



CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT HOTLINE UNIT

DISARMING THE MYTHS

Because of the privacy and sensitivity of this work, there are misconceptions about the hotline. We offer responses to some of the common misconceptions:

MYTH A hotline worker, and a field worker have the ability to take children away if there is a dangerous situation.

FACT Children's Division does not have the authority under state law to take a child into custody. Under Missouri law, the final decision to remove a child from the parent's custody can only be made by a Juvenile Court judge. If there is a concern that a child may be in imminent danger, a law enforcement officer, a physician, and a juvenile officer have the authority to place a child in temporary protective custody.

MYTH Hotline workers can decide how a call is classified based upon how they feel.

FACT Structured Decision Making protocols minimize the subjectivity. This was critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of the hotline, which is why it is embedded in state law.

MYTH Many people call the hotline because they are angry at someone and trying to get them into trouble with Children's Division or law enforcement.

FACT Most callers have the well-being of children in mind, there are very few cases where callers have ill-intent and CA/N workers are trained to recognize harassment calls.

MYTH If enough calls come in on the same child, the hotline worker will send a field worker to investigate.

FACT It does not matter how many calls come in on a child, the allegations must meet the statutory definition of child abuse and neglect. The hotline has no authority to act outside of the law. However, by state law if three documented calls from one or more individuals are made within 72 hours on the same child, the calls will be reviewed together to see if collectively there is enough information to meet the requirements of a CA/N report, or these calls can be considered harassment if they meet the statutory definition.

MYTH The hotline worker can take physical or photo evidence the caller has.

FACT This evidence can be used to give the worker descriptions of the abuse or neglect, but the hotline worker cannot accept evidence. If there is a reason to send a field worker to the home, the caller can give the field worker the evidence. (i.e. Facebook posts, text messages, photos).

MYTH Parental drug use is always child abuse and neglect.

FACT No, Missouri law does not say that a parent or caregiver's use of illegal drugs automatically constitutes child abuse or neglect. However, the illegal use of controlled substances may impair the parent/caregiver's ability to properly care for their child to the point that the child is abused or neglected. It is not uncommon when parental or caregiver drug use does not also expose a child to educational neglect, unsafe living conditions, emotional abuse, and other symptoms of abuse or neglect.

MYTH Callers can always be anonymous.

FACT Anonymous reports can be accepted from those not mandated by occupation. Mandated reporters are required by law to identify themselves. Permissive reporters (all other callers who are not mandated) are encouraged to, but can choose to remain anonymous. The caller identification information is not released to the family, but is given to the field investigator so they can contact the caller should the investigator have any additional questions, or if the caller has additional information to share, including evidence.