

# Kids Need Schools to Continue Reporting Abuse During COVID-19 Crisis

Empowering teachers, counselors, nutrition staff, and others in their role as mandated reporters during the COVID-19 crisis.



## Students not being in school creates barriers to reporting abuse

In times of crisis and economic instability, child abuse and neglect rates increase. However, reports of child abuse and neglect in Merced County have declined dramatically. The ability to speak up for kids' safety is crucial at this time.

## To report effectively, explain how the suspected abuse has impacted the child

Example: (Child) has not engaged in the virtual classroom in 10 days, but has internet access. I have made five failed attempts to contact parents. Concerned that (child's) lack of participation is negatively impacting his/her education. (Child) experienced physical abuse one year ago.

## Making a report is asking for help and services

If you reasonably suspect a child is unsafe – report. You do not need proof. You are not making an accusation. You are asking for a professional to help a child and their family.

## You may be the only person to act

If something does not look safe, sound safe, or feel safe – report.



## How To Report

24-hour/seven days a week  
Merced County  
Child Protective Services  
Abuse Hotline  
**1-209-385-3104**

## Helpful Tips for Protecting Children

### Continue to let students know you remain a supportive, caring adult in their lives:

- Check in regularly with students and/or caregivers. Provide encouraging messages.
- Ask questions to engage children. Ex: "Give me one word that describes how you feel today?" "How is learning from home different from learning at school?"

### Signs of concerns:

- For students with technology/internet access: lack of virtual attendance or homework not completed over a long period of time.
- If you have had no contact at all with a family after many repeated phone calls/messages.
- If a child communicates they feel unsafe, you see a child in a dangerous environment, or you notice a significant change in a child's mood/behavior.

### Make an extra effort with children who:

- Have a history of emotional, sexual, physical abuse or neglect, drug use, or discussed/attempted suicide.
- Are responsible for the care of other children or live in a highly stressful family situation with limited support systems.
- Require assistance due to physical, mental, behavioral, or medical disabilities or delays.

### Legal Responsibilities and Protections:

- School personnel are mandated reporters. If you have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, you must directly report it immediately to the hotline: 1-209-385-3104.
- No administrator or supervisor may impede or inhibit any report.
- When you make a report in good faith you are protected against civil/criminal penalty or adverse employment action.