



Podcast 3 Script: What does it mean to be a mandated reporter?

Welcome, Listeners, my name is Julie and I am part of the U.S. Department of Education's You for Youth Technical Assistance team. In this podcast series, we investigate the use of Trauma-Informed Care in 21st Century Community Learning Centers. In this podcast we are going to discuss what it means to be a mandated reporter.

Ask yourself if this scenario sounds familiar: Lily is an eight-year-old student in your program. During homework time, you notice some large bruises in more than one place on her arms. You ask if you can take a closer look and if she can remember how she got hurt. She looks down, crosses her arms and doesn't answer you. When talking to other staff members in your program, you find out that in the past they've noticed bruises on Lily that they assumed were from rough housing on the playground, although none of you have ever really seen her playing that way. What do you do? When does a situation like this demand that you to take action?

In your work, you've heard the term 'mandated reporter' all the time. But what does it really mean to be a mandated reporter? A mandated reporter is someone who has regular contact with vulnerable people and is legally required to give an account of abuse that either they have seen or suspect to a relevant reporting agency. When we talk about vulnerable people, this can include children, individuals of any age with special needs or the elderly. Suspected abuse can include neglect, or abuse, whether that is physical, sexual, psychological or financial. Each state has its own mandated reporting process. All staff in your program from volunteers to partners are strongly urged to have a firm understanding of that process should you suspect that abuse, neglect or maltreatment is happening to a child under your care.

Ensuring that students like Lily are safe and supported takes a community effort, and your program and staff play a critical role. If you're worried you have seen possible indicators of abuse or neglect, immediately talk with your program leadership and staff to see if they have any more insight. For example, a colleague may have also noticed subtle signs of possible abuse or heard something about a student's home life that you have not. Your organization is sure to have procedures in place to determine the appropriate reporting action to take, so consult with your leadership if you are in any doubt what these are.

Usually a report is made when the mandated reporter suspects or has reason to believe the child has been abused or neglected. But if a mandated reporter simply sees conditions that could reasonably harm a child, they should report that as well. Some examples of this could be a child who routinely sneaks extra snacks into her backpack that have been served, or worse, thrown away. Another example might be an adult who acts drunk or altered coming for the student at pickup, or even a middle school-aged sibling coming at the last minute with an elaborate excuse why their parent couldn't make it. Especially when you see a pattern of these kinds of conditions, further inquiry, and even reporting, may be demanded.

You may still be hesitant to report because you have not directly witnessed instances of child abuse or neglect, but your role as a reporter is to give the facts and circumstances that you have observed, and describe them as just that. The burden of proof is not on you. Just keep a thorough record of all instances you're worried about, and how you've come to believe a child may be living



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in an unsafe environment. Once again, you should absolutely feel comfortable seeking reassurance by sharing these concerns with a colleague or team leader. This is not idle gossip or a violation of a student's privacy when you show the appropriate discretion. Then, refer to your state requirements to learn the actual process for reporting. Most states have a toll-free number for mandated reporters to call anonymously. Some states or jurisdictions may ask for the name of the person who is making the call and a phone number to call in case there may be questions during the course of the investigation. Rest assured, you will not be penalized, whatever the outcome.

There is a link in the resource section of this click and go to state-specific requirements, it is always best to check with your state agency for the most up to date mandated reporting laws and requirements. You can consult community resources like your local domestic violence agency or child advocacy center to learn about the most recent research and possible local nuances to reporting safely in your area. Above all else, you want to know that a child, like Lily, is not at risk for even more harm and these community agencies are usually equipped with ways to educate you on best practices.

Summary of each states law can be found here:

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf#page=5&view=Summaries%20of%20State%20laws>