The District Policy JLF States:

“State law mandates the reporting of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. The board directs the administration to develop procedures for reporting such suspected abuse and/or neglect, in accordance with the law.”

*Legal Ref.: Child Protection Act of 1984, as amended.*

**Steps to Reporting Child Abuse and/or Neglect**

The district recognizes that the law requires school personnel, among others, to report to the Protective Services Division of the Richland County Department of Social Services (DSS) or to the appropriate law enforcement agency, when they have reason to believe that a student’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by child abuse and/or neglect. To assure the district provides consistent follow-up for each such referral, the following procedure is to be used:

1. **The employee who suspects the child abuse or neglect is legally required to make a report to DSS at 714-7444.** In the event that DSS cannot be reached the employee should contact the police or sheriff’s departments. When necessary, the employee may request the assistance of the guidance counselor, however, the employee who suspects child abuse or neglect is responsible for making the report to DSS.

2. **The employee should notify the principal immediately that a report is being made on suspected child abuse and/or neglect.**
   
   NOTE: In cases where abuse appears severe also contact local law enforcement as the child may need to be taken into emergency protective custody.

3. The guidance counselor shall provide a **Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect** form and other pertinent information to the employee making the report. If the school’s guidance counselor is unavailable, the principal or designee shall call the school social
worker, nurse, or the coordinator of social work services, who can assist if necessary in making the report to DSS. In either event, the employee suspecting the abuse and/or neglect is responsible for making the call to DSS and must complete and sign the “Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect” form.

4. The report should be given to the guidance counselor for proper handling which includes sending the original to Richland County DSS, sending a copy to The Office of School Social Work at mail code #526 and maintaining a copy of the report in a confidential file at the school.

5. If DSS Protective Services refuses to accept the referral and the case is considered critical, the principal or designee shall call law enforcement which has the authority to take the student into protective custody.

6. **No employees shall intercede to keep a report from being made.** Nothing shall prevent an employee from making a direct report to DSS Protective Services or to law enforcement, if in his/her opinion, appropriate steps have not been taken to report the case.

7. **Each school year, every principal shall put a statement of the District Policy JLF in each Employee Handbook.** The Policy JLF is located on the district website under About Us at [www.richlandone.org](http://www.richlandone.org).

* The “Report of Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect Form” is available on the district Intranet under the forms tab.

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**IMMUNITY FROM LIABILITY**

Anyone permitted or required to report suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect under this law, who acts in good faith, is immune from civil and criminal liability. All Child Protective Services (CPS) reports are confidential. Names of individuals making a report can only be released by a Family Court Judge.

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**PENALTIES**

The penalty for **knowingly failing to report** suspected child abuse and/or neglect or performing any other function required under law, or threatening or attempting to intimidate a witness, is a fine of up to $500 and/or up to six months’ imprisonment.
WHEN REPORTING:

It is important to remember that the perpetrator is usually a family member or friend who the child may want to protect. Be sensitive to the child's level of understanding as well as to his/her allegiance to family members.

1. Do not wait until the end of the day to make a report.

2. Provide a confidential and protective environment to discuss the problem with the student.

3. Don't interrogate. Ask enough questions to get a clear picture of the event that has occurred. (Who? How? When? Where? Siblings?) Be careful to ask questions in a non-judgmental manner. Do not become emotional except to show support and genuine concern. Do not attempt to force a reluctant student to speak – do not threaten or scare the student. Do not have the student re-tell the events to several staff members.

4. Carefully observe and note any visible signs of abuse on exposed areas; however, do not attempt to physically examine the student.

5. Tell the student exactly what you plan to do and assure him/her that you will call in someone who knows how to help children in situations like this.

6. Thank the student for explaining what has happened and let them know that you will get some help so the situation will not happen again.

7. Inform the building administrator that a report is being made.

8. Do not wait until the end of the school day to make a report.

For more information, contact the school social work office at 231-6757.

While it can be intimidating to make a report of child abuse and neglect, be mindful that in many cases you are helping a child; that can lead to a better life for the child and family. Educators are mandated reporters.