

Mandatory Reporting with Refugees and Newcomers

**Sample Scripts and Additional
Resources for Refugee Service
Providers**



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Introduction

Many refugee service providers are mandated reporters—they're required to report when they know or reasonably believe that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned. Providers must manage the legal requirements and procedures while also preparing their clients for what to expect and supporting them through it. This toolkit provides sample scripts and useful language to guide you and help you practice framing these complex yet crucial conversations with your clients; collates resources on mandatory reporting of abuse and neglect of vulnerable populations, including state-specific laws, agencies, and reporting contacts; and highlights tools and guidance for supporting refugees and newcomers through family violence response and safety planning.

1. Sample Scripts and Language for Discussing Mandatory Reporting

Discussing mandatory reporting with clients can be difficult. Clients may be in unsafe situations, feel fearful, or hesitate to share information when they learn there are limits to confidentiality in the service provider–client relationship. The sample scripts below will help you practice how to frame these complex yet crucial conversations with your clients.

General Best Practices for Sensitive Conversations with Clients about Reporting

- **Use plain, simple language** and pause to check for understanding, especially when having conversations mediated by [language interpreters](#).
- As much as the circumstances allow, don't rush the conversation and **go slowly**. Allow time and space for clients to comprehend this information, especially if it is pertinent to their personal situation and they are already feeling vulnerable.
- Whenever it is safe for you and the others involved, approach these conversations with **transparency and openness**. This helps clients understand complexities but also helps build long-term trust with them, a key principle of [trauma-informed care](#).
- **Review these scripts and guidelines thoroughly before you enter these kinds of conversations** with clients, if possible. Practice using the language, or imagine how you might say things in your own words to feel more natural. You can even ask to role-play with your supervisor or other colleagues to increase your comfort level.

For more information on navigating difficult conversations with newcomers, please refer to Switchboard's [archived webinar](#) and [accompanying guide](#), or explore empathic communication with newcomers through this [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\) eLearning course](#).

Notifying Clients that You Are a Mandated Reporter

When to have this conversation

Mandated reporters should explain this role at the start of services and revisit it as needed. Clear communication about confidentiality and its limits helps clients make informed decisions about what they share. For more guidance on client intake conversations, refer to Switchboard's guide and template on [Client Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Sample Script

"I want to explain how I protect your information. I cannot share what you tell me without your permission. That includes not sharing information with your family, immigration officials, or others unless you say it's okay.

Sometimes I may ask you to sign a form called a Release of Information. This form lets you choose what information I can share and with whom.

There are a few situations where the law requires me to share information, even without your consent, to help keep someone safe. I must make a report if:

- *A child is being abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned;*
- *An adult who can't protect themselves due to age or disability is being abused, neglected, or exploited;*
- *Or if someone tells me they plan to seriously harm themselves or someone else.*

If this happens, I would only share the information necessary to help protect someone's safety. Do you have any questions about this?"

Clarifying and Explaining the Importance of Mandatory Reporting to Clients

When to have this conversation

Clients may express fear, hesitation, or confusion when they learn about mandatory reporting requirements or when they have questions about how reporting may affect them or their family. These conversations may happen after the initial explanation of confidentiality limits or later as trust develops. Taking the time to have additional in-depth discussions helps dispel fear and misunderstandings about the mandatory reporting process. Equally as important, it demonstrates your support of the client and their family's best interests and well-being.

The script below applies specifically to mandatory reporting related to abuse or neglect. For situations involving risk of harm to oneself or others, refer to [Switchboard's Critical Incident Response Toolkit](#) and related resources on [safety planning](#) and [crisis management](#).

Sample Script

"I know this may feel scary, and you may feel unsure about sharing certain information now that we've talked about mandatory reporting. What you share with me is always your choice.

Because I work with children and adults who may need extra protection, I have a legal and ethical responsibility to report when I learn about possible harm to a child or a vulnerable adult. This legal requirement to report is because everyone has a right to be safe, including you and your family.

If I need to make a report, my role is to share concerns about someone's safety with Child Protective Services, the agency that investigates and responds to these situations. It is not my role to question anyone involved or make decisions about what happens next. No matter how the situation is handled, I will continue to support you as long as we continue working together. If something big changes with Child Protective Services' investigation or in your family's circumstances, we can revisit this conversation and see how I still may be able to support you.

This may feel like a lot of information. We can talk through any questions together at any point. How are you feeling about it? If you're not sure what to think about this yet, that's okay. We can talk about it again anytime."

Responding to Direct Disclosure from a Child or Vulnerable Adult

When to have this conversation

Direct disclosure about a reportable situation is when a child or vulnerable adult tells you about abuse or neglect they have experienced directly. They may share information with you on purpose or accidentally. If they ask to speak with you about something important or private, or if a disclosure has happened accidentally, find a private, neutral space where you can continue the conversation. You are now in a situation where you need to gather more information both to report and to help keep the individual safe while trying to respond kindly and empathetically in the moment.

Tips for information gathering and responding to direct disclosure

- **Information Gathering:** Allow the individual to tell you what they want to share and listen openly and calmly. Disclosure is a process and will likely take time and even multiple meetings. Never try to force someone to disclose to you.¹ If you encounter a [crisis](#), gather any information you can as calmly as possible. Even if you do not have all the necessary details,

¹ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (2025). *Training school employees as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect* (Script). https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Training_School_Employees_as_Mandated_Reporters_of_Child_Abuse_and_Neglect_Script.pdf.

call 911, 988, or a similar appropriate local emergency service, and ensure ongoing support for the child or vulnerable adult as emergency responders get involved.

- **Responding:** When responding to disclosure from a child or vulnerable adult, focus on setting a safe, welcoming tone and showing calm, care, and trustworthiness to the individual.
 - Be proactive and **assure the individual that you can handle the information.**
 - **Avoid making the client repeat disclosures.** Sharing once is likely already challenging for them. Do not lead them in telling their story; let them share in their own words. As much as possible, do not pressure them for further details.
 - **Approach the conversation slowly** and do not rush the individual. It is better to have multiple short meetings than to make the person feel pressured to share quickly. When you allow for quiet and pauses, you show the individual that you care about their well-being, you value them, and you have time for them.
 - Try to **maintain emotional balance and respond calmly** rather than with fear or disgust, even if the story is difficult to hear. Consider your facial expressions and body language as well as your verbal responses.
 - **Avoid speaking judgmentally about the alleged abuser**, who might be someone the individual loves or is close to.
 - **Never make promises**, such as that you will keep their disclosure a secret or that things will immediately get better now that they have told you.²

While the sample script below is intended for situations involving mandatory reporting related to children or vulnerable adults, the language can be adapted when responding to any client disclosing difficult, sensitive, or traumatic experiences. For additional guidance, see:

- The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [training scripts for school staff](#)
- Safe Kids Thrive [tips on responding to direct disclosures from children](#)
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network fact sheet [Talking to Children When Scary Things Happen](#)
- Switchboard guide [Family Violence: Core Concepts for Refugee and Newcomer Serving Organizations](#)

Sample Script

"Thank you for telling me. That must have been difficult. I'm glad you included me so that I can try to support you."

Remember how we talked about my role as a mandated reporter? This is one of those times when I will need to let someone know, and we will take it step by step. Would it be helpful to talk through what that process means again?"

² Safe Kids Thrive. (n.d.). *Responding to direct disclosures*. <https://safekidsthive.org/prevention-topics/reporting/responding-to-direct-disclosures/>

Other Supportive Language

- “When this kind of thing happens to kids, it is never the kid’s fault.”³
- “I will need to tell some other people who help protect children.”⁴
- “You are not alone. Thank you for telling me.”
- “You did a brave thing sharing this with me.”
- “I want to help you be safe. I am here to support you.”⁵
- “This is not your fault, and you are not causing trouble by asking for help.”⁶

Responding to Disclosure from a Third Party

When to have this conversation

There are several situations in which you may receive disclosure from a third party, i.e., someone not directly experiencing abuse or neglect, that you must report. Possible third-party reporters include:

- A parent or caregiver reporting abuse or neglect of their child by a different caregiver or adult
- A sibling or other family member who is not in a position of authority or caregiving over the individual
- A community member, including religious leaders or members of shared faith groups, mentors or teachers, youth group leaders, agency volunteers, or friends of the family (though some of these individuals may be mandatory reporters themselves within their professional scope)

When a third party shares concerns with you, follow both your state’s and your agency’s guidelines for involving others in a report—if it is safe and appropriate to do so—including any rules about informing them of your obligation to report. Even if permissible, **if you believe that involving the third party or telling them you are going to make a mandatory report could threaten your safety or the safety of the person allegedly being abused, neglected, exploited, or abandoned, you should not disclose this information.**

This means before you make the report, you should decide if it is safe and advisable to allow the third party to participate in the reporting process or if you need to make the report confidentially without their knowledge.

³ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2025.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Switchboard. (2025). *Family violence: Core concepts for refugee and newcomer serving organizations*. <https://www.switchboardta.org/resource/family-violence-core-concepts-for-refugee-and-newcomer-serving-organizations/>

⁶ Safe Kids Thrive.

Examples of when you may judge *it is safe* to invite the third party to be a part of reporting

- If the third party wants to make a report themselves but is not sure whom to call/how to start
- If the third party has shared custody or responsibility over the individual, and involving them in the report may help them secure a safer situation for the individual
- If the third party supports you making a report but has reservations about the process and wants to learn more

Sample Script if you determine *it is safe* to disclose that you're a reporter

"Thank you for sharing this with me. I know it can be hard to talk about concerns involving someone you care about.

Because of my role, if I learn that a child or a vulnerable adult may be experiencing harm, I'm required to make a report to Child Protective Services so that safety concerns can be reviewed.

If it feels safe and right for you, we can talk together about what information would be shared and what the reporting process generally looks like. You're not required to be involved in my reporting beyond what feels comfortable to you, though Child Protective Services may contact you as part of their investigation.

Maybe you would like to hear more from me about what Child Protective Services' role is and how they might get involved. If you do choose to help make the report directly, it might show that you're trying to support your family member and help them stay safe.

I'm not part of Child Protective Services, which follows up on reports, and I don't control what happens next. My role is to share concerns about safety and help you think through what support might be helpful right now.

We can take this step by step, and I'm here to answer questions as we go."

Examples of when it may *not* be safe or advisable to disclose to the third party that you are a reporter

- If you suspect the third party may attempt to dissuade the child or vulnerable adult from speaking with you or Child Protective Services when an investigation is made or convince them to lie or cover up the information
- If you suspect the third party may also be abusing or neglecting the individual or may be directly complicit in the abuse or neglect they have brought to your attention
- If you suspect the third party may become unsafe by having direct interactions with Child Protective Services
- If the third party is also a child or vulnerable adult and may be traumatized or negatively affected by being involved in the reporting

Sample Script if you determine it is *not* safe or advisable to disclose that you're a mandated reporter

"Thank you for letting me know about this situation. I will make sure to do what I can to help support this person and keep them safe."

2. Resource Collection

Mandatory reporting can be one of the hardest situations service providers face, as they want to support their clients, fulfill their legal and ethical obligations, and attend to their own distress and needs. This section provides a comprehensive list of available resources on mandatory reporting. For resources on trauma-informed care and self-care for staff, refer to Switchboard's blog [A Collection of Resources for Supporting the Mental Health of Newcomers and Direct Service Providers](#).

Abuse, Neglect, and Mandatory Reporting Resources

Mandatory Reporting with Refugees and Newcomers (not state-specific)

- Archived Webinar: [Foundations of Mandatory Reporting for Refugee Service Providers](#) (2025) This archived webinar covers the basics of the mandatory reporting process and explores the difficulties of maintaining trust, confidentiality, ongoing support, and positive relationships with refugee clients throughout the reporting and investigation process.
- Guide: [Fundamentals of Mandatory Reporting: A Guide for Refugee Service Providers in the U.S.](#) (2024) This written guide accompanies the above webinar on the basics of mandatory reporting with refugee clients.

National Agencies and Hotlines, and Corresponding State-by-State Contacts and Information

- Website: The [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) collects publications, research, and learning tools to support thriving children, youth, families, and communities. It also collates [state-specific resources and contact lists](#).
 - [State Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Numbers](#) Lists of agencies and contacts for reporting child maltreatment, filterable by state and territory as well as other categories such as topic area, resource format, and intended audience.
- Website: The [National Adult Protective Services Association \(NAPSA\)](#) provides a forum to improve services for victims of elder and vulnerable adult mistreatment, with many resources for education on mistreatment of vulnerable adults, abuse prevention, and reporting.

- [State-by-State Guidance on Mandatory Reporting Requirements for Vulnerable Adults](#)
Summary of the statutes, mandated reporters, and definition of protected individuals in each U.S. state.
 - [Brief on Mandated Reporting of Abuse of Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities](#) A guide on mandated reporting of abuse of older adults and adults with disabilities to Adult Protective Services (APS).
- Website: The [Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation \(ASPE\)](#) summarizes each state's laws about statutory rape and child abuse reporting requirements.
- Tool: The [National Children's Alliance Children's Advocacy Centers \(CAC\) Coverage Maps](#) provide an interactive tool for locating children advocacy centers across the country.
- Website: [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#) is the largest anti-sexual violence organization in the U.S. and operator of the National Sexual Assault Hotline, also leading related research and public education.
 - [RAINN's National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) Live support specialists are available 24/7 for free and confidential support by phone (800-656-HOPE), online chat, text message (text HOPE to 64673), and WhatsApp chat, also available in Spanish.
- Website: [Mandated Reporter Training Resources](#) has a search function to explore state-specific regulations around mandatory reporting for abuse and neglect of both children and vulnerable adults, with information on free and paid opportunities for further training.

National Resources Specifically for Protecting Children and Youth

- Website: The [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#) provides confidential support from professional crisis counselors available 24/7 in over 170 languages via live chat, or phone call or text to 1-800-4ACHILD (1-800-422-4453).
- Website: The [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#) operates a national resource center and provides technical assistance and training on child abduction and exploitation.
 - NCMEC's [CyberTipline](#) is the nation's centralized reporting system for the online exploitation of children.
- Website: [Safe Kids Thrive](#) provides free tools and resources to schools, child care centers, and other youth-serving organizations to prevent child sexual abuse. The learning center has an archive of resources on all the elements of prevention, including [reporting](#).
 - [Responding to Direct Disclosures](#) Advice on responding to direct disclosures from children.
- Website: The [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\)](#) provides information and tools for caretakers, organizations, and communities for preventing child sexual abuse by educating on child sexual development, definitions of sexual abuse, and action steps toward prevention.
- Website: [Darkness to Light](#) offers the evidence-informed *Stewards of Children*® training for adults to prevent, recognize, and react responsibly to child sexual abuse through awareness, education, and the reduction of stigma. This training is available upon request to organizations and public groups for a fee.

Supporting Refugees and Newcomers Before, During, and After Mandatory Reporting

Supporting a client through the reporting process can be just as challenging as making the report itself. The following resources offer practical guidance for supporting clients before, during, and after a report is made.

Talking to Clients about Mandatory Reporting and their Rights

- Guide: [Client Rights and Responsibilities](#) (2022) This suite of resources contains two tools, a guide, and a customizable template to support effective and meaningful discussion with clients about their rights and responsibilities.
- Toolkit: [Critical Incident Response: Toolkit for Developing Organizational Policies and Procedures](#) (2024) This toolkit provides an overview of critical incidents and a structured approach for agencies to develop their own policies and procedures to respond to crises and sensitive situations. One of several sample procedures in this toolkit is on non-emergency mandated reporting.
- Flyer: International Rescue Committee (IRC) [Understand Your Rights & Responsibilities in the United States](#) (2021) This flyer describes important laws and rights that apply to everyone who lives and works in the U.S., including laws about violence and exploitation and child abuse and neglect. It is available in English, Dari, and Pashto.

Safety Planning Fundamentals

- Guide: [Introduction to Safety Planning](#) (2025) This guide provides an overview of safety plans and the safety planning process.
- Guide: [Promoting Client Safety and Security in Virtual Settings](#) (2025) This guide details how providers working with clients in virtual services can be mindful of their clients' safety and security needs.
- Tip Sheet: [Nonverbal Communication and Safety Cues](#) (2025) This tip sheet, geared toward service providers working in virtual settings, details general nonverbal communication cues to help you identify clients' potential safety issues.
- eLearning Course: [International Rescue Committee \(IRC\) Safety Planning in Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration Settings](#) (2022) This module focuses on the foundational skills of safety planning with refugee clients.
- Archived Webinar: [Fundamentals of Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) for Refugee Service Providers: The What, Why, and How of Safety Planning](#) (2020) This webinar focuses on the specifics of safety planning and maintaining safety when working with refugee and immigrant clients.

Family Violence Resources

- Archived Webinar: [Family Violence Core Concepts for Newcomer Serving Organizations](#) (2025) This webinar explores power dynamics and violence in relationships, survivor-centered approaches in service delivery, and the role of direct service providers in assessing client needs and responding to disclosures of violence.

- Guide: [Family Violence: Core Concepts for Refugee and Newcomer Serving Organizations](#) (2025) This guide reviews the basics of family violence within refugee and newcomer families, including core concepts for survivor-centered service provision.
- Guide: [Safety Planning for Family Violence: Guidance for Service Providers](#) (2025) This guide explores the fundamentals of using safety plans with newcomers at risk of family violence.
 - Switchboard's editable [Family Violence Safety Plan Template](#) accompanies this guide, including a section on safety planning directly with children and youth.
- Blog Post: [Meeting Newcomers' Protection Needs Part II: A Collection of Resources on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#) (2023) This blog post has a resource collection for supporting newcomers who have faced or are in danger of sexual and gender-based violence.

Supporting Refugee Children and Youth through Abuse, Neglect, and Disclosure

- Toolkit: [Teen Dating Violence](#) (2026) This toolkit provides practical, ready-to-use tools for service providers, foster parents, and other adults supporting newcomer youth to start mindful conversations, respond safely to disclosures, and support youth in building healthy relationships rooted in dignity and respect.
- Guide: [An Introduction to Child Protection: Guide for Newcomer Youth Caregivers and Service Providers](#) (2025) This guide introduces the basics of child protection in the newcomer youth context and provides practical strategies for building safe, healing-centered environments.
- Archived Roundtable Series on Child Protection (2025): This series of webinars explores how service providers, caregivers, and program staff can work together to create safer, more supportive environments for youth. It addresses how to recognize early warning signs of harm, proactively build safety plans that honor youth voice and culture, and provide meaningful support to caregivers and staff.
 - Part 1: [Abuse and Neglect in the Newcomer Context](#)
 - Part 2: [Exploitation, Trafficking, and Violence](#)
 - Part 3: [Hear Foster Parent and Staff Perspectives](#)
- Guide: [Traumatic Stress Among Refugee Children: Responding to Abuse, Exploitation, and Trafficking](#) (2024) This guide defines and summarizes risk factors and indicators of child abuse, exploitation, and trafficking and describes how to support newcomer children and youth potentially facing these issues.
- Archived Webinar Series: Traumatic Stress Among Refugee Children and Youth (2023)
 - [Viewing Trauma Through a Developmental Lens](#): This webinar introduces the concept of traumatic stress and describes common expressions of emotional distress in refugee children and youth.
 - [Responding to Abuse, Exploitation and Trafficking](#): This installment focuses on defining abuse, exploitation, and trafficking; recognizing the risk factors for newcomer children and youth; and reviewing screening strategies and practical skills to engage and empower children and caregivers.
- Blog Post: [Combating Child Labor Trafficking: A Resource Collection for Providers Serving URM's and Other Youth](#) (2023) This blog post helps you define, recognize, and combat trafficking of refugee youth, and it offers a collection of relevant resources.

- Website: [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) This website provides a library of resources on child trauma that can be filtered by specific topic, resource, keywords, trauma type, language, or audience.
 - Fact Sheet: [Talking to Children When Scary Things Happen](#) (2022) This fact sheet offers guidance on talking with children and youth when scary things happen, including reflecting, asking helpful questions, and labeling emotions.
- Archived Webinar: [Safety Planning with Unaccompanied Refugee Minors](#) (2021) This webinar discusses safety planning and other skills in identifying vulnerable youth and preventing further exploitation.
- Toolkit: U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI): [Safety Planning with Foreign National Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking](#) (2021) This toolkit uses notes, tips, activities, and checklists to provide practical strategies for Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (TVAP) providers engaged in safety planning with youth survivors of human trafficking.
- Archived Webinar: Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS): [Refugee Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence](#) (2018) This webinar discusses the overlaps between children who witness intimate partner violence (IPV) and children who grow up in refugee families. It describes how to help families live free from IPV and how to lessen refugee children's exposure to violence and boost their resilience.

About Switchboard

Switchboard is a training and technical assistance project helping to build capacity in resettlement services across the U.S. We offer tools and training to service providers, newcomers, state agencies, and local communities to strengthen support for newcomers and promote integration.

Switchboard offers an online resource library, learning opportunities, research, and personalized technical assistance covering a range of topics related to the newcomer experience. In addition, we provide trusted information for newcomers through Settle In and for community members through the Switchboard Community Support Line. Switchboard is implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

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