



Recognizing & Reporting Possible Child Abuse

Report Suspected Abuse

Under Kansas law, all teachers, school administrators, school guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, school psychologists, and other school employees who have a reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 has been physically abused, neglected, exploited, or sexually abused must report the facts to the individual in charge of the facility where the individual is employed, or to their designee. After the teacher or other employee makes the report, the principal or his/her designee must make a verbal report as soon as possible, and then follow up with a written report to the child welfare agency or appropriate law enforcement or district attorney. The law protects school employees who participate in

making reports, and are immune from civil and criminal liability, provided such participation is made in good faith. On the other hand, penalties for failing to report can be severe. (O.C.G.A. 19-7-5).

Kansas's certified educators are mandated reporters under the Code of Ethics for Educators. Educators who fail to report suspected child abuse may be sanctioned by the Professional Standards Commission.



Preventing False Accusations

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of teachers being investigated for child abuse. Touches or hugs can lead to accusations of sexual abuse or “conduct unbecoming a teacher.” Even if a child’s parents choose not to sue or to file charges at the time of any accident or other incident, the child can do so when he or she reaches 18. There are cases where a classroom incident long since forgotten has come back to haunt a teacher years later in the form of civil charges.

One of the teacher’s most cherished possessions is his or her reputation. To guard yours, take *these simple precautions*:

- ▶ Don’t ever leave your class unattended. Be sure your students understand your classroom rules and regulations. Make sure students are adequately supervised on field trips.
- ▶ Corporal punishment is inconsistent with current educational trends and may not be permitted by your employer’s policy - the school board policy under which you work. Any physical contact with a student increases the risk of being accused of inappropriate physical or sexual contact.

KNEA Tips: Child Abuse

- ▶ If you must use physical force to protect another from being injured, the law permits you to use only that force that is reasonably necessary. You should only use physical force to prevent one student from injuring another.
- ▶ A hug or a pat on the back may be fine for primary-age children if initiated by the child, but refrain from touches that may be misinterpreted by older children.

While details are still fresh in your mind, write a description of the events leading up to any incident that you think may cause you liability problems later on.

Of course, your membership in NEA, KNEA and your local association provides a wide array of legal protection. This includes a \$1 million liability policy* that protects you if a civil or criminal suit is brought against you as a result of your teaching duties.

If you are a member of KNEA and are accused of child abuse, contact your local UniServ Director immediately. You will be provided with advice and support to assist you in this traumatic situation.

**See the actual policy language for specific coverage.*

Signs of Possible Abuse

Physical Abuse

- Bruises, welts, black eyes, burns, frequent injuries.
- Reluctance to sit down; possibly cannot hold a pencil.
- Reluctance to change clothes for Physical Education.
- Wearing long sleeves even in hot weather.
- Complaints of pain without obvious injury.
- Evidence of poor self-concept.
- Frequent absences or tardiness without reasonable explanations.
- Coming to school early and staying late.
- Aggressive, disruptive, destructive behavior.
- Passive, withdrawn, fearful of other children or adults.
- Manipulative or distrustful attitude or child is “too eager” to please.
- Chronic running away, especially in adolescents.
- Lack of expression of anger or pain; absence of joy.
- Complaints of beating or other harsh treatment.

Sexual Abuse

- Any significant change in attitude or behavior at school.
- Complaints of pain/itching in genital area or evidence of trauma in genital area.
- Unusual odors around genital area.
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Pregnancy in young child.
- Unusual seductive behavior.
- Drawings or writing may have strong, often bizarre sexual theme.
- Overly sophisticated knowledge or interest in sexual acts or vocabulary.
- Expression by child or other children of his/her being sexually involved with an adult.