

There are six DCF Area Offices that cover the cities and towns of Middlesex County. For consultation on a case or to file a 51A Report, call the Area Office that covers the city or town where the child lives:

**Arlington Area Office**

781-641-8500

Covers Arlington, Belmont, Lexington, Newton, Waltham, Watertown, Weston

**Cambridge Area Office**

617-520-8700

Covers Burlington, Cambridge, Somerville, Wilmington, Winchester, Woburn

**Framingham Area Office**

508-424-0100

Covers Acton, Ashland, Bedford, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Lincoln, Marlborough, Maynard, Natick, Sherborn, Stow, Sudbury, Wayland

**Lowell Area Office**

978-275-6800

Covers Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro, Westford

**Malden Area Office**

781-388-7100

Covers Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, North Reading, Reading, Stoneham, Wakefield

**North Central Area Office**

978-353-3600

Covers Ashby, Ayer, Groton, Pepperell, Shirley, Townsend

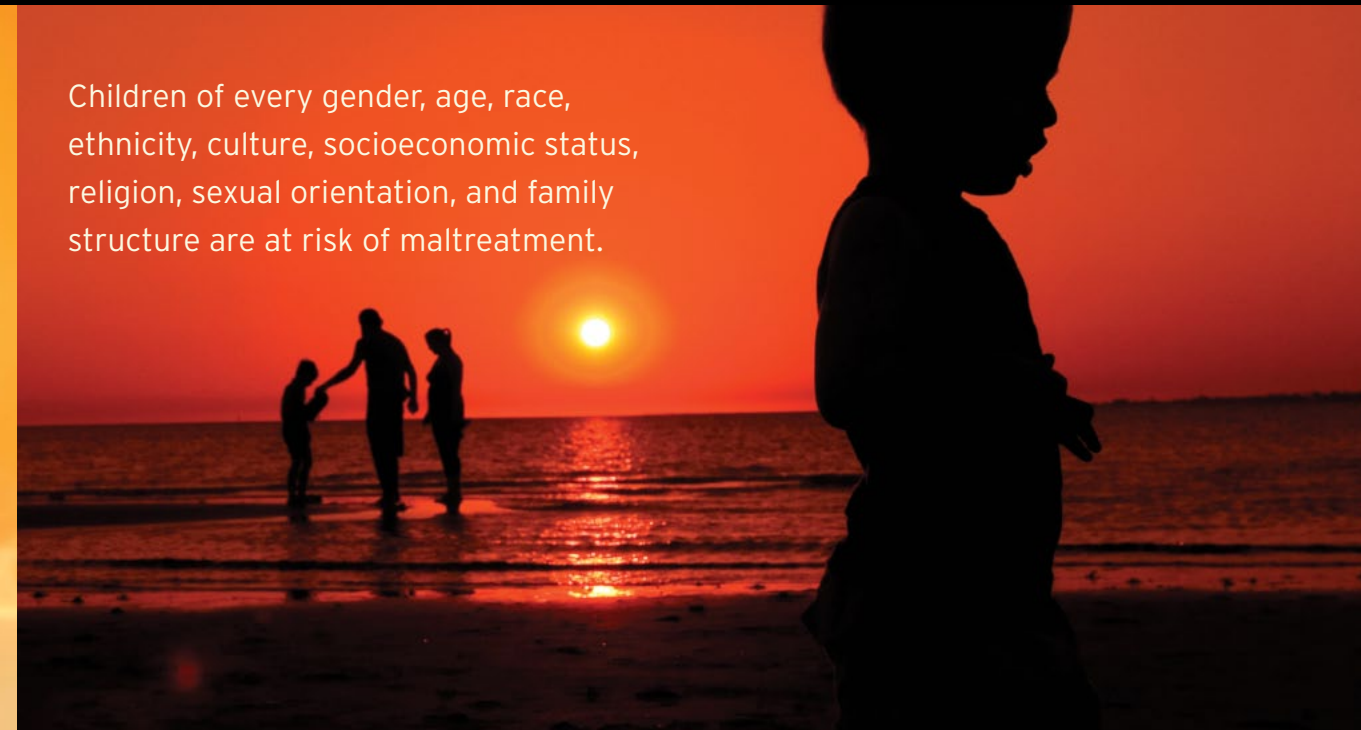


# Responding to Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation



MIDDLESEX  
CHILDREN'S  
ADVOCACY CENTER

Children of every gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and family structure are at risk of maltreatment.



## Why is Mandated Reporting Important?

Reporting laws are designed to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They also provide an opportunity for early detection and intervention, which may help prevent or lower the risk of future maltreatment – or possibly even death.

## Who is a Mandated Reporter?

The Massachusetts Legislature has designated certain professionals whose work brings them in contact with children to notify the Department of Children and Families (DCF) if they suspect the maltreatment of a child. Mandated reporters include medical providers, first responders, law enforcement, court personnel, school personnel, counselors, mental health providers, child care providers, clergy, and the Child Advocate.

## What types of maltreatment require the filing a 51A Report?

Our Reporting Law (G.L. c. 265, § 51A) requires mandated reporters to file a report with DCF if, in their professional capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe (i.e. a suspicion) that a child under the age of 18 is suffering physical or emotional injury from one of the following conditions:

1. Abuse, including sexual abuse, inflicted upon a child, which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child's health or welfare;
2. Neglect, including malnutrition;
3. Physical dependence upon an addictive drug at birth;
4. Being a sexually exploited child; and/or
5. Being a human trafficking victim.

**Does it matter whether the alleged perpetrator is a caretaker?**

No. The relationship between the alleged perpetrator and child is irrelevant to a mandated reporter’s obligation to file a 51A Report. “Caretaker” status only matters for purposes of internal DCF action after the report is filed. Mandated reporters must file whenever they suspect a child is being abused, neglected, or exploited.

**How and when must the report be filed?**

Mandated reporters are required to file an oral report immediately and follow-up with a written report within 48 hours. The oral report should be filed with the Area Office covering the city/town where the child lives during business hours and with the Hotline during nights, weekends, and holidays.

**What information should be included in the report?**

The report should include: your name; the name and address of the child and his/her parent(s) or guardian(s); the child’s age and gender; the nature and extent of the child’s maltreatment and any injuries or evidence thereof, and the circumstances by which you became aware of them; what action, if any, has been taken to assist the child; the identity of the suspected perpetrator; and any other information you believe might be helpful in establishing the cause of the injuries.

**Can I contact other agencies?**

Yes. In addition to filing with DCF, mandated reporters may contact local law enforcement authorities and/or the Child Advocate.

**Protections for Mandated Reporters:**

A mandated reporter cannot be held liable in any civil or criminal action if their report was filed in good faith, was not frivolous, and the reporter did not cause the maltreatment. Additionally, an employer cannot discharge, discriminate, or retaliate against a mandated reporter who filed in good faith.

**Will the family find out I filed?**

A mandated reporter’s name is protected from disclosure unless ordered by a court, but the family may figure out or ask if you filed. You can tell the family you are required by law to file if you feel comfortable, but you are under no obligation to inform them if not.

**Criminal Penalties for Failing to File a 51A Report:**

It is a crime punishable by a fine up to \$1000 for a mandated reporter to fail to file a 51A Report as required. It is a crime punishable by up to 2.5 years in jail and/or a fine up to \$5000 for a mandated reporter to willfully fail to file a 51A Report when a child has died or suffered serious bodily injury as a result of a reportable condition. If a child has died as a result of a reportable condition, mandated reporters must notify the Medical Examiner and local District Attorney in addition to DCF; failure to do so is a crime punishable by up to \$1000.

**Can I delegate the actual reporting to a superior?**

The decision to file cannot be delegated. However, if you are a staff member of a medical or other public or private institution, school or facility, you may delegate the mechanics of the filing by notifying the person in charge or their designated agent who shall become responsible for submitting the report.

**What happens after DCF receives my report?**

DCF’s mandate is to protect children from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by their caretakers and to ensure that each child has a safe, nurturing, and permanent home. After receiving a 51A Report, DCF will evaluate the allegations and determine whether to “screen in” the case. If a report is “screened in,” it is assigned to an investigation, initial assessment, or short term stabilization track based on an assessment of the allegations involved and interventions needed for stabilization. Regardless of which track a case is assigned, mandated reporters are required to answer any questions DCF may have to help determine whether a child is being maltreated and to assess the child’s safety.

**Will I be notified about the DCF decision?**

Yes. DCF will send a mandated reporter a copy of their decision letter, which includes information about the response, outcome of the investigation or assessment, and whether DCF is opening a case for services.

\* For more information about the 51A Law and the signs and symptoms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, visit: [www.middlesexcac.org](http://www.middlesexcac.org).

The Massachusetts State Child Fatality Review Team recommends filing a 51A Report on any unexplained infant or child death as this condition establishes reasonable cause to believe that neglect or abuse may have contributed to the death.

