

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse, Neglect, or Human Trafficking in a Remote Learning Environment

Reminders and Tips

Amid the pandemic, reports to the child abuse hotline have dropped significantly. Students are spending more time at home and less time with the teachers, coaches, and other adults who most often report concerns of abuse or neglect. Educators are mandatory reporters and are required to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect, including the trafficking of a child (Texas Family Code § 261.101). As districts prepare for a new school year that may include both remote and in-person learning environments, it is critical for teachers and school staff to remain vigilant in their identification and reporting of these concerns. See below for key tips and considerations.

Possible Signs of Abuse, Neglect, or Trafficking

Injuries and Other Visible Signs – In a remote setting, an educator may observe unexplained, frequent, or patterned injuries that may indicate a child is being abused. A lack of personal care or hygiene may also be cause for concern.

Changes in Behavior or Demeanor – Abused children may appear scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or more aggressive. Children who have been sexually abused may engage in high-risk behavior or may seem to know more about sex than they should at their age. This may be evident in your communications with a student or may be something that you have a sense about when interacting with them remotely.

Disengagement or Absenteeism – Pay attention to students who are absent from remote classrooms, who are not turning in assignments, or who are otherwise unreachable. Make sure your district has a plan for reaching out to and connecting with students who are not engaged.

Concerns with the Student's Physical Environment – When connecting with students remotely, pay attention to any safety concerns you observe within the home, or any other indicators that the child may be in danger.

Additional Ways Educators Can Provide Support

Engage with students and ask how they are doing. Make sure students know that you are a supportive adult who genuinely cares about their well-being. Ask questions like, “How are you doing?” and “What’s it like for you to be at home so much instead of at school?” Even children who are not being abused may have difficulty coping with changes brought on by the pandemic. Asking these questions may identify students who are struggling with mental health concerns.

Connect more frequently with students who may be at a higher risk for abuse, neglect, or trafficking. This may include students whose well-being you have been concerned about in the past, students with disabilities or special needs, and/or students with a history of trauma.

Enlist school counselors and other student support professionals to help you connect with students' families. Many parents and caregivers are under a lot of stress right now, and some may be experiencing job loss and other stressors related to the pandemic. Be aware of the supports and resources your district has available for families and help link students and families to these resources.

**If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911.
For all other cases in Texas, call the abuse & neglect hotline at
1.800.252.5400**

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