

May 15, 2020

Dear Illinois Educator:

On behalf of DCFS, I want to thank you for your dedication to the education of Illinois youth, especially during this unprecedented crisis. With in-person education canceled for the remainder of the school year and youth sports and extracurricular activities suspended, reports of suspected abuse and neglect by mandated reporters have dropped dramatically. DCFS hotline reports are down 57% compared to this same time last year. Of course, this does not mean that child maltreatment has decreased with the COVID-19 pandemic – in fact, it has likely increased as families face social isolation, exacerbation of mental health conditions and economic hardships.

Children spend so much of their time in school, which gives you more access to students than most other professionals. You have a vital role in identifying, reporting, and preventing child abuse and neglect. Educators contact us more than any other group of mandated reporters. Our “ask” is that you continue to be mindful of children’s safety and well-being, even though you may not have in-person contact with your students until fall. As a mandated reporter, your assessment of the safety of our most vulnerable children is essential.

Below are some actions you can take to support their safety and well-being:

- See something, do something. In the virtual classroom, as in the physical classroom, if you observe what appears to be an injury suspicious of maltreatment, you should report that to our hotline. Whether an injury or mark is suspicious to you will understandably be influenced by the age of the child and your ability to talk 1:1 with that student.
- Ask each student to let you know what their signal is that requests a 1:1 conversation outside the group setting, this could be holding up a certain pen, a post-it note or a specific emoji in the group chat.
- If you have not heard from a student, reach out individually and ask how things are going at home. Children may not share these challenges if we don’t ask.
- Be especially aware of at-risk populations:
 - Youth with developmental disabilities are at higher risk as they may not be able to verbally communicate abuse or protect themselves.
 - Students who struggle to manage their behavior in the school setting may struggle equally at home, and more profoundly during shelter in place.

- Continue communication with students past the traditional end of the school year, whether it be reaching out individually or continuing web-based communications with a group of students if possible.
- Let families know they can reach out for support by texting “TALK” or “HABLAR” to 552020. One text can connect families to local support for food, jobs, housing or mental health services.

We must be attentive to signs of possible abuse or neglect and report suspected maltreatment to DCFS. Child protection investigations continue at DCFS despite COVID-19, and the hotline continues to accept reports 24/7. Our hotline number is **800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873)**. For non-emergencies, report online at <https://www2.illinois.gov/dcfs/safekids/reporting>.

We share and appreciate your deep commitment to the safety of all the children of Illinois. Thanks for all you do to care for and protect children, youth and families, especially in this challenging time.

Sincerely,



Marc D. Smith
Acting Director, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services