

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

MYTH: Morrow County Children Service notifies the parent or guardian who made the report against them.

FACT: *Under Ohio law any person(s) who report child abuse or neglect in good faith are protected, and may not be disclosed. Mandated reporters, such as doctors, teachers, law enforcement, and counselors, are required by law to report any suspected child abuse or neglect.*

If you are confronted by someone who claims that Children Services told them that you made a report of abuse or neglect against them or their children, they may be attempting to find out who made the report. The agency does not inform the family or anyone else who made the report. There are also times when it may be very easy for the family to determine who made the report based on circumstances. The circumstances include who was present when the incident occurred, who knows about the incident or who has had contact with the child(ren) since the incident.

The agency, by law, must disclose the reporter source to Law Enforcement if there is evidence that a crime may have been committed and/or to the Prosecutor's office to aid in any investigation that they are conducting regarding the allegations.

In extreme cases, the reporter source may be required to testify in court in either a juvenile matter where the agency has requested assistance from the court to protect the child(ren) or in criminal action because charges have been filed by the prosecutor's office.

MYTH: *Why should I call, they don't do anything anyway.*

FACT: *Morrow County Children Services has rules and laws that they must follow in regards to abuse and neglect cases. The agency and the staff also have to put personnel feeling and values aside when making decisions about children and families and look at whether families are meeting minimum standards, not optimum standards. Due to these issues, it may appear that the agency does not do anything with the families that they work with, but in reality, the agency refers families to many services and resources in the community. In cases where it is determined that further assistance from the agency is not needed due to the level of risk established through the family assessment, caseworkers refer families to community services. In some cases when the level of immediate risk of harm is deemed very high, the agency will attempt to intervene on a longer basis. Some interventions include establishing a safety plan that outlines services or other changes in the household that everyone agrees to in order to reduce risk and/or in some of these cases, court involvement is needed to reduce the immediate risk to that child(ren). The agency then completes an affidavit and presents evidence to the court to request their involvement either through temporary custody or court ordered protective supervision.*

The agency MUST have evidence that the children are in IMMEDIATE risk of harm in order to file in court.

MYTH: *There is a law that states when you can leave your children home alone.*

FACT: *There is no law in the state of Ohio that dictates at what age a child can be home alone. The agency looks at many factors to determine whether or not a child can be home alone.*

Some of these factors include:

Age of the child

Is the child afraid to be home alone

Whether or not the child is watching other children

Child's ability to obtain help if needed

Child's access to help (phone, neighbor)

Child's ability to care for themselves

Length of time

Child's behaviors

Child's medical needs

The agency would like parents to use good judgment when deciding to leave their child home alone. Age alone (other than for small children or infants) should not be the deciding factor alone. Most of us are aware of 10 year olds who are responsible and are able to be home alone for periods of time, , but not all 10 year olds can be home alone. Most of us are also aware of 16 year olds who are responsible and are able to be home alone for most of the day or evening, but there are cases due to behavior or other issues, where a 16 year old is not safe being home alone or caring for other children.

MYTH: *Children Services helps parents, relatives or others obtain custody of children from the current custodial person.*

FACT: *Children Services does not provide services to change custody of children. Children Services may file for a custody change in extreme cases where there is imminent risk of harm to the child. That custody change usually begins with custody to the agency. The agency then is mandated by law to work with the parent or guardian who lost custody and make every attempt to reunify that family.*

If you are in need of obtaining custody of a child, you may contact Legal Aid in your area, retain an attorney or contact the court in your county to inquire if other means can be utilized.