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Stewards of Children® Participants...Never Stop Learning!

You are receiving this email because you have attended a Stewards of Children training with Chaucie's Place. We want to continue to provide you helpful information, tips, stories in the news, and other valuable resources to expand your awareness and strengthen your role as a steward of children.

Reporting Laws and Sex Offender Registries

Many of the *Stewards of Children*® evaluations we receive indicate that participants want more information about child sexual abuse reporting laws and sex offender registries. In this month's Never Stop Learning, we discuss these matters and how they help keep the children in your life safe.

State Laws

As you learned in your *Stewards of Children* training, the state of Indiana has a [mandated reporter law](#). This means that if you **suspect** that any child is being abused, then you must report it to the Department of Child Services and your local law enforcement agency. Additionally, if you work at a school or medical institution, whether public or private, and you are in a position where you need to make a report, you are legally required to tell the person in charge of your workplace. That person then has an obligation to report the matter to the Department of Child Services and local law enforcement, or initiate the filing of a report. This does not relieve you of your duty to report unless you know that a report has already been made. That is, you made a report together or you were in the room when the report was filed.

Knowingly failing to report child abuse is a crime in Indiana. That means that if you suspect child abuse is occurring but you choose not to report it, then you could face a misdemeanor criminal charge. This offense carries up to 180 days in jail and a fine of up to \$1,000. If you work in one of the institutions mentioned above and fail to report to the person in charge, then you could face an additional misdemeanor. This means that someone working in a school setting who fails to report abuse to the Department of Child Services and local law enforcement, and fails to tell an administrator, could face up to nearly a year in jail.

Making a Report

Reports must be made verbally. To file a report with the Indiana Department of Child Services, call the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-800-5556. To file a report with your local law enforcement, please [find their phone number and call](#). You may remain anonymous when you file a report, but it is not encouraged as the Department of Child Services and local law enforcement will then be unable to follow up with you if more information is needed. Even if you give your name when you file a report, the alleged abuser will not know it was you as your personal information will be redacted from any report made available to him or her.

It is important to remember that you are protected from liability so long as you make a report in good faith. Therefore, you do not have to know all the facts or know for certain that abuse is occurring. You only need reason to believe that a child is being abused.

Remember...

There are many signs of sexual abuse. Physical signs may be apparent, but rarely so. These signs might include irritation around the genitals; torn, stained or bloodied underclothing; and difficulty walking or sitting. Behavioral indicators may also give rise to suspicion. If a child exhibits age inappropriate sexual behaviors, fears certain places or people, suddenly displays anger or withdrawal, or has an adult-like knowledge of sex, then he or she may be a victim of sexual abuse. Another reason to suspect child sexual abuse is when an adult continues to break safe boundaries even after being intervened upon. Also, if you find pictures or videos of a sexual nature that contain children then you have discovered child sexual abuse and should file a report.

Legally speaking, having "reason to believe" that abuse is occurring or has occurred simply means that other individuals with a similar background (i.e. similar education, environment, etc.), if presented with the same evidence, would also think that abuse is occurring. Even if that information is wrong, so long as you had a reasonable belief and reported it in good faith, you will not be punished in any way.

As these laws attest, the state wants us all to err on the side of caution when it comes to reporting abuse. If you suspect abuse, you are required by law to report it. The worst that can happen to you is that you are wrong. The best thing that can happen is that you change or even save a child's life. Therefore, take the signs and symptoms of abuse seriously. Only by reporting all suspected abuse can we ensure that all children are adequately protected.

Sex Offender Registries

Sex offender registries allow law enforcement officials to keep tabs on convicted predators and permit the public to learn if any sex offenders are in their neighborhood. Though you might be familiar with the purposes of sex offender registries, you might not know how they are regulated and updated. However, understanding how the registry works and how to use it can help you keep your children away from proven predators.

According to [state law](#) related to sex offender registration, those who have been convicted of a sex offense and who reside, work, or attend school in Indiana must register in the county in which they live, work, or study. If more than one county comes into play, as when an individual lives in multiple counties or lives and works in different counties, then he or she must register in each county. The time frame within which an offender must register is quite quick. Typically, a sex offender must register before being released from incarceration or entering into any kind of work release program. Also, sex offenders must report any address changes, in person, to their local law enforcement agency within 72 hours of moving. The same holds true for sex offenders who transition to a new job in a different Indiana county. Additionally, those who do not have a principal or temporary place of residence must report to authorities every seven days where they will be staying. These short reporting periods ensure that local sex offender registries are up-to-date and accurate.

When a sex offender initially registers with local law enforcement, he or she must provide the department with a long list of identifying information. His or her name, aliases, birth date, gender, height, weight, race, hair and eye color, and identifying marks like scars and tattoos must be recorded. A current photograph must be provided, as well as the sex offender's address, place of employment, place of study, and fingerprints. Any usernames for social media, email, and chat room usage must also be provided to local law enforcement. The law also allows for the collection of any other information that the department deems necessary, which gives authorities wide breadth to ensure these predators are closely monitored.

Those who fail to adhere to sex offender registry laws can be charged with a felony, which can result in up to two-and-a-half years in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000.

Criticisms of Sex Offender Registries

Some people criticize sex offender registries and label them as less effective than they should be. As can be seen from the laws discussed above, there are gaps in reporting periods that could cause an individual to be unaware of a predator's presence in his or her neighborhood unless the registry is checked frequently. Additionally, errors can be made that either leave important information off an offender's profile or that mislead the public as to the offender's sexual conviction and length of required registration.

Sadly, no system, even those dealing with sex offenders, is perfect. Though sex offender registries can be another tool you use to help keep your child safe, you should not rely solely on the information contained there.

How to Use a Sex Offender Registry

To use the sex offender registry, simply go to the [Indiana Sex and Violent Offender Registry's](#) website and click on your county. Once you do so and agree to the site's terms and conditions, you can search by address, name, or even email address or phone number. Conducting the search may bring up records of offenders in your area. This information will heighten your awareness, provide valuable insight into where you live, work, play, and areas that may

become part of your everyday life, and allow you to implement safety measures that protect your children.

You may also search for sex offenders using the [National Sex Offender Public Website](#). Here, you can enter search information and, by doing so, allow the NSOPW to search the databases of all jurisdictions. This may be a more thorough search, as it allows you to see all jurisdictions where an offender is registered. It is worth noting, though, that there is no federal database that contains a single sex offender registry. Instead, this website merely allows you to search each jurisdiction's registry with one simple click.

Though federal and state legislatures and law enforcement agencies are doing their best to increase reporting and maintain public safety, the onus does not fall solely on them. We all must be diligent in our awareness of our children's behavior and their environments, learn to ask questions about changes in our children's demeanor, and educate ourselves about child sexual abuse. Also, as you learned in your *Stewards of Children* training, do not hesitate to intervene on behalf of a child whose boundaries are being violated. Only by taking preventative steps can we truly protect children to our fullest capability.

Information provided by:

[Indiana Code](#)

Provides access to Indiana laws, including those related to sex crimes and sex offender registries.

[Indiana Legal Services](#)

This site provides helpful answers to some pressing questions regarding a variety of legal topics.

[The Legal Information Institute](#)

This website provides free access to state and federal laws.

[Indiana Sex and Violent Offender Registry](#)

This interactive site allows users to search the sex offender registries in each Indiana County.

[The National Sex Offender Public Website](#)

Allows users to search the registries of all jurisdictions in the United States with one simple search.

Helpful Prevention Sites:

[Darkness To Light](#)

Creators of the *Stewards of Children* program, this organization's website provides a lot of helpful prevention tips and well as access to training videos and studies. By following the link, you will be directed to discussion about reporting abuse and what to do if you are unsure.

[Stop It Now!](#)

A nonprofit organization dedicated to prevention education and advocacy where you can get immediate help with issues involving child sexual abuse. This link takes you to the organization's guidance page, where you can access resources to assist you with your sexual abuse concerns.

[Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#)

This anti-sexual violence organization's websites provides access to statistics, the National Sexual Assault Hotline, and a database of local counseling services near you. The link here provides helpful information about reporting abuse and what to expect when making it.

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About Chaucie's Place

Chaucie's Place works passionately to ensure the welfare of children by offering evidence-based; high-quality prevention programs to end the cycle of abuse and to empower children and adults to ensure that children of central Indiana have the opportunity to live to their highest potential.