

DCF Guidance on Reporting Abuse and Neglect for First Responders

April 7, 2020

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) works in partnership with families and communities to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. Child protection is an essential function of state government and during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Department remains fully operational with social workers responding to emergencies 24 hours per day. DCF offices are open, however most DCF employees are teleworking and offices are closed to walk-in visitors.

Reporting Abuse or Neglect

DCF is designated by state law to receive and assess all reports of suspected abuse and/or neglect of children under the age of 18. Law enforcement, medical professionals and educators are all considered [mandated reporters](#) by state law. If you suspect child abuse or neglect, you must report immediately it to DCF. All reports of suspected child abuse or neglect **must be phoned in**.

During regular business hours (8:45 a.m.-5 p.m. M-F) call the [Department of Families and Children \(DCF\) area office that serves the city or town](#) where the child lives.

Nights, weekends, and holidays dial the Child-at-Risk Hotline at [\(800\) 792-5200](#).

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

What types of situations does DCF respond to?

DCF screens and responds to reports where a child may have been or is at risk of being abused and/or neglected by a caregiver, or where a child may have been or may be at risk of sexual exploitation and/or human trafficking. You can find more information on DCF's definitions of abuse/neglect [here](#).

Supporting Caregivers who are Ill with COVID-19

During the COVID-19 response, first responders may encounter situations where a child's parents or caregiver require immediate medical care or hospitalization, leaving care for children into question. The following questions can be helpful in deciding if a report needs to be made to DCF:

- Have the caregivers identified an alternative caregiver to care for their children while they receive medical care?
- Have they expressed concern about the alternative caregiver's capacity to care for children?
- Have you observed any concerns about the alternative caregiver's capacity to care for children?
- Are there other potential caregivers available?

DCF can assist in locating appropriate caregivers in some circumstances, for example, in situations where a parent's absence would leave the child without immediate supervision. If you have questions about whether a situation necessitates filing a report with DCF, we recommend calling DCF at the numbers listed above to discuss the situation further.

Other Helpful Resources to Connect Caregivers To:

[2-1-1](#) : Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Caregiver Affidavit link:

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/08/ul/caregiverauthorizationaffidavitform.pdf>

[Kinship Navigator Program](#): Provides help, assistance, tips, support, guidance and advice for all familial caregivers throughout the Commonwealth. 1-844-924-4KIN (4546)

[Family Resource Centers](#): FRCs are located through Massachusetts and offer a variety of services to help families. Some of the FRCs are not physically open, but are providing assistance to families by phone.