

A publication of the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Santa Barbara County — because their world depends on us!  
 Member of the Coastal Tri-Counties Child Abuse Prevention Council

## I Made the Report. Now What?

As a Mandated Reporter you may wonder or be concerned about what happens to a child or family after you make that call. You know making the report is your legal responsibility, but what you really want to know is whether your call helped that child.

Let's look at what actually happens from the time a call is placed to the Hotline.

A typical conversation may start off like this:

*Hotline:* Child Abuse Reporting Hotline, may I help you?

*MR:* Hi, yes, I am worried about one of my students.

*Hotline:* Do you want to make a report?

*MR:* I am not sure.

*Hotline:* That's ok, let me ask you some questions. What is your name and where are you calling from?

After taking down your personal information, which you are required to provide as a Mandated Reporter, the hotline workers will guide you through a set of questions, which are based on a standardized safety assessment process.



Typically the hotline worker will begin with eliciting information about the specific concerns that prompted the call, and may ask you to describe your observations or conversation with the child. Let's go back to our example:

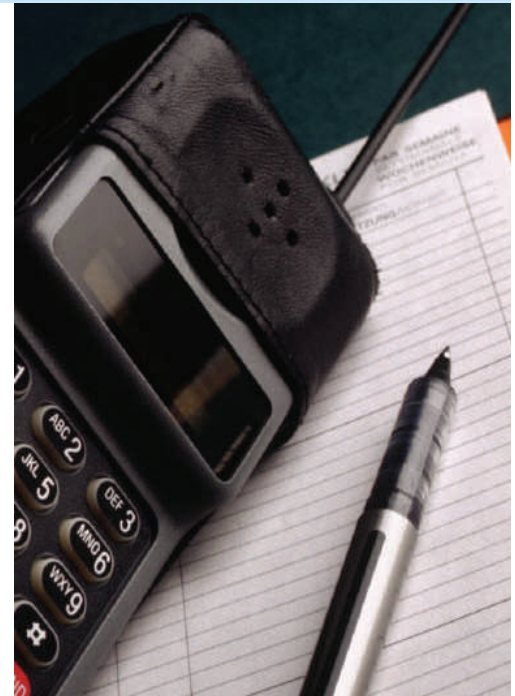
*Hotline:* What are you concerned about?

*MR:* Well, I noticed some time ago that a boy in my class is looking not very well taken care of and it seems to have gotten worse. I don't really know the parents. They don't come to any school functions. I tried to talk to the boy, but he says everything is fine at home. He's only been in my class for a month; I am not sure what to do. I talked to my colleague and she said not to worry about it, since most likely there was nothing you could do, but I still wanted to call to be safe.

*Hotline:* You did the right thing. We are here to answer your questions. Let me first get some information about the child and the family.

Depending on what the caller describes this may or may not be a case of neglect and the hotline may simply advise the caller to connect the family to community resources, such as a school-based Family Resource Center.

However, if what the caller is describing falls under the broad legal categories of neglect or physical, sexual or emotional abuse, the hotline worker will then move on to a series of questions that help him or her determine whether a social worker from the Assessment and Investigations Unit (AIU) needs to see the child immediately or whether the child will be safe if the family is con-



tacted within 10 calendar days. For example, in a case of suspected neglect, questions may sound like this:

*Hotline:* Do you know if the child is supervised at home?

*MR:* I don't know, I didn't think to ask.

*Hotline:* That's ok. Does the child's health seem compromised in any way?

*MR:* Well, he does seem really depressed and tired. I know he is hungry because he always sneaks food from the class room's "snack stash"—that's what we call our collection of healthy snacks I keep on hand for the kids—when he thinks I am not looking.

A social worker will go out immediately if a child is very young, his or her safety, physical or mental health is threatened, or if the caregiver's behavior is extreme or unpredictable and creates a safety risk to the child.

Ten day responses are more typical in cases where there is no prior abuse, no

immediate safety threat and no known aggravating conditions like substance abuse or domestic violence.

Based on the information you provide, the hotline worker may also determine that while your concerns about a family are well founded, *legally* what you are describing is not considered child abuse. In this case the hotline has the option to refer this family to a community-based program called “Front Porch”, which voluntarily connects families with a case manager offering resources and supports.

No matter what happens after your call, the information you provide is recorded in a database. Every time a caller reports a family or child, the hotline worker will automatically search the database for prior calls or incidences with that family or child. A record of multiple, repeated calls is an important piece of information to Child Welfare Services and may create urgency for a family to be connected to the Front Porch program, other services, or increased CWS contact.

In most cases the involvement of the Mandated Reporter ends here. In rare cases, a reporter may be contacted by the social worker to provide more information, or if close to the family might be invited to participate in a Team Decision Making meeting about the family’s strengths and needs.

### **Assessing and Investigating**

After your call has been completed, the hotline worker creates a record for the Assessment and Investigations Unit. If the referral is for an immediate response, a social worker will visit the child within 24 hours at home, school or day care. Depending on the reason for the call, the social worker may be accompanied by a police officer. At this point the primary intent is to assess the safety of the child. Even if one or more



safety threats are present, it does not automatically follow that a child must be placed outside of the home. In many cases, it will be possible to initiate a temporary plan that will mitigate the safety threats sufficiently so that the child may remain in the home while the investigation continues. In each case, the worker carefully considers the relative severity of the safety threats, the caregiver’s protective capacities, and the vulnerability of the child.

Let’s go back to our example and let’s assume the concerns of the caller were serious enough to warrant an investigation, but not an immediate response. Within ten days the assigned social worker makes an unannounced visit to the family. During that visit, through observation and conversation with the child and his parents, the social worker determines that there is indeed cause for concern for this child, as the father is absent most of the time and the mother seems severely depressed and overwhelmed by the daily demands of taking care of her children.

### **Will the Child Remain Home?**

The investigative worker then is faced with the decision whether to remove the boy and his little three year old brother temporarily or have them remain in the home. Using a standard risk assessment tool as a guide throughout, the social worker determines that the two boys can stay at home and proceeds to complete a safety plan. The safety intervention is not intended to “solve” the household’s problems or provide long-term answers. A safety plan does not function as a case plan; it permits a child to remain home during the course of the investigation. In this case, the safety plan includes enlisting the support of the elderly neighbor who occasionally has cared for the children and providing emergency food supplies for the family.

If conditions are so severe that a child is in danger, or there is doubt from the social worker on the ability of the caregiver to follow through, he or she may decide, in conjunction with law enforcement, that temporary removal is the best option. In that case, the social worker will place the child temporarily in a safe environment, which could be with an approved relative or in a temporary foster home. Once a child has been removed, strict timelines for all further steps including court hearings, placement decisions and review, have to be followed to ensure that the child is returned as soon as possible or alternative arrangements can be made within a reasonable time frame.

In the case of our family, the investigative worker now has 30 days in which to either close the investigation or open a case. Once a case is opened the case moves on to a different unit.

*(Look for further installments of this article to be continued in upcoming issues of the CAPC Connection.)*

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE PROTECTIVE FACTORS: PARENTAL RESILIENCE

When **parents are resilient**, what does it look like? It is very similar to our goals for children as they develop:

- They respond to stressful situations in productive ways.
- They feel supported and able to solve problems.
- They develop trusting relationships and reach out for help.
- They care for their mental and psychological health needs.

Parents who are emotionally resilient are able to maintain a positive attitude, creatively solve problems, and effectively rise to challenges in their lives—and they are less likely to abuse or neglect their children.

In observing this protective factor in yourself and the parents with whom you interact, ask yourself:

- Do you handle stress or adversity well?
- What resources do you have for parents who feel stressed or overwhelmed?
- How could you encourage parents to reach out for help when they need it?

For more information, visit [www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/protectfactors](http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/protectfactors).

## How Child Welfare Services is Organized

CWS is divided into units; this issue focuses on the two units whose efforts are centered on **investigating and assessing allegation of abuse or neglect**.

The **Central Intake Unit** is the child abuse and neglect reporting hotline, which receives and refers all incoming calls for Santa Barbara County.

The **Assessment and Investigations Unit** assesses and investigates allegations of abuse and neglect. Voluntary or court-ordered services are offered to ensure child safety in the home, and referrals are made to community resources to strengthen the family.

Look for more to come on Court Services, Ongoing Units, Foster Care Licensing and Services, Adoptions, Concurrent Planning, and the Independent Living Program in upcoming issues.

## Ask the Experts

*I'm a junior high teacher in Santa Barbara County, and I have a question about my responsibility as a mandated reporter. It seems like our school administration discourages us from making reports directly, and would prefer I report any concerns about a child's well-being to the administration. I feel torn about what to do about my suspicions of child abuse—should I tell school administration, call the hotline, or both?*

As a mandated reporter, while within the scope of your employment, your responsibility under [the law](#) is to immediately report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect to CWS (via the hotline), or to the police or sheriff's department. The law states that reporting duties are individual, and "no supervisor or administrator may impede or inhibit the reporting duties, and no person making a report shall be subject to any sanction for making the report." The law permits internal procedures that facilitate reporting and keep administrators apprised, provided they are not

inconsistent with the requirements of reporting, and that they not require mandated reporters to disclose their identities to the employer.

The law also specifies that "reporting the information regarding a case of possible child abuse or neglect to an employer, supervisor, school principal, school counselor, co-worker, or other person shall not be a substitute for making a mandated report..." Even if you inform your supervisors, you are still personally responsible for reporting to CWS or the police.

For you, and all other mandated reporters, failure to report your suspicions is a misdemeanor, punishable by fines and jail time. Agencies and employers have their own responsibilities under the law, for which they may be held liable. Each mandated reporter must be responsible for fulfilling his or her own legal obligation.

Remember, your report may be a catalyst for change for a family, or a life-saving measure for a child.

# RESOURCES AND LINKS

Understanding the Child Welfare System in California: A Primer for Service Providers and Policymakers

[http://www.ccrwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/final\\_web\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.ccrwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/final_web_pdf.pdf)

SafeCare Fact Sheet

<http://chhs.gsu.edu/safecare/docs/SafeCare-fact-sheet.pdf>

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, CA Penal Code Sections 11164-11174.3

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=pen&group=11001-12000&file=11164-11174.3>

## Members Corner



As a CAPC we are busy in our communities working with parents and children. CAPC members and supporters contribute stories related to what their organizations are doing and how you can utilize them as a resource. The SafeCare model described below is currently being used by Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services in collaboration with community partners.

### *SafeCare: Evidence-Based Treatment and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect*

SafeCare is an in-home parent training model focused on three main areas: Health, Home Safety and Parent-Child Interactions. It also teaches structured problem-solving that parents can use for other issues. SafeCare training is highly structured in that it utilizes a standardized teaching format which begins with an explanation, has the trainer model the expected behavior, has the parent practice the behavior, and then finishes with feedback to the parent. Typically each family receives 18-20 sessions in English or Spanish depending on their needs. While the training was developed over 30 years ago, it has gained recognition in recent years due to promising research results in particular with treating and preventing child neglect. Santa Barbara County's Department of Child Welfare Services, in collaboration with community partners, has successfully been using the SafeCare model since February and is looking forward to cascading the model by providing training to more community partners.

For more information on SafeCare, please contact Melissa Hoesterey, Child Welfare Services Division Chief, at 805.346.7248.

The following success story is from a SafeCare home visitor from CALM (Child Abuse Listening and Mediation), one of CWS's collaborating partners.

*ML is a stay-at-home mother of four children ages one, three, five and nine. A neighbor heard ML yelling at her children one day, and believed the children were being hit. This led to a referral by Front Porch. I arrived for our first visit to a very chaotic household. The three youngest were running around the living room, yelling and hitting each other. ML told me that she had no idea how to discipline her children, nor how to get them to stop fighting with each other. We began immediately with SafeCare's Parent-Child Interaction Module. We trained for eight weeks on how to better interactions between her and her children, how to set clear rules, and how to provide positive consequences for positive behavior. We worked until she mastered the skills in the module. ML had never sat and actually played with her children. She said that she normally would sit on the couch and watch them play. At the end of our eight weeks, ML now feels in control of her family. She knows how to discipline them without yelling, and feels hopeful for the future. Her children have stopped fighting with each other because they learned how to play with each other. They are no longer trying to get negative attention from their mom, because their mom is now giving each child positive attention.*

### *Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect*

If you are a Santa Barbara County mandated reporter and you suspect child abuse or neglect, YOU MUST ADHERE TO THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURES:

1. Immediately call Child Welfare Services at:  
**800.367.0166** Santa Barbara County Hotline  
**805.683.2724** After Hours  
 In the case of an emergency, please call 911.
2. Complete and file a Suspected Child Abuse Report, Form #SS8572 ([www.CTC-CAPC.org/SCAR](http://www.CTC-CAPC.org/SCAR))
3. Retain a legible copy of the SCAR Report.
4. YOU are responsible for making this report. DO NOT ALLOW your supervisor/principal to make the report for you or assume because another co-worker has some of the same information that they will make the report.
5. Do not attempt to investigate, conduct interviews or interfere with the information you hold.
6. Remember that you are to report SUSPECTED abuse—you are not required to have witnessed or have complete proof of the incident. You are obligated by law to report what you observe or what you are told that caused suspicion the child is being physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected. When in doubt, call CWS or law enforcement and get their input about the scope of your report.

This info is also available at  
[www.PreventChildAbuseSB.org!](http://www.PreventChildAbuseSB.org!)

The Santa Barbara County Child Abuse Prevention Council welcomes your feedback, ideas and requests for training and resources.

Email us at:  
[capc.newsletter@gmail.com](mailto:capc.newsletter@gmail.com)

The CAPC meets the third Thursday of every month (except August and December) from 10am-12pm at the Santa Ines Mission. All meetings are open to the public. To receive agendas or more information, call the KIDS Network at 346.8222, or email [j.thomas@sbcsocialserv.org](mailto:j.thomas@sbcsocialserv.org).

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