



Sexual Abuse and Prevention Guide

Whether you are a student, parent or guardian, or an educator, this resource guide was developed to help you know where to find help in the event sexual abuse is suspected, reported, and/or being investigated. Being the support person to a victim of sexual abuse can create secondary trauma, and it's important to seek appropriate help and support not only for the primary victim but for yourself as well. Conversely, if you are the victim of abuse and feel unsupported by the adults in your life, help and hope are available.

All children have the right to grow up in safe and healthy communities that have welcoming and nurturing schools. Unfortunately, statistics point to child sexual abuse as a prevalent and ongoing issue that impacts thousands of children in Illinois each year. Sixty-six percent of sexually abused children are between the ages of 12 and 17, according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network. Most guardians believe teaching their children not to talk to strangers will keep their children safe. Sadly, statistics also show us that 93% of victims will know and trust their assailant. Studies have shown us that one in 10 students will be a victim of educator misconduct and one in four athletes report having been sexually assaulted or harassed within their sport. We also now know that thousands of children have been abused under the care of their church leaders, youth leaders and Scout leaders. These numbers are alarming, but educating adults and students alike gives us the hope that prevention is possible, and that victims can heal when given access to proper services.

School communities with child sexual abuse response and prevention policies in place tend to have lower rates of bullying, mental health struggles, suicide, and both online and in-person peer harassment⁷. Students who feel supported by responsive adults are more likely to come forward earlier about a harmful experience. Parents/ guardians are key in supporting their children after abuse.

Parents/guardians may not know the indicators of a child being abused, and they may not feel prepared if their child discloses abuse to them. If a child in your care discloses abuse, know that help is available. That is why this resource guide was created. Report the abuse by calling 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873). If an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) investigation is initiated, the local Child Advocacy Center will coordinate the next steps and keep you informed. Sexual assault centers (also sometimes referred to as rape crisis centers) are a free resource to find sexual violence services in Illinois, and each center has a 24/7 hotline. Visit the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA) website or Appendix 2 of this report to find where centers are located.

Illinois has a wealth of resources that parents/guardians, students, and school personnel can turn to for help with sexual abuse. The following sections outline five categories of resources that are available statewide, with contact information for local offices included in two additional appendices at the conclusion of this document. Please contact ISBE's Faith's Law team at faithslaw@isbe.net if you have any questions about this guide. This guide is pursuant to legislation that has been enacted in Illinois recently to improve how schools handle allegations of sexual misconduct by a school employee. Please visit ISBE's Faith's Law webpage for more information, including ISBE's Faith's Law FAQ and Guidance document.

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) of Illinois partner with local law enforcement and DCFS to support children and work towards ensuring children's safety. CACs help children feel more comfortable during an investigative process, while supporting them and their caregivers. All CACs provide the same 10 minimum services in accordance with the National Children's Alliance Accreditation Standards. These 10 standards are as follows: Multidisciplinary Team Response, Diversity, Forensic Interviewing, Victim Support and Advocacy, Forensic Medical Evaluation, Evidenced-Based Mental Health, Case Review, Case Tracking, Organizational Capacity and Child Protection. At a CAC, a child tells their experiences to a trained interviewer who knows the right questions to ask in a way that does not retraumatize the child. Then, a team which includes medical professionals, law enforcement, mental health, prosecution, child protective services, victim advocacy, and other professionals makes decisions collaboratively about how to help the child based on the forensic interview. CACs offer therapy and medical exams, plus courtroom preparation, victim advocacy, case management, and other services. This is called a multidisciplinary team response and is a core part of the work of CACs. All CAC services are completely free. A map¹⁰ of Children's Advocacy Centers, along with contact

information, can be found on the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Illinois website¹¹. The name, locations, list of services offered, and contact information of all CACs in Illinois is also included in Appendix 1 of this resource guide.

Sexual assault centers provide free and confidential services to survivors of sexual violence. The services include trauma-informed counseling, and medical and legal advocacy. Staff at sexual assault centers believe and work with survivors. Services are available to any survivor regardless of age, race, gender identification or sexual orientation. The response can begin immediately through 24-hour hotlines and 24-hour response to hospital emergency rooms or years after the assault. Services can be provided in-person or virtually. Centers also provide sexual violence prevention programming to schools, community organizations, and other groups. A list of sexual assault centers in Illinois can be found at www.icasa.org. The name, locations, list of services offered, and contact information of all ICASA centers in Illinois is also included in Appendix 2 of this resource guide.

Mental health services are available to survivors and their families who are alongside them in their healing journey. It is the intention of this section to expand on the mental health evaluation and service resources available through Children’s Advocacy Centers and Illinois sexual assault centers, described earlier in this guide and in Appendices 1 and 2.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline¹² is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week in the United States.

The state of Illinois has developed a school safety program called Safe2Help Illinois in an effort to raise awareness of 21st-century threats facing schoolchildren in Illinois. Safe2Help Illinois is a 24/7 program in which students can use a free app, text/phone, and website¹³ to share information on school safety issues. Once vetted, that information will be shared with local district and school officials and/or local PSAP/911 call center, depending on the nature of the information shared. Call: 844-4-SAFEIL (844-472-3345), text SAFE2 (72332), or email: HELP@Safe2HelpIL.com.

SPIDER is a free, comprehensive resource identification database for the state of Illinois. SPIDER connects service providers, individuals, families, and communities to useful and timely social service resources. It includes detailed information on more than 1,700 agencies and over 4,200 social service programs. The SPIDER link contains contact information and a list of the services offered by organizations that provide mental health evaluations and services to victims and the families of victims of child sexual abuse. All agencies and programs are geo-coded to allow users to locate programs near them. The application is a collaborative effort sponsored by the DCFS, with data maintenance and user support provided by the Northwestern University/Hospital Feinberg School of Medicine, technology resources provided by the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology, and information provided by countless child and family welfare service providers across the state of Illinois. Users can conduct searches on SPIDER by language, including English, Spanish, and Polish. PLEASE NOTE: The information listed in the SPIDER is solely based on self-reported information provided by the respective agencies and programs.

The Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health¹⁶ has a number of additional resources for accessing mental health services, partners, resources and support, including contact information and a list of the services offered by organizations that provide mental health evaluations and services to victims and the families of victims of child sexual abuse.

Survivors of child sexual abuse seeking medical care should visit their local hospital emergency department and the staff will provide immediate medical attention. It may be beneficial for survivors to seek medical treatment because they may have injuries they are unaware of. Survivors may also have been exposed to sexually transmitted infections or, if applicable to their body, be at risk of pregnancy.

Sexual assault center advocates can help you navigate the medical services offered to survivors. Medical care is available to protect a survivor's health and to collect evidence of the assault. If a survivor goes to the emergency room, the survivor can choose to have a physical exam, medical treatment, and collection of evidence process. Sexual assault center advocates can come to a hospital, if the survivor wishes, and stay with the survivor throughout the process to answer questions and provide support. The advocate can also help the survivor navigate the

post-exam process of follow-up care and make sure the survivor is not billed for emergency room services.

The local hospital emergency department staff will provide immediate medical attention. However, not all emergency departments offer evidence collection by medical personnel who specialize in sexual assault services. In some cases, a survivor will be offered a transfer to a hospital that is approved to perform sexual assault evidence collection. Those approved hospitals will also provide a voucher that can cover the cost of follow-up care. The Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Act (SASETA) (410 ILCS 70/) governs the medical care provided to any survivor of sexual assault visiting any emergency room in Illinois. More information about this law, including a listing of hospitals and the type of approved plan they have on file with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). This page includes updated contact information and a list of the services offered by organizations approved by the State of Illinois to provide medical evaluations and treatment to victims of child sexual abuse.

Consent forms may be signed during a visit to a hospital with an approved plan under SASETA to allow the medical personnel to examine, treat, administer medication, collect evidence, and to release information to the police. Survivors of any age can consent to medical treatment for sexual assault/abuse and evidence collection, but only survivors 13 and older can consent to releasing evidence for testing. A medical provider [Note: while this is often a nurse (SANE), it could also be a physician or physician assistant (SAFE) or child abuse pediatrician] will explain the exam procedures to the survivor and will be present throughout the exam. More information about SASETA is available on the Illinois Attorney General's website.

The Illinois Attorney General's Office has a wealth of legal resources for survivors of sexual abuse and their families on its website, including a section dedicated to information about sexual assault. Information is also provided about the Crime Victim Compensation Program in Illinois. Another section of the attorney general's website, Rights of the People, has information to help members of the public learn more about their civil rights. This section includes information about immigration rights, disability rights, and others. Additionally, the attorney general maintains a list of referral resources across the state for those seeking legal assistance.

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) helps to implement a number of laws that are in place to assist vulnerable populations with school stability. Students and families

experiencing homelessness have specialized support available in Illinois schools, as do students who are considered Youth in Care because they are under the guardianship of the DCFS. Additionally, the Ensuring Success in School law was passed specifically to support student survivors of sexual assault in Illinois schools, and an ISBE task force is working on a report about this law as of the writing of this resource guide. Finally, ISBE's Student Care Department maintains a list of legal advocacy resources that may be able to provide free or reduced-price legal representation for Illinois school students. This list includes contact information of organizations that offer legal assistance to victims of child sexual abuse.

Sexual assault centers offer legal advocacy to survivors. The support can begin during the sexual assault emergency exam at the hospital and continue through the entirety of the judicial system. Advocates are available to help a survivor understand and protect the survivor's rights during all phases of the legal process. If the survivor chooses to participate in the process of prosecution, the advocate can assist the survivor in meeting with and asking questions of law enforcement. Advocates can also work with the survivors to obtain civil legal remedies, such as a Civil No Contact Order. The services are free and confidential.

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) include multidisciplinary teams made up of law enforcement, child protective services, prosecutors, and family advocates. Family advocates are CAC staff that help survivors and their supporters navigate the aftermath of abuse within the multidisciplinary team.