

# What should you know about reporting suspected child abuse?



## You are a mandated reporter, and as such:

1. You are required to report suspected child abuse if:
  - You have “Reasonable Cause to Suspect” that abuse has occurred.
  - Someone lets you know about an identifiable child having been abused, even if this is told to you when you are not at your workplace.
2. You are required to report suspected child abuse to ChildLine (or file online) **immediately** and then notify the person in charge at your facility, or their designee.
3. If you report suspected abuse in good faith (meaning that you’re acting to protect the child):
  - **You are immune from civil or criminal liability**, meaning that you are protected from any kind of lawsuit or prosecution *regardless of whether abuse actually occurred*.
  - **The law also protects your identity**, meaning that it is against the law for your name to be revealed as the person who reported the suspected abuse.

## Many people are unclear what “Reasonable Cause to Suspect Abuse” means.

**Reasonable Cause to Suspect** does **not** require that you be “certain” that abuse occurred, or that you have evidence or “proof” that abuse occurred.

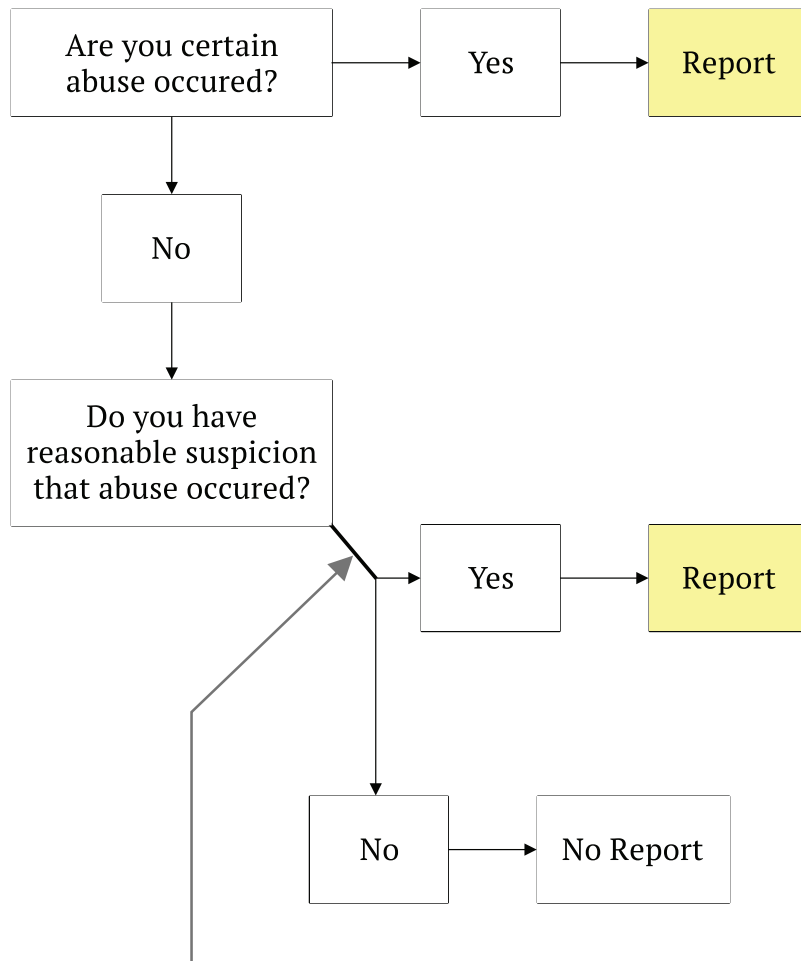
While the law does not define exactly how likely abuse must be before you are required to report, a good rule of thumb is that (in addition to reporting any child whom you **believe** has been abused/neglected),

**you should report whenever you have the nagging feeling that abuse/neglect may have happened.**

If you’re not sure, asking the right questions will help you decide whether there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse. The following diagram can help you think through these questions, and determine when to report.

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## When should you report?



Adapted from Levi & Portwood, *J. Law, Medicine, & Ethics*, 2011;39(1):62-69

**AFTER YOU REPORT:** As a mandated reporter, you have the right to learn from the PA Department of Human Services the outcome of the report that you made and the services planned or provided to protect the child.

Components to help answer the question: *Do you have reasonable suspicion?*

### Feelings

- You have confidence in the soundness of your observations, based on
  - the time you have spent observing
  - familiarity with the object of your observations
  - the nature of the evidence you examined
    - ◆ their meaning is clear
    - ◆ you observed it first-hand
- You have confidence in your judgement, based on
  - similar or related experience in the past
  - the “fit” of the explanation

### Conditions

- The child is vulnerable
- You have information and/or insight that others do not have
- No one else has reported it

### Assessing Probability

- You think it's likely
  - The child was abused
  - Something bad could happen if you don't report
  - Abuse will occur in the future
  - Reporting will help