATE ADOPTED:</b>	<b>JULY 16, 2001</b>
<b>DATE WARNED:</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 10, 2006</b>
<b>DATE ADOPED:</b>	<b>FEBRUARY 20, 2006</b>