WHO NEEDS TO REPORT?

In Florida, everyone is a mandatory reporter. However, there are two types of reporters:

**Mandated Reporter (General):**

- Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare is a mandatory reporter. § 39.201(1)(a).
- Any person, including but not limited to state, county, or municipal criminal justice employees or law enforcement officers, who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a vulnerable adult has been or is being abused, neglected, or exploited must make a report. § 415.1034(a)5.

**Mandated Reporter (Professional)**

Anyone who is legally obligated to report known abuse and must also identify themselves when reporting. These include:

- Physician, osteopathic physician, medical examiner, chiropractic physician, nurse, or hospital personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of persons;
- Health or mental health professional;
- Practitioner who relies solely on spiritual means for healing;
- School teacher or other school official or personnel;
- Social worker, day care center worker, or other professional child care, foster care, residential or institutional worker;
- Law enforcement officer;
- Judge, § 39.201(1)(d)(1)-(7); or
- Mediators. § 44.405(4)(a)3.

- Note: An officer or employee of the judicial branch is not required to again provide notice of reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, abandonment, or neglect when that child is currently being investigated by the department,
there is an existing dependency case, or the matter has previously been reported to the department, provided that there is reasonable cause to believe that the information is already known to the department. This paragraph applies only when the information has been provided to the officer or employee in the course of carrying out his or her official duties. § 39.201(1)(f)

WHAT NEEDS TO BE REPORTED?

Child Abuse:

- A child in need of supervision who has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult. § 39.201(1)(a).
- A child abused by a parent, caregiver, guardian, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare. § 39.201(1)(a).
- Child abuse, abandonment, or neglect by any adult. § 39.201(1)(b).
- Child abuse by a known or suspected juvenile sex offender. § 39.201(1)(c).
- If the report contains information of an instance of known or suspected child abuse involving impregnation of a child under 16 years of age by a person 21 years of age or older, the report shall be made immediately to the appropriate county sheriff’s office or other appropriate law enforcement agency. § 39.201(2)(e).
- Reports involving surrendered newborn infants shall be made and received by the department. § 39.201(1)(g).

Sexual Battery:

Section 794.027 requires that any person who observes a sexual battery and who has the ability to seek assistance for the victim without being exposed to a threat of physical violence must make a report.

Vulnerable Adult Abuse:

Section 415.1034(1)(a)5 states that any person, including, but not limited to any state, county, or municipal criminal justice employee or law enforcement officer, who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a vulnerable adult has been or is being abused, neglected, or exploited shall immediately report such knowledge or suspicion to the central abuse hotline.

WHO DO YOU REPORT IT TO?

- Child and adult abuse should be reported to the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) through either the DCF statewide hotline (call 1-800-96-ABUSE) (1-800-962-2873) or through the DCF website at
http://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us. The hotline also accepts faxes at 1-800-914-0004 and web-based chats on their website. § 39.201(2)(a).

- If the abuse is by an adult other than a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare, the report will be transferred by hotline staff to the appropriate county sheriff’s office. § 39.201(2)(b).
- If the alleged abuse is by a juvenile or involves a child who is in the custody or protective supervision of the department, the report shall be transferred by the hotline to the county sheriff’s office. § 39.201(2)(c).

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DON’T REPORT?

- Failure to report child abuse to DCF is a third degree felony. § 39.205(1).
- Section 794.027 provides that a person who observes the commission of the crime of sexual battery is guilty of a first degree misdemeanor where that person 1) has reasonable grounds to believe that he or she has observed the commission of a sexual battery; 2) has the present ability to seek assistance for the victim or victims by immediately reporting such offense to a law enforcement officer; 3) fails to seek such assistance; 4) would not be exposed to any threat of physical violence for seeking such assistance; 5) is not the husband, wife, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother or sister of the offender or victim, by consanguinity or affinity; and 6) is not the victim of such sexual battery.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE REPORT IS MADE?

Once a report is received, the hotline counselor sends the report within one hour to the county investigation office where the victim is located. An investigator is assigned and will respond as soon as possible if the victim is in imminent risk of harm, or within 24 hours if imminent risk is not present. The investigator may or may not contact the reporter during the investigation.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU MAKE A FALSE REPORT?

A person who knowingly and willfully makes a false report of child abuse, abandonment, neglect, or abuse of a vulnerable adult, or who advises another to make a false report, is guilty of a felony of the third degree. §§ 39.205(9), 415.111(5). However, anyone making a report who is acting in good faith is immune from any liability. §§ 39.205(9), 415.111(5)(b).