

Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse

As an Illinois school teacher, you are a “mandated reporter.” What that means is if you suspect abuse of children, you are required to report your observations to the authorities. The following pointers, adapted from the Virtus Online program (<http://www.virtus.org/>), provides several points that you should keep in mind in relation to protecting children from sexual abuse.

Step 1. Know the Warning Signs

Watch for people who:

- Discourage other adults from participating or monitoring activity.
- Always want to be alone with children.
- Are more excited to be with children than with adults.
- Give gifts to children, often without permission.
- Go overboard with touching.
- Always want to wrestle or tickle.
- Think that rules don't apply to them.
- Allow children to engage in activities their parents would not allow.
- Use bad language or tell dirty jokes to children.
- Show children pornography.

Step 2. Control Access

- Communicate the school's commitment to keeping children safe.
- Use standard applications for both employees and volunteers.
- Require criminal background checks.
- Conduct face-to-face interviews.
- Check references.

Step 3. Monitor All Programs

- Identify secluded areas, lock empty rooms.
- Develop policies regarding use of secluded areas. For example, staff should check bathrooms before sending children in alone.
- Do not permit children to enter staff-only areas.
- Meet with children only when other adults are present, or nearby.
- Supervisors should look in on activities.
- Make sure enough adults are involved.

- Allow parents to drop in on programs and encourage parent involvement.
- Don't start new programs without school approval.

Step 4. Be Aware

- Talk to your students.
- Listen to your students.
- Observe your students.
- Let your students know they can tell you anything.
- Believe what your students are saying unless it is proven false.

Step 5. Communicate Your Concerns

If you are uncomfortable with a situation or suspect abuse, you should:

- Talk to the person involved.
- Speak to their supervisor.
- Follow the school reporting protocol.
- Contact the principle.
- Call the DCFS child abuse hotline.
- Call the police if you feel a child is in immediate danger.
- Follow the requirements of being an official “mandated reporter” for the state of Illinois.