

# **Reporting Child Abuse**

**What School Officials Can Do...**

**Department of Children Families  
Division of Youth and Family Services**

# Department of Children and Families

- This new cabinet-level department was created in July 2006 by Governor Corzine.
- Consists of several offices and divisions - including DYFS - that were formerly part of the Department of Human Services.
- Focuses on child protection, child welfare, permanency, education, child behavioral health and prevention of child abuse and neglect.

# Facts:

- Each year, more than three million cases of child abuse and neglect are reported to authorities in the United States\*
- As many as four children die each day from abuse\*
- About one-third of abused children later abuse their own children\*
- **Schools are the largest reporters of child abuse to DYFS.**
- **\*Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway**

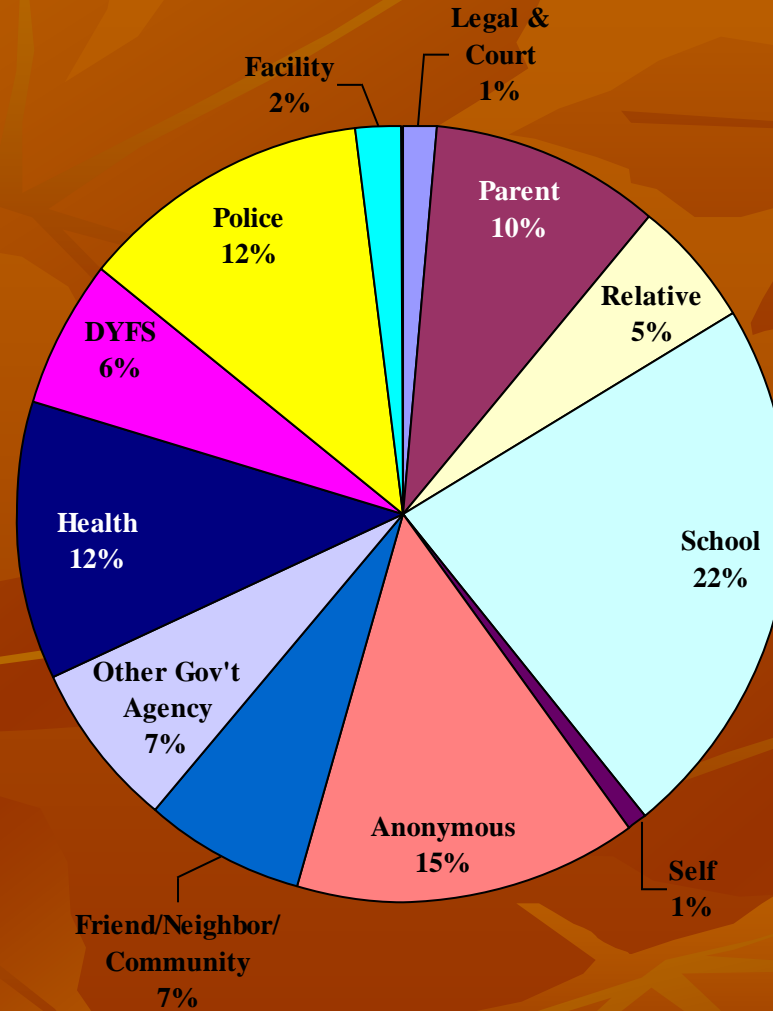
# More Facts

- Ocean County 5 in the state for new Referrals
  - Essex, Camden, Hudson, Middlesex
- Ocean South Local Office is first in number of Referrals for a single office in the state.



**Division of Youth and Family Services  
Referral Sources for All Reports and Requests  
CY 2006**

**Total = 65,834**



Prepared March, 2007

# What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

A **child who is under the age of 18** is considered to be abused or neglected when a **parent or caregiver**:

- Inflicts or allows to be inflicted physical injury by other than accidental means that creates substantial harm or risk of substantial harm.
- Fails to provide proper supervision or adequate food, clothing, shelter, education or medical care although financially able or assisted to do so.
- Commits or allows to be committed an act of sexual abuse against a child.

# What are the common signs of abuse?

- **Indicators of physical abuse:** unexplained bruises, welts, burns, lacerations, fractures, abrasions, etc.
- **Indicators of sexual abuse:** complaints regarding genital/anal areas, sexually transmitted diseases, unusual knowledge about or preoccupation with sex.
- **Indicators of neglect:** consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress, lack of supervision.
- **Indicators of emotional difficulties for which abuse may be considered may include:** aggressive or withdrawn behavior, unusual fears, running away, sudden change in mood or behavior.

# What are my obligations to report child abuse/neglect?

- By state law (N.J.S.A.9:6-8.10 and 18A:36-25) and NJDOE regulations (N.J.A.C. 6A:16-11.1), any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected is required to notify the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS).

# What are my obligations to report child abuse/neglect?

- In compliance with NJ DOE regulations, after reporting to DYFS, any school district employee, volunteer or intern must inform the principal or other designated school official so that law enforcement authorities can be notified.



# What if I suspect abuse and DO NOT report it?

- Knowingly not reporting abuse or neglect can have devastating consequences on a child and legal consequences on YOU!
  - Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse according to the law is a disorderly person and subject to a fine up to \$1,000 or up to 6 months in prison, or both!



# **Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline (State Central Registry)**

**Operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to receive reports.**

**1-877- NJ ABUSE**

**1-877-652-2873**

- **Reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and requests for child welfare services are screened.**
- **All Calls are Recorded for Quality Assurance Purposes.**
- **All reports of child abuse and neglect are investigated within 24 hours.**

# **Call 1-877 NJ ABUSE if there is reasonable belief of risk to a child**

- **Call as soon as possible:**
  - When you see signs of abuse or neglect
  - When a child tells you about the abuse or neglect
  - When you witness abuse or neglect
  - When a parent/other individual tells you about abuse
- **Call early in the day: The investigator has time to plan the response and may be able to see the child at school.**
- **Be supportive of the child!**

# Reports to Child Abuse/Neglect Hotline

- From June 2008 to June 2009 SCR received:
  - 62,512 Child Protection Referrals (child abuse and neglect)
  - 14,219 Child Welfare Services
  - Other 54,628 ( No AR;RI;IR;IO)
  - Ocean County 4,235 CPS & CWS
- Historically, about 20% of investigated child abuse/neglect referrals are substantiated each year.

# How do I make a report?

- All reports of child abuse should be made immediately by YOU by calling 1-877-NJ ABUSE (652-2873)
- Some school policies require that the person reporting the alleged abuse and/or neglect shall inform the principal that a report has been made to DYFS.
- However, the principal need not be given notice if the reporter feels it may endanger the reporter or child involved.
- **Make sure you are familiar with your school's policies.**

# What About Children with Behavioral Problems?

- DCF's Division of Child Behavioral Health Services will assist families with children who have behavioral or emotional health challenges.
- **DCF Child Behavioral Health Services Access Line (1-877-652-7624)**



# YOU SHOULD KNOW...

- Names of reporters of child abuse and neglect are confidential. However, in the event of court action, their identities may be revealed during litigation.
- Calls can be made anonymously, but...
- The investigator may need to clarify information with the reporter, or have additional questions.
- School staff may be entitled to feedback, under certain circumstances (e.g., reporters can be informed whether services will be provided to the family or child involved).



# Just Give Us the Facts!

## Details Make a Difference – if you know

- **Who** - Identify the people involved – the child, the alleged perpetrator, the perpetrator's relationship to the child; parents, siblings, others in the home; dates of birth, addresses
- **What** - What type of abuse/neglect is suspected? Describe the incident. What happened that caused your concern? What is the child's current condition?
- **Where** - Where did the incident take place? Where is the child now? Does the alleged perpetrator have access to the child?

# Just the Facts!

- **When** - When did the incident happen? What is the frequency of the abuse/neglect? When did you learn about it?
- **How** - How urgent is the need for intervention? Is there a likelihood of danger for the caseworker?
- School personnel also should let DYFS know **when** and **how** the child will be released from school to ensure the child's safety.

# What if I am not sure if a child has been abused?

- Err on the side of caution! Call the Hotline and they will help determine if the situation is considered child abuse or neglect.
- By law (N.J.S.A.9:6-8.13), you are protected from civil or criminal liability, discharge from employment, and discrimination, if you make a report “in good faith.”

# What About Allegations Involving School Personnel?

- The DCF Institutional Abuse Investigation Unit (IAIU) investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect in institutions and other out-of-home settings that serve children: day care centers, foster homes and schools.
- School districts also may conduct an investigation, but must not interfere with an IAIU investigation.



# DCF Case Practice: Focusing on Families



- Families must be our most powerful ally to ensure safety, improve well-being and achieve permanency for children.
- Our case practice focuses us on engaging families in a robust and constructive way.
- With this practice, we focus on children while strengthening their family and formal and natural supports to help make good decisions effecting their safety and well-being.

# Importance of Family

## Engagement

- Engagement involves understanding the culture of a family and helping the family identify all potential supports.
- Engagement does NOT mean we will lose objectivity about safety risks to children.
- Engagement means that, whenever safe and appropriate, youth and parents will be included in decision-making about what they need to find solutions to family issues and concerns about child safety.



# Working with Family Teams

## Building a family team has multiple benefits:

- Teams are useful for gathering important information about the strengths and needs of families that contribute to the family's current life situation.



- Teams can assist the family throughout the involvement with DCF/DYFS and help staff facilitate a successful service plan.
- When it is time for the family to end its involvement with DYFS, the team can help support the family's transition.

# Educational Stability in New Jersey

- A child placed in a resource home should always remain in the school he/she attended before the placement while DYFS considers which placement is in the child's best interest unless the following exception applies:

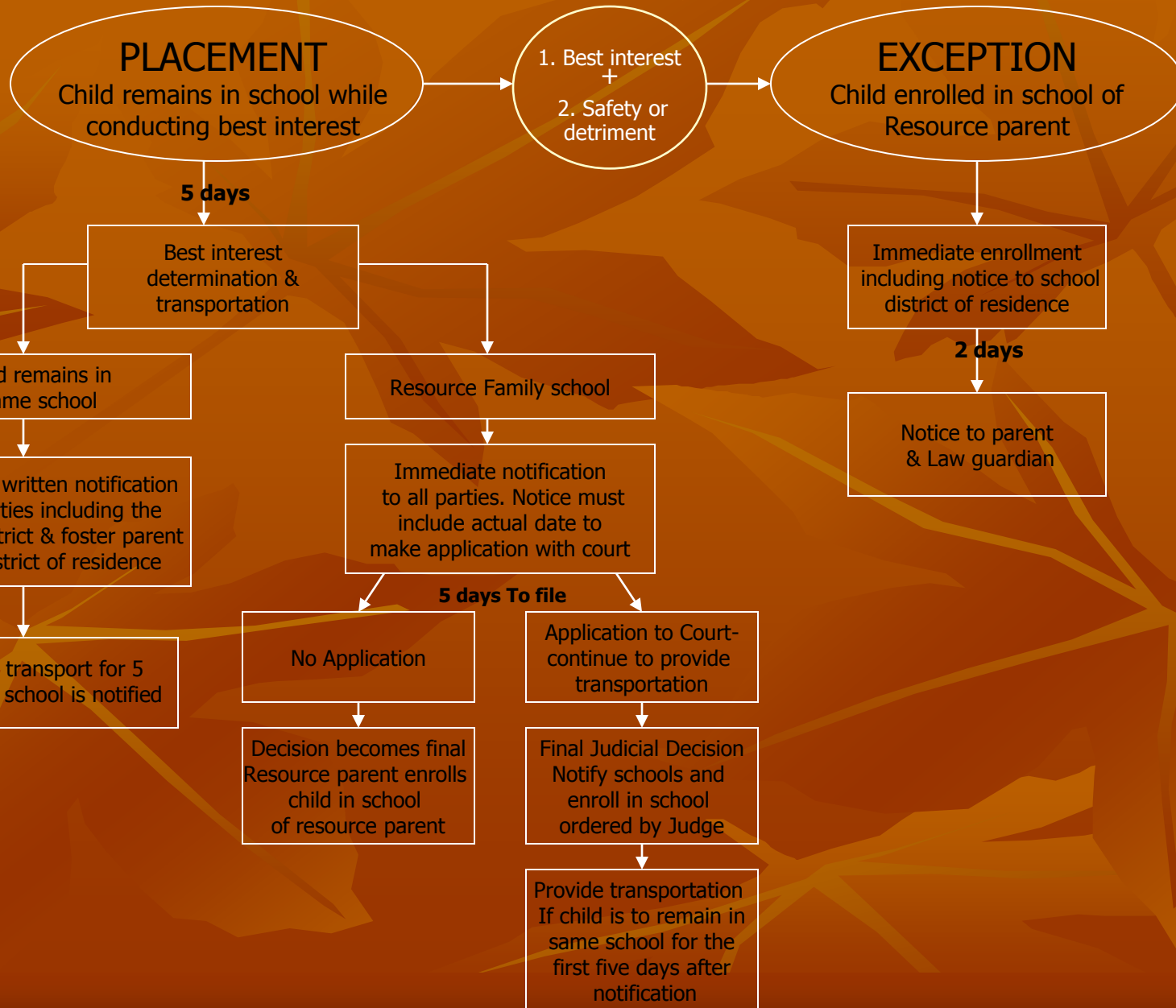
# Immediate Change in School Placement

- Exception - if remaining in the present school is not in the child's best interest and if there is a safety concern or a significant detriment exists (ie; extraordinary distance), the child will be immediately enrolled in school where the resource home is located.
- If making the exception, DYFS has 2 days to notify the parent (or guardian) and law guardian. Notice must include the new school placement (unless safety issue) and the basis for the decision.
- Once school placement is made via the exception, the decision is final.
- Provide notice to schools of the decision to enroll child in new school.

# Best Interest Factors

- DYFS and court to consider (but not limited to):
  1. Safety considerations
  2. Proximity of the resource family home to child's present school
  3. Age & grade level of child as it related to other factors
  4. Needs of child, including social adjustment & wellbeing
  5. Child's preference
  6. Child's performance, continuity of education & engagement in present school
  7. Child's special education programming
  8. Point of time in school year
  9. Child's permanency goal & likelihood of reunification
  10. Anticipated duration of current placement; and
  11. Other factors provided by regulation of DCF Commissioner

# Decision Tree





# **Contact Us**

**Division's Action Line  
800-339-DYFS (3937)**

**For Literature  
609-292-6448**

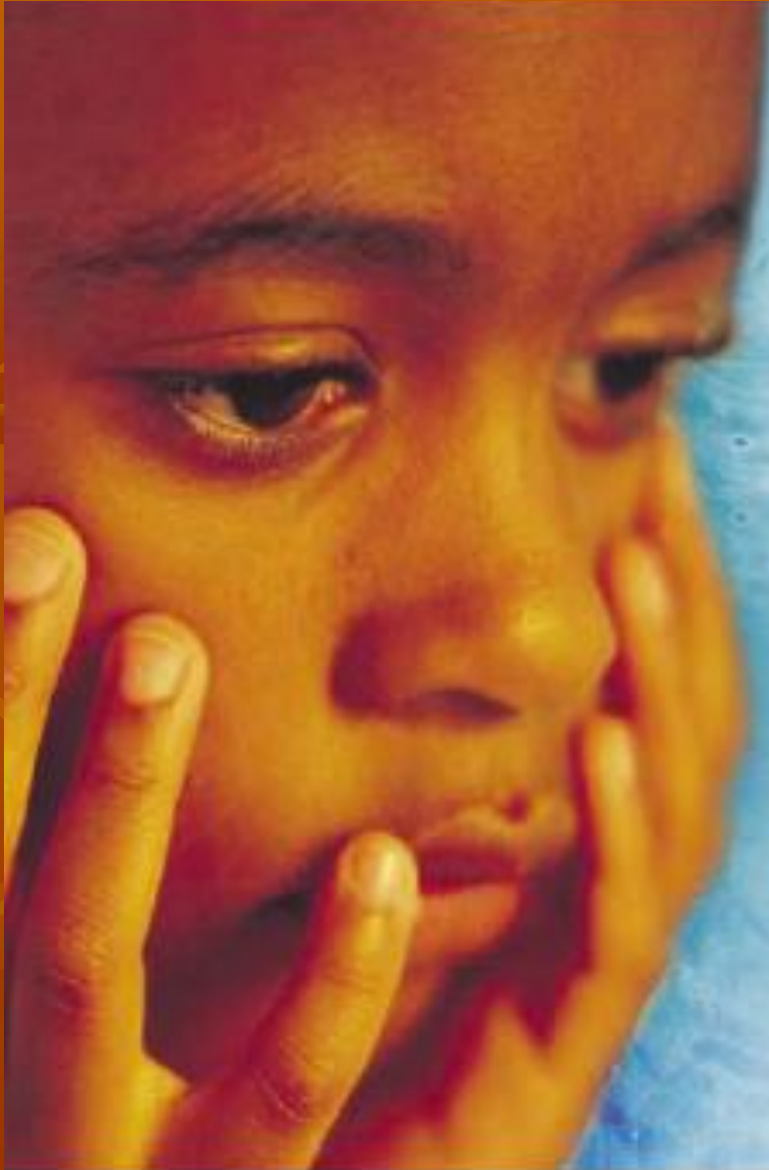


## In closing...

- When considering alleged child abuse or neglect, **remember to do what is in the best interest of the child.**
- Additional information and questions can always be directed to DYFS.



Remember...



# Child Abuse doesn't report itself.

Make The Call, Help A Child

1-877 NJ **ABUSE**

1-877-652-2873