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(1)(a) 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, as defined in this chapter, or that a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department in the manner prescribed in subsection (2).

(c) A professional who is hired by or enters into a contract with the department for the purpose of treating or counseling any person, as a result of a report of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect, is not required to again report to the central abuse hotline the abuse, abandonment, or neglect that was the subject of the referral for treatment.

(d) 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 there is reasonable cause to believe 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.

(e) Nothing in this chapter or in the contracting with community-based care providers for foster care and related services as specified in s. [409.1671](#) shall be construed to remove or reduce the duty and responsibility of any person, including any employee of the community-based care provider, to report a suspected or actual case of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect or the sexual abuse of a child to the department's central abuse hotline.

(2)(a) Each report of known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare as defined in this chapter, except those solely under s. [827.04](#)(3), and each report that a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care shall be made immediately to the department's central abuse hotline. Such reports may be made on the single statewide toll-free telephone number or via fax or web-based report. Personnel at the department's central abuse hotline shall determine if the report received meets the statutory definition of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Any report meeting one of

these definitions shall be accepted for the protective investigation pursuant to part III of this chapter.

(b) If the report is of an instance of known or suspected child abuse by someone other than a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare as defined in this chapter, the report or call shall be immediately electronically transferred to the appropriate county sheriff's office by the central abuse hotline.

(c) If the report is of an instance of known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect that occurred out of state and the alleged perpetrator and the child alleged to be a victim live out of state, the central abuse hotline shall not accept the report or call for investigation, but shall transfer the information on the report to the appropriate state.

(d) If the report is 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 solely under s. [827.04\(3\)](#), the report shall be made immediately to the appropriate county sheriff's office or other appropriate law enforcement agency. If the report is of an instance of known or suspected child abuse solely under s. [827.04\(3\)](#), the reporting provisions of this subsection do not apply to health care professionals or other persons who provide medical or counseling services to pregnant children when such reporting would interfere with the provision of medical services.

(e) Reports involving known or suspected institutional child abuse or neglect shall be made and received in the same manner as all other reports made pursuant to this section.

(h) Hotline counselors shall receive periodic training in encouraging reporters to provide their names when reporting abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Callers shall be advised of the confidentiality provisions of s. [39.202](#). The department shall secure and install electronic equipment that automatically provides to the hotline the number from which the call or fax is placed or the Internet protocol (IP) address from which the report is received. This number shall be entered into the report of abuse, abandonment, or neglect and become a part of the record of the report, but shall enjoy the same confidentiality as provided to the identity of the reporter pursuant to s. [39.202](#).

(i) The department shall voice-record all incoming or outgoing calls that are received or placed by the central abuse hotline which relate to suspected or known child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The department shall maintain an electronic copy of each fax and web-based report. The recording or electronic copy of each fax and web-based report shall become a part of the record of the report but, notwithstanding s. [39.202](#), shall be released in full only to law enforcement agencies and state attorneys for the purpose of investigating and prosecuting criminal charges pursuant to s. [39.205](#), or to employees of the department for the purpose of investigating and seeking administrative penalties pursuant to s. [39.206](#). Nothing in this paragraph shall prohibit the use of the recordings, the electronic copies of faxes, and web-based reports by hotline staff for quality assurance and training.

(4) The department shall establish and maintain a central abuse hotline to receive all reports made pursuant to this section in writing, via fax, via web-based reporting, or through a single statewide

toll-free telephone number, which any person may use to report known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect at any hour of the day or night, any day of the week. The central abuse hotline shall be operated in such a manner as to enable the department to:

- (a) Immediately identify and locate prior reports or cases of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect through utilization of the department's automated tracking system.
 - (b) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the department's program for reporting and investigating suspected abuse, abandonment, or neglect of children through the development and analysis of statistical and other information.
 - (c) Track critical steps in the investigative process to ensure compliance with all requirements for any report of abuse, abandonment, or neglect.
 - (d) Maintain and produce aggregate statistical reports monitoring patterns of child abuse, child abandonment, and child neglect. The department shall collect and analyze child-on-child sexual abuse reports and include the information in aggregate statistical reports.
 - (e) Serve as a resource for the evaluation, management, and planning of preventive and remedial services for children who have been subject to abuse, abandonment, or neglect.
 - (f) Initiate and enter into agreements with other states for the purpose of gathering and sharing information contained in reports on child maltreatment to further enhance programs for the protection of children.
- (5) The department shall be capable of receiving and investigating, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, reports of known or suspected child abuse, abandonment, or neglect and reports that a child is in need of supervision and care and has no parent, legal custodian, or responsible adult relative immediately known and available to provide supervision and care. If it appears that the immediate safety or well-being of a child is endangered, that the family may flee or the child will be unavailable for purposes of conducting a child protective investigation, or that the facts otherwise so warrant, the department shall commence an investigation immediately, regardless of the time of day or night. In all other child abuse, abandonment, or neglect cases, a child protective investigation shall be commenced within 24 hours after receipt of the report. In an institutional investigation, the alleged perpetrator may be represented by an attorney, at his or her own expense, or accompanied by another person, if the person or the attorney executes an affidavit of understanding with the department and agrees to comply with the confidentiality provisions of s. [39.202](#). The absence of an attorney or other person does not prevent the department from proceeding with other aspects of the investigation, including interviews with other persons. In institutional child abuse cases when the institution is not operating and the child cannot otherwise be located, the investigation shall commence immediately upon the resumption of operation. If requested by a state attorney or local law enforcement agency, the department shall furnish all investigative reports to that agency.

(7) On an ongoing basis, the department's quality assurance program shall review calls, fax reports, and web-based reports to the hotline involving three or more unaccepted reports on a single child, where jurisdiction applies, in order to detect such things as harassment and situations that warrant an investigation because of the frequency or variety of the source of the reports. A component of the quality assurance program shall analyze unaccepted reports to the hotline by identified relatives as a part of the review of screened out calls. The Program Director for Family Safety may refer a case for investigation when it is determined, as a result of this review, that an investigation may be warranted.

History.—ss. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, ch. 63-24; s. 941, ch. 71-136; ss. 1, 1A, ch. 71-97; s. 32, ch. 73-334; s. 65, ch. 74-383; s. 1, ch. 75-101; s. 1, ch. 75-185; s. 4, ch. 76-237; s. 1, ch. 77-77; s. 3, ch. 77-429; ss. 1, 2, ch. 78-322; s. 3, ch. 78-326; s. 22, ch. 78-361; s. 1, ch. 78-379; s. 181, ch. 79-164; s. 1, ch. 79-203; s. 7, ch. 84-226; s. 37, ch. 85-54; s. 68, ch. 86-163; s. 34, ch. 87-238; s. 21, ch. 88-337; s. 33, ch. 89-294; s. 6, ch. 90-50; s. 51, ch. 90-306; s. 7, ch. 91-57; s. 17, ch. 91-71; s. 6, ch. 93-25; s. 59, ch. 94-164; ss. 22, 44, ch. 95-228; s. 9, ch. 95-266; s. 51, ch. 95-267; s. 133, ch. 95-418; s. 1, ch. 96-215; s. 14, ch. 96-268; s. 14, ch. 96-402; s. 271, ch. 96-406; s. 1041, ch. 97-103; s. 43, ch. 97-264; s. 257, ch. 98-166; s. 31, ch. 98-403; s. 4, ch. 99-168; s. 10, ch. 99-193; s. 41, ch. 2000-139; s. 3, ch. 2000-188; s. 1, ch. 2000-217; s. 1, ch. 2001-53; s. 1, ch. 2003-127; s. 7, ch. 2006-86; s. 2, ch. 2008-90; s. 5, ch. 2008-245; s. 3, ch. 2009-43.

Note.—Former ss. 828.041, 827.07(3), (4), (9), (13); s. 415.504.

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