



ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Reporting Abuse: Frequently Asked Questions

- **What does it mean to have "reasonable suspicion" that a child or a vulnerable adult might be a victim of abuse?**

Generally, reasonable suspicion includes but is not limited to: a witnessed act of abuse, a child's disclosure of abuse, or signs of abuse in a child. Reasonable suspicion may also come from another person who may have heard about possible inappropriate behavior from the victim.

- **What should I do if I have reasonable suspicion that a child or vulnerable adult is being abused, abandoned, neglected, or exploited?**

First, ensure the youth's safety. Call 911 if the youth has just been victimized or is in immediate harm.

You **must** report reasonable suspicion of abuse to both legal authorities and the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources. Though you should also inform your supervisor and/or senior pastor (or if they are not available, then the Youth Protection Coordinator), remember that informing someone from the parish is not the same as reporting reasonable suspicion to legal authorities.

When you report to law enforcement:

- The person to whom the alleged abuse was reported should make the report to law enforcement, as he or she has pertinent information. But if he or she is uncomfortable doing so, the senior pastor or Youth Protection Coordinator should make the report in the presence of the Youth Worker.
- In most jurisdictions, it is likely the local Child Protective Services agency handles child abuse cases. However, each state, province or territory may have different responsible authorities and procedures, including the police or a welfare department.
- State-level contact information can be found at: www.childwelfare.gov. Assistance in reporting suspected abuse can be obtained from the ChildHelp National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-ACHILD (1-800-422-4453). Information from the Government of Canada on child abuse can be obtained at <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/fv-vf/ca-me.html>.



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- Reports may generally be made anonymously, but it is helpful to provide contact information so authorities can follow up for more information and the reporter can serve as a witness¹.

When you report to Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources:

- All abuse or suspected abuse must also be reported to the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources².
- Use these Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources Reporting Forms ([United States](#), [Canada](#)) when making your report³.
- **What should I expect when I contact the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources?**

Reporters contacting the Department should expect to be asked for the following information:

Demographic information of the person(s) involved in the situation being reported. This includes the names, ages, dates of birth (if known), race, gender, Social Security Number for United States reports and Social Identification Number for Canada reports (if known).

A means to locate the subject(s) of the report. Some common means to locate may include, but not be limited to:

- Home Address
- Phone number
- School Name, Address, and Phone Number
- Parents/Caregivers Work Location, Address, Phone Number
- Directions to the Home

Specifics of the incident being reported. Some common questions asked by the Department include:

- What happened or allegedly happened to the victim?
- Who caused the harm?
- What were the effects on the victim?

¹ If mandated reporters (see "Mandatory Reporting" below) make reports anonymously, it is recommended that they do so in the presence of a witness who can verify the reporter's identity, as this may become important if the reporter later is charged with negligence for failing to make a report.

² If the suspected perpetrator is the senior pastor, then the Youth Worker should inform the Youth Protection Coordinator and/or the Parish Council President. In such case, the Youth Protection Coordinator and/or the Parish Council President should make the report to law enforcement with the Youth Worker and to the Diocesan Bishop.

³ See *Appendices D (US) and E (Canada): Sample Reporting Forms* in the Youth Protection Policy for a copy of the report which must be submitted to the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources.



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- Any known history, frequency, etc. of the same or similar incidents.

Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources reporting forms are available for [United States](#) and [Canada](#).

- **What kind of information do I need to have ready when I report to civil authorities?**

Specific descriptions of the incident(s) or the circumstance(s) contributing to the risk of harm, including who was involved, what occurred, when and where it occurred, the extent of any injuries sustained, what the victim(s) said happened, and any other pertinent information are very important. Information that reporters should have ready includes:

- Name, date of birth (or approximate age), Social Security Number (USA) or Social Identification Number (Canada) if known, race, and gender for all adults and children involved.
- Addresses or another means to locate the subjects of the report, including current location.
- Information regarding disabilities and/or limitations of the victims (especially for vulnerable adult victims).
- Relationship of the alleged perpetrator to the child or adult victim(s).

Other relevant information that would expedite an investigation, such as directions to the victim (especially in rural areas) and potential risks to the investigator, should be given to the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources. Reporting forms are available for [United States](#) and [Canada](#).

- **Will the person(s) know I reported him or her?**

All reports are confidential. Access to these reports is limited by specific criteria.

The Department of Human Resources will not acknowledge the existence of any report, will not acknowledge that they have previously spoken to a particular individual, nor will they release any information provided by an individual or any information contained in a report. No reports are released by the Department other than to those persons specifically authorized by the Department. Any person with a statutory right to a report copy must contact the local investigative office.



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- **Do I have to provide my name when I contact the Department of Human Resources?**

No. You do not have to give your name in order to make a report. Providing your name, however, is helpful in the event an investigator needs to ask you more questions or seek clarification about the information you provided to the Archdiocesan Department of Human Resources.

The names of reporters are held confidential and will not be released to the individuals named in the report.

Contact the Department to learn who has the right to the copy of a report related to child victims and who has a right to a copy of a report related to adult victims.

Although every church leader and youth worker has a responsibility to report suspected abuse or neglect, some occupations are specified by law as required to do so. These occupations are considered [professionally mandated reporters](#)⁴. A professionally mandated reporter of child abuse/neglect is required to provide his or her name when reporting. A professionally mandated reporter's name is entered into the record of the report, but is held confidential by the Department.

- **If I file a report of suspected abuse that turns out to be false, can I be held criminally or civilly liable?**

Note that in all 50 states and in Canada, a person who mistakenly reports suspected abuse is generally immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report was made in good faith and without malice. Regardless, if you are a mandatory reporter, you have a legal obligation to report the alleged abuse. It is the responsibility of each parish to know and understand the reporting requirements of the municipality in which they are located.

⁴ National Association of Mandated Reporters, 2021, What is a Mandated Reporter? <https://namr.org/news/what-is-a-mandated-reporter>