



PROJECT WORTH UNDERSTANDING UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORTS

When the system meant to protect children becomes part of the harm.



CHILDREN DEPEND ON INSTITUTIONS FOR SAFETY, HONESTY, AND ACTION.



1 UNSUBSTANTIATED DOES NOT MEAN FALSE

An unsubstantiated finding means the available information did not establish maltreatment under the standard used in the assessment. It does not establish that the report was intentionally false or that no safety concerns remain.



2 INTENTIONALLY FALSE REPORTS ARE UNCOMMON

Research has found that intentionally false reports are uncommon. Children often delay disclosure, and some never disclose at all.



3 LOYALTY DOES NOT REPLACE DUE DILIGENCE

Concern for the accused is human, but it cannot outweigh the dignity and safety of the reporter, their family, or other children. Accountability is not cruelty. It is the integrity to act on credible risk and keep child safety first.



4 CARE DOES NOT REQUIRE CONTINUED ACCESS

Access to children is not an entitlement. Abuse is often hidden, and one known concern may not reveal the full pattern. Limiting or ending access may be necessary to prioritize child safety.



5 INDEPENDENT REVIEW REDUCES BIAS

When a concern involves someone connected to leadership, an independent reviewer may be needed. The reviewer needs freedom from conflicts that could affect impartiality. Independent review supports, but does not replace, external reporting.



6 TRANSPARENT OVERSIGHT PROTECTS CHILDREN

Organizations can clearly explain who receives reports, who investigates them, what authority exists, when concerns are reported externally, and what protective measures may be used. Families deserve to know who is responsible when a child's safety is at stake.



7 PROJECT WORTH BELIEVES

Fairness and child safety are not opposing values. Organizations can avoid premature conclusions while documenting concerns, preserving records, identifying patterns, conducting an impartial review, and taking reasonable protective action.



AN UNSUBSTANTIATED FINDING DOES NOT ESTABLISH THAT NO HARM OCCURRED OR THAT NO FUTURE SAFETY CONCERN EXISTS.



REQUEST A PROJECT WORTH TRAINING OR SPEAKER FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION.

SOURCES

★ Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
Child Abuse and Neglect Report, CY 2024

★ London, K., Bruck, M., Wright, D. B., & Ceci, S. J. (2008).
Review of the Contemporary Literature on How Children Report Sexual Abuse to Others.

★ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Child Maltreatment 2023

