



N.Y.S. PROTECTION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ACT

NOTICE TO MANDATED REPORTERS

Justice Center Guidance – June 11, 2013

This Notice provides Mandated Reporters with an overview of their legal duties under the New York State Protection of People with Special Needs Act (the Act) to report Abuse, Neglect and Significant Incidents involving vulnerable persons to the Vulnerable Persons' Central Register (VPCR), a 24/7 hotline operated by the Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs (Justice Center). The effective date of this new reporting requirement is June 30, 2013.

WHAT ARE MANDATED REPORTERS REQUIRED TO REPORT?

Effective June 30, 2013, Mandated Reporters have a legal duty to:

- Report to the Justice Center, by calling the VPCR at 1-855-373-2122, if they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a Vulnerable Person, including a child receiving residential services in a facility or provider listed below. Certain Mandated Reporters may also submit reports by completing a form available on the Justice Center website.
- Report all Significant Incidents to the Justice Center by calling the VPCR at 1-855-373-2122 or by completing the form on the Justice Center website.
- Call the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment if they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or maltreatment of children in family and foster homes, and day care settings. Suspicion of child abuse or neglect in a day care setting, foster family boarding homes, or within a family home must continue to be reported to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment at 1-800-635-1522.

WHO ARE MANDATED REPORTERS?

Mandated Reporters are (1) Custodians and (2) Human Service Professionals.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CUSTODIANS OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Revised January 21, 2016

Introduction

The Code of Conduct, as set forth in the Code of Conduct itself, sets forth a framework intended to assist impacted employees to help people with special needs “live self-directed, meaningful lives in their communities, free from abuse and neglect, and protected from harm,” in addition to the specific guidance provided by the agency's policies and training.

Similarly, the Notice to Mandated Reporters contains guidance designed to assist mandated reporters, and is intended to provide a summary of reporting obligations for mandated reporters. It is not intended to supplement or in any way add to the reporting obligations provided by law, rule, or regulation.

As provided by law, rule, or regulation, only custodians who have or will have regular and direct contact with vulnerable persons receiving services or support from facilities or providers covered by the *Justice Center Act* must sign that they have read and understand the Code of Conduct.

The framework provides:

1. Person-Centered Approach

My primary duty is to the people who receive supports and services from this organization. I acknowledge that each person of suitable age must have the opportunity to direct his or her own life, honoring, where consistent with agency policy, their right to assume risk in a safe manner, and recognizing each person's potential for lifelong learning and growth. I understand that my job will require flexibility, creativity and commitment. Whenever consistent with agency policy, I will work to support the individual's preferences and interests.

2. Physical, Emotional and Personal Well-being

I will promote the physical, emotional and personal well-being of any person who receives services and supports from this organization, including their protection from abuse and neglect and reducing their risk of harm to others and themselves.

3. Respect, Dignity and Choice

I will respect the dignity and individuality of any person who receives services and supports from this organization and honor their choices and preferences whenever possible and consistent with agency policy. I will help people receiving supports and services use the opportunities and resources available to all in the community, whenever possible and consistent with agency policy.

4. Self-Determination

I will help people receiving supports and services realize their rights and responsibilities, and, as consistent with agency policy, make informed decisions and understand their options related to their physical health and emotional well-being.

5. Relationships

I will help people who receive services and supports from this organization maintain or develop healthy relationships with family and friends. I will support them in making informed choices about safely expressing their sexuality and other preferences, whenever possible and consistent with agency policy.

6. Advocacy

I will advocate for justice, inclusion and community participation with, or on behalf of, any person who receives services and supports from this organization, as consistent with agency policy. I will promote justice, fairness and equality, and respect their human, civil and legal rights.

7. Personal Health Information and Confidentiality

I understand that persons served by my organization have the right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to their personal health information and I will protect this information from unauthorized use or disclosure, except as required or permitted by law, rule, or regulation.

8. Non-Discrimination

I will not discriminate against people receiving services and supports or colleagues based on race, religion, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, economic condition or disability.

9. Integrity, Responsibility and Professional Competency

I will reinforce the values of this organization when it does not compromise the well-being of any person who receives services and supports. I will maintain my skills and competency through continued learning, including all training provided by this organization. I will actively seek advice and guidance of others whenever I am uncertain about an appropriate course of action. I will not misrepresent my professional qualifications or affiliations. I will demonstrate model behavior to all, including persons receiving services and supports.

10. Reporting Requirement

As a mandated reporter, I acknowledge my legal obligation under *Social Services Law* § 491, as may be amended from time to time or superseded, to report all allegations of reportable incidents immediately upon discovery to the Justice Center's Vulnerable Persons' Central Register by calling 1-855-373-2122.

1. Custodians:

- Employees, volunteers, directors and operators of covered facilities and programs (please see list on Page 3), and
- External staff who have regular and substantial contact with the people being served.

2. Human Service Professionals:

Child Care or Foster Care Worker; Chiropractor; Christian Science Practitioner; Coroner; Dental Hygienist; Dentist; District Attorney or Assistant District Attorney; Emergency Medical Technician; Hospital Personnel engaged in the admission, examination, care, or treatment of persons; Intern; Investigator employed in the office of the district attorney; any other Law Enforcement Official; Licensed Creative Arts Therapist; Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist; Licensed Mental Health Counselor; Licensed Occupational Therapist; Licensed Physical Therapist; Licensed Practical Nurse; Licensed Psychoanalyst; Licensed Speech/Language Pathologist/Audiologist; Medical Examiner; Mental Health Professional; Nurse Practitioner; NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse - all persons credentialed by OASAS; Optometrist; Osteopath; Peace Officer; Physician; Podiatrist; Police Officer; Psychologist; Registered Nurse; Registered Physician's Assistant; Resident (medical); Social Services Worker; Social Worker; Surgeon, and School Official, including but not limited to: School Teacher, School Guidance Counselor; School Psychologist; School Social Worker; School Nurse; School Administrator; or other school personnel required to hold teaching or administrative license or certificate.

WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION SHOULD A MANDATED REPORTER BE PREPARED TO PROVIDE TO THE JUSTICE CENTER?

- Details regarding the victim(s), suspect(s) and witnesses(s).
- Details of the incident, including the date and time, location, description of incident and injury/impact to the victim.
- State agency responsible for oversight of the agency, facility and/or program.
- Name and address of the agency, facility and/or program.
- Confirmation that immediate protections are in place for the victim(s), if applicable.
- Any other information that may assist with the investigation or review of the incident.

Note: Mandated Reporters are required to report to the VPCR even if they may not have all the information outlined above.

WHEN IS REPORTING REQUIRED?

Whenever a Mandated Reporter has reasonable cause to suspect a Reportable Incident involving a vulnerable person, he or she is required to make a report to the VPCR immediately upon discovery.

- Reasonable Cause means that, based on your observations, training and experience, you have a suspicion that a vulnerable person has been subject to abuse or neglect as described below. Significant incidents that may place a vulnerable person at risk of harm must also be reported. Reasonable cause can be as simple as doubting the explanation given for an injury.
- Immediately means “*right-away*;” however reporting may be delayed to prevent harm (e.g., for as long as it takes to call emergency responders and/or address the need to maintain supervision.) Staff “going off-duty” does not justify a reporting delay. In any event, reports must be made to the VPCR within 24 hours.
- Discovery comes from witnessing the situation or when the vulnerable person or another individual comes to you and the available information indicates reasonable cause.

In addition to Mandated Reporters, anyone who has reasonable cause to suspect a Reportable Incident involving a Vulnerable Person should immediately call the VPCR.

If a Mandated Reporter or any other person has doubts about whether the available information indicates such reasonable cause, he or she should call the VPCR.

Reporting to the VPCR is an additional reporting requirement and does not relieve the Mandated Reporter of any other reporting requirements or duties that may be required by law, regulation or policy.

WHO ARE VULNERABLE PERSONS?

The Act defines a Vulnerable Person as a person who due to physical or cognitive disabilities or the need for services or placement is receiving care from a facility or provider within the systems of the State Oversight Agencies (SOA).

WHAT FACILITIES & PROGRAMS ARE COVERED BY THE ACT?

- Facilities and programs that are operated, certified, or licensed by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD);
- Facilities and programs that are operated, certified, or licensed by the Office of Mental Health (OMH), except Secure Treatment Facilities and programs located in correctional facilities;
- Facilities and programs that are operated, certified, or licensed by the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS);
- Facilities and programs operated by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) for youth placed in the custody of the Commissioner of OCFS; OCFS licensed or certified residential facilities that care for abandoned, abused, neglected, and dependent children, Persons In Need of

Supervision, or juvenile delinquents; Family Type Homes for Adults; OCFS certified runaway and homeless youth programs; and OCFS certified youth detention facilities.

- Adult homes licensed by the Department of Health (DOH) that have over 80 beds, and where at least 25% of the residents are persons diagnosed with a serious mental illness and have fewer than 55% of beds designated as Assisted Living Program (ALP) beds.
- Overnight summer day and traveling summer day camps for children with developmental disabilities under the jurisdiction of DOH;
- New York State School for the Blind; New York State School for the Deaf; State-supported (4201) schools that have a residential component; special act school districts; and in-state private residential schools approved by the New York State Education Department (NYSED)

AS A MANDATED REPORTER, WHAT ARE MY OBLIGATIONS RELATED TO NOTIFYING LAW ENFORCEMENT?

Possible crimes should be immediately reported to law enforcement. When a report is received by the VPCR, staff can consult with supervisors to decide if local police should be contacted, if such a call has not already been made.

WHAT CONSTITUTES ABUSE OR NEGLECT?

The Act defines Abuse and Neglect of Vulnerable Persons in broad terms, including both actual harm and the risk of harm:

Terms	Examples of Custodian Behaviors
Physical Abuse	Intentional contact (hitting, kicking, shoving, etc.) corporal punishment, injury which cannot be explained and is suspicious due to extent or location, the number of injuries at one time, or the frequency over time
Psychological Abuse	Taunting, name calling, using threatening words or gestures
Sexual Abuse	Inappropriate touching, indecent exposure, sexual assault, taking or distributing sexually explicit pictures, voyeurism or other sexual exploitation. All sexual contact between a Custodian and a service recipient is sexual abuse, unless the Custodian is also a person receiving services
Neglect	Failure to provide supervision, or adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care; or access to an educational entitlement
Deliberate misuse of restraint or seclusion	Use of these interventions with excessive force, as a punishment or for the convenience of staff
Controlled Substances	Using, administering or providing any controlled substance contrary to law
Aversive conditioning	Unpleasant physical stimulus used to modify behavior without person-

	specific legal authorization
Obstruction	Interfering with the discovery, reporting or investigation of abuse / neglect, falsifying records or intentionally making false statements

WHAT CONSTITUTES A SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT?

New York State law also recognizes that Vulnerable Persons can be harmed or put at risk in many types of circumstances. The Act defines a Significant Incident as an incident that is not abuse or neglect, but has the potential to result in harm to the health, safety or welfare of a person receiving services. Examples may include, but are not limited to the following:

- The use of restraint when it is avoidable, involves a banned technique, or is used by inadequately trained staff;
- Unauthorized seclusion or time-out;
- Harmful interactions between Vulnerable Persons that could reasonably have been prevented; and
- Administration of a medication contrary to a medical order resulting in an adverse impact.
- Any other conduct identified in regulations of the State Oversight Agency, according to guidelines or standards established by the Justice Center.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A REPORT IS MADE TO THE VPCR?

Trained VPCR staff will take a full report over the phone or via a web form and, based upon the information provided, categorize the reportable incident (abuse, neglect, significant incident) and notify the appropriate SOA. In addition, the Justice Center will be responsible for ensuring that the reportable incident is investigated or reviewed by the appropriate entity.

WHAT PROTECTIONS AND LIABILITIES DO MANDATED REPORTERS HAVE?

- **Immunity from Liability** - The law grants immunity to Mandated Reporters and other reporters from any legal claims which may arise from a good faith act of providing information to the VPCR.
- **Protection from Retaliatory Personnel Action** - The law prohibits an employer or agency from taking any retaliatory personnel action against a person as a result of a good faith act of providing information to the VPCR.
- **Confidentiality** - The law provides protections against the disclosure of the reporter’s identity, subject to limited exceptions (e.g., the reporter’s consent, a court order).

- **Failure to Report** - Failure by a Mandated Reporter to report suspected Abuse or Neglect to the VPCR is a serious matter and possible consequences include administrative discipline, termination, civil liability and criminal prosecution.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Please contact the Justice Center at: 1-518-549-0200. We will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.