

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect

According to the state of Indiana, child abuse is an action or lack of action by the parent, guardian, or custodian seriously endangering a child's physical or mental health, whereas child neglect is the inability or refusal to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision. Examples of child abuse or neglect include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, allowing a child to commit an illegal offense, and illegally manufacturing a drug or controlled substance where the child lives. As mandated reporters, teachers must follow a specific protocol for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect. Whether teaching in face-to-face or in online environments, it is vital to be aware of potential indicators of child abuse and neglect, and what to do when those indicators appear. When teaching in online environments, it is important to continue placing an emphasis on supporting the whole student, including their academic, physical, and social-emotional health.

1. How do I recognize potential child abuse and neglect in online environments?
2. What does it mean for me to be a "mandated reporter" of suspected child abuse or neglect?
3. How does providing a safe online environment impact my ability to recognize potential child abuse and neglect?



to Consider

According to the state of Indiana, child abuse is an action or lack of action by the parent, guardian, or custodian seriously endangering a child's physical or mental health. Three common types of child abuse are physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. Child neglect is the failure to meet a child's basic physical or emotional needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision. Whether teaching face-to-face or in online environments, teachers must be aware of indicators of child abuse and neglect, and what to do if they appear.

Teachers and other school staff are in a position to recognize child abuse and neglect. Signs of child abuse or neglect include physical indicators such as bruising or other injuries, unexplained illness, poor physical hygiene, stealing food, consistent fatigue, and self-harm as well as behavior indicators such as poor attendance, poor academic performance, anti-social behavior, extremes or sudden changes in behavior, anxiety or fear, and atypical sexual knowledge or behavior. It can be challenging to spot indicators of child abuse and neglect in online learning environments. However, there might be times when it is possible to observe indicators of child abuse or neglect in a home environment through audio or video such as noticing anxiety or fear directly related to people within a student's physical environment or noticing a physical environment that fails to meet a student's basic physical needs.

Whether teaching face-to-face or in online environments, teachers can employ strategies to check on students' physical and social-emotional health. During synchronous learning in online environments, check-in strategies might include intentionally planning a movement activity to confirm students' physical health or scheduling a short independent work activity to allow time to perform visual checks of students' physical environments. Teachers can also encourage students to self-report physical or social-emotional issues through established school or class protocols. According to Indiana state law, teachers are required to immediately report any suspicion that a student is a victim of child abuse or neglect directly to the Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect hotline. Once the immediate report of suspicion is filed, some schools may require additional follow-up protocols, but reporting within the school does not waive a teacher's responsibility to file their own report to the authorities immediately following suspicion.

Teachers should be proactive in creating safe online environments where students feel comfortable self-reporting physical or social-emotional issues. These environments can be strengthened through establishing and implementing online norms and routines; building trust, respect, and relationships with students and families; and empowering and supporting self-advocacy. When teaching in online environments, it is important to continue placing an emphasis on supporting the whole student, including their academic, physical, and social-emotional health.

KEY Elements