

# U Choose to Know

## When sex education meets mandatory reporting

As a teacher, you know that if you suspect that a student has been abused, or a student tells you about a situation that sounds like abuse, you must report it to the authorities. Although you hope you never have to serve in your role as a mandatory reporter, it's important to be prepared, especially when you are teaching sex education and might learn things about your students that cause you to ask, "Should I be reporting this?"



### Some examples might include:

- » A student asks you where they can get an abortion without a parent's permission.
- » You learn that one of your students is having sex in exchange for food and shelter.
- » A student says they were sexually assaulted.
- » You learn that one of your students has a naked picture of another one of your students on their phone.
- » A student tells you that they're pregnant and worried about what to do.
- » You hear a student has syphilis.
- » A student says they got birth control, and their parents don't know.

### Explore how to respond by checking out answers to these common questions:

**Q:**

**I know that sexting is illegal. Should I report it if I learn about it happening with my students?**

**A:**

*Sexting is considered child pornography and therefore is not legal, but the law is not clear about whether sexting falls into mandatory reporting guidelines. If you suspect that there may be exploitation involved, you should definitely report it. And you should warn students that they might be at risk if the authorities find these images on their phones, no matter who took them.*

Q:

I've heard that people under 16 cannot consent to sex. So do I need to report a 15-year-old telling me that they have had sex?

A:

*Not necessarily. Unless you suspect or learn that they had sex with a parent, guardian, or other caregiver—or was forced in any way, you would not report a disclosure about these topics. If a student reports that they have engaged in sex in exchange for money, food, shelter, or were told by someone else to do this, you should definitely report this to authorities.*

Q:

What about abortions, STIs, or birth control? Do I need to report these types of disclosures, especially if a person is under age 16?

A:

*A disclosure about abortion, STIs, pregnancy, or birth control doesn't necessarily mean that child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment is taking place. So you would not necessarily need to report these types of disclosures. But you should encourage the student to find a trusted adult who can help them navigate the health care they might need.*

Q:

What if the only information I have about a situation comes from other students?

A:

*You should try to talk to the student yourself before making any report based on information provided by others. You only need to file a report if you have a reasonable suspicion or actual evidence.*

Q:

Should I tell my students I am a mandatory reporter?

A:

*Absolutely—the worst time for a student to find this out is after they confide in you. Even if you have already told your students about your role at the start of the year, remind them about it when you start teaching sex education. You can bring it up during the time your class forms group agreements, as you discuss confidentiality.*

### Stay up to date by checking out these resources:

- » General information on [reporting child abuse or neglect](#)
- » [Mandatory reporting requirements in Maryland](#)
- » [How to report child abuse or neglect in Maryland](#)

Learn more about sex education and the law by checking out the *Teacher's Guide to Sex Ed* online course on [Blackboard](#) and click on the U Choose logo to get started.



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