

## COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

### **POLICY: REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT**

**DATE ADOPTED:** November 19, 2024

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

It is the policy of the Colchester School District to ensure that all employees report suspected child abuse and/or neglect as required by law.

#### **I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to protect children whose health and welfare may be jeopardized by abuse or neglect. It is further the purpose of this policy to make clear to all district employees and school officials that it is not their role to investigate, prove or disprove suspected abuse or neglect. Rather, it is the role of district employees to be faithful and timely reporters of suspected abuse or neglect so that allegations can be brought to the attention of objective, trained and experienced investigators. According to Chapter 49, Subchapter 2, of VSA Title 33, any school employee, physician, or concerned person who has reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused or neglected must report their suspicions regarding this abuse in accordance with the provisions of this statute. Also protected under this policy are vulnerable adults included in Chapter 69, Subchapter 1, of VSA Title 33 (Section 6902).

#### **II. RELATIVE TERMS**

- A. Mandatory Reporter** is any individual who is employed by the school district or who is contracted and paid by the school district to provide student services, including but not limited to any superintendent, principal, teacher, student teacher, librarian, school counselor, social worker, mental health professional, or school resource officer. Any mandated reporter who reasonably suspects abuse or neglect of a child shall report it to a building level administrator within 24 hours of the time the information regarding the suspected abuse or neglect was first received or observed. A Child Protection Team will be convened.
- B.** Each school will organize and maintain a **Child Protection Team (CPT)**. The CPT will include, but not be limited to, a building administrator, nurse, guidance counselor, the child's teacher and the reporting person if they are not a regular member of this team. Minutes of each CPT meeting will be taken and maintained in a confidential file within the school. The CPT's role is to determine if there is a reasonable cause for suspicion of abuse or neglect. If it is determined that one exists, a report will be made to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) within 24 hours. In reporting a case of suspected child abuse or neglect, district procedures do not negate any employee's right or responsibility to make an independent, confidential report to DCF. A Child Protection Team cannot substitute its judgment for that of the reporter. If the Child Protection Team does not make a report to DCF, any employee who has reasonable cause to believe that a

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child has been abused or neglected retains the right and responsibility to make such a report.

- C. Suspected** means the school district employee reasonably believes abuse or neglect occurred. This does not mean that the employee must be convinced the abuse or neglect occurred. Further, the employee shall not refrain from making a report under this policy for the reason that there may be retaliation against the child because the employee has a confidential relationship with the child, or for any other reason no matter how well-intentioned.
- D. Report** means an oral or written description of the suspected abuse or neglect. If the report is made orally, the reporter should note in writing the person to whom the report was made and when the report was made. That information should then be provided to the CPT.
- E. Abused or neglected child** means a child under the age of eighteen whose physical or mental health, or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of harm by the acts or omissions of the child's parent or other individual who may be responsible for the child's welfare (e.g. guardian, foster parent, stepparent, teacher, etc.), or in the case of sexual abuse, of any individual. Harm can be caused by physical injury or emotional maltreatment, by allowing such harm to occur, by failing to provide the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care, or by abandonment of the child.
- F. Sexual abuse** as defined by Title 33, Chapter 49 § 4912, means any act by a person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

### III. IMPLEMENTATION

Any school district employee or school official shall report suspected child abuse or neglect to the building principal, or their designee, and then to DCF as required by state law. If the building principal or designee is the person suspected of child abuse or the person who suspects the abuse or neglect, the report shall be made to the superintendent of schools.

### IV. TRAINING

Once each school year, all employees shall receive training in reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. Such training shall include assistance in recognizing the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect.

### V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Those looking for additional information on mandated reporters should visit the Department of Children and Families (DCF) website at: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/>. To make a report, call DCF at (800) 649-5285, 24 hours a day – 7 days a week. If the child is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1 or your local police first, then call DCF to make a report.