



Reporting Protocol

Georgia law states that anyone employed by or volunteers for an organization that serves children is a mandated reporter. This includes clergy, staff, and all volunteers in a church.

A mandated reporter is anyone who is required by law to report to Child Protective Services (CPS) any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Failure to report reasonable suspicion of abuse is a misdemeanor offense and punishable by a year in prison and a monetary fine.

The Georgia law also states that a volunteer will satisfy this reporting mandate requirement when she/he makes a report according to the Reporting Protocol of the organization for which they volunteer.

Therefore, **CHURCH NAME** has established the following Reporting Protocol.

What am I required to report?

The minimum standard for a report to be made to Child Protective Services is any “reasonable suspicion” of abuse. Reasonable suspicion does not mean you have proof that abuse has occurred.

There are three ways you will learn about abuse:

1. A child discloses abuse
2. You observe abuse
3. You have reasonable suspicion of abuse

When a child discloses abuse or you observe abuse, you must report the abuse by following the reporting protocol below.

Reasonable suspicion is more challenging to determine than receiving a disclosure or observing abuse. At **CHURCH NAME**, we have a Code of Conduct that describes the

boundaries adults are to maintain when interacting with children. Every adult who works with children must sign our Code of Conduct, acknowledging they agree to abide by the Code of Conduct when interacting with children. When an adult agrees to our Code of Conduct, he/she gives permission to any adult who observes any inappropriate or questionable behavior to speak to him/her about what has been observed and remind them of the commitment we have made to maintain safe boundaries between adults and children.

When an adult is observed crossing a child's safe boundaries or violating our Code of Conduct, the adult who saw the inappropriate behavior or boundary violation is expected to intervene on behalf of the child. The adult who observed the inappropriate behavior or violation must report it to the children's ministries director as soon as possible.

Once the ministry director is notified of the inappropriate behavior, they will discuss the situation with the adult observed violating the Code of Conduct. If there is any reason to believe the child is at risk or if the adult's response to the observation causes concern, a formal Incident Report (described below) must be completed.

It may also be determined that there is reasonable suspicion that a child has been abused outside of any church event, such as in the home. In such a case, you are still a mandated reporter, even though the abuse is not related to a church's program or ministry.

Making a report to CPS does not constitute an accusation of abuse. Making a report means we are requesting that a professional service be performed to determine if a child is at risk and if abuse has occurred.

To whom in the Church is a report made?

If the child is in immediate danger, call law enforcement or 911 immediately. Once law enforcement has been reached, you then follow the reporting protocol below.

PROTOCOL FOR ADULT VOLUNTEERS

If you have received a disclosure of abuse, you have observed abuse, or you have reasonable suspicion of abuse, you must report it immediately to either the children's ministries director or the pastor. The person making the report will be referred to here as the "Reporter." If neither the ministry director nor the pastor is on-site to hear the verbal report, then the verbal report must be given to the individual in charge of the event.

PROTOCOL FOR PAID STAFF/MINISTRY DIRECTORS

If you have received a disclosure of abuse, you have observed abuse, or you have reasonable suspicion of abuse, you, as the “Reporter,” must report it immediately to the pastor.

The Incident Report

After the verbal report has been made, the Reporter must complete an Incident Report (provided by the children’s ministries director or pastor—also available on the church website) and submit the completed, signed, and dated form to the person to whom it was verbally reported. The Incident Report must be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than 6 hours after the verbal report was made.

–If the verbal report was given to the individual in charge of the event (if neither the ministry director nor the pastor was on site to receive the verbal report), the Reporter is also responsible for initiating the Incident Report by contacting the ministry director or pastor as soon as possible.

The Reporter and the person receiving the Incident Report (ministry director or pastor) must each sign the Incident Report, noting the appropriate dates and times. Both the Reporter and the person receiving the report must retain a copy of the completed Incident Report.

Any ministry director who receives an Incident Report must forward the original Incident Report to the pastor (or the person designated by the pastor to receive these reports). The pastor must sign the Incident Report, indicating the time/date signed.

All Incident Reports received by the pastor or his designee **MUST** be reported to Child Protective Services. The pastor does not have the option of bypassing this step of making the report to CPS. The date and time the incident was reported to CPS or law enforcement must be noted on the Incident Report, which will be kept at the church office in a secure file.

The Reporter cannot be denied the opportunity to report directly to CPS but should understand that he/she has met their mandatory reporting requirement by following this Reporting Protocol.

Georgia law requires that all reports of abuse must be made to CPS within 24 hours of the original disclosure or suspicion of abuse.

How is a report made to CPS?

To make a report, call the Georgia Child Protective Services Information Center: **1-855-GA-CHILD (1-855-422-4453)**. Child Protective Services is a division of DFCS responsible for receiving and responding to reports of abuse. You can also report suspected abuse by email (cpsintake@dhr.state.ga.us) or by fax (229-317-9663).

It is best if the report is made by phone. The Intake Officer will collect the necessary information that will help CPS determine the best response option available to CPS and what will create the highest level of safety for the child.

This Reporting Protocol is intended as a sample document and is provided to you courtesy of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church. Please check the mandatory reporting guidelines in your state to determine the proper protocol for your location. For additional resources on child protection policies for IPHC churches and conferences, please visit our website at <https://iphc.org/discipleship/vigilant/> or email us at kids@iphc.org.