Washington
Child Abuse Reporting

Who do I contact to report an incident in Washington?
Report by telephone or otherwise to the proper law enforcement agency of the Department, and if requested follow up with a report in writing.

Use the website below to find the local intake number for the
https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/safety/report-abuse
The Statewide End Harm Line is: 1-866-END-HARM (1-866-363-4276)

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

RCW §26.44.040.

How much time do I have to report an incident?
Reports must be made immediately. **RCW §26.44.040**.

What is "child abuse" in Washington?
"Abuse or neglect" means sexual abuse, sexual exploitation,[i] or injury of a child by any person under circumstances which cause harm to the child's health, welfare, or safety, excluding conduct permitted under RCW 9A.16.100; or the negligent treatment or maltreatment[ii] of a child by a person responsible for or providing care to the child. An abused child is a child who has been subjected to child abuse or neglect as defined in this section. **RCW §26.44.020**.

Who is a mandatory reporter in Washington?
Any practitioner, county coroner or medical examiner, law enforcement officer, professional school personnel, registered or licensed nurse, social service counselor, psychologist, pharmacist, employee of the department of children, youth, and families, licensed or certified child care providers or their employees, employee of the department of social and health services, juvenile probation officer, placement and liaison specialist, responsible living skills program staff, HOPE center staff, state family and children's ombuds or any volunteer in the ombuds's office; or host home program; or any person, in his or her official supervisory capacity with a nonprofit or for-profit organization when there is reasonable cause to believe that child has suffered abuse or neglect caused by a person over whom he or she regularly exercises supervisory authority, he or she shall report such incident, or cause a report to be made, to the proper law enforcement agency, provided that the person alleged to have caused the abuse or neglect is employed by, contracted by, or volunteers with the organization and coaches, trains, educates, or counsels a child or children or regularly has unsupervised access to a child or children as part of the employment, contract, or voluntary service. **RCW §26.44.030(1)(a)(b)**.

Are Clergy mandatory reporters in Washington?

Yes.
Clergy are included in "any person, in his or her official supervisory capacity with a nonprofit or for-profit organization when there is reasonable suspicion that child has suffered abuse or neglect caused by a person over whom he or she regularly exercises supervisory authority" **RCW §26.44.030(1)(b)**.

Is there an exception for penitential communication in Washington?
Yes. Reports are not required for information received during privileged communications.

"No one shall be required to report under this section when he or she obtains the information solely as a result of a privileged communication as provided in RCW 5.60.060[iii]." **RCW §26.44.030(1)(b)**.

If there is a penitential communication in Washington, how do you define such a communication?
"A member of the clergy, a Christian Science practitioner listed in the Christian Science Journal, or a priest shall not, without the consent of a person making the confession or sacred confidence, be examined as to any confession or sacred confidence made to him or her in his or her professional character, in the course of discipline enjoined by the church to which he or she belongs." **RCW §5.60.060(3)**.

Where can I find Washington law on child abuse?
https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=26.44.030

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[i] Sexual exploitation includes (a) Allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution by any person; or (b) allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child by any person.
[ii] Negligent treatment or maltreatment means an act or a failure to act, or the cumulative effects of a pattern of conduct, behavior, or inaction, that evidences a serious disregard of consequences of such magnitude as to constitute a clear and present danger to a child's health, welfare, or safety, including but not limited to conduct prohibited under RCW 9A.42.100. When considering whether a clear and present danger exists, evidence of a parent's substance abuse as a contributing factor to negligent treatment or maltreatment shall be given great weight. The fact that siblings share a bedroom is not, in and of itself, negligent treatment or maltreatment. Poverty, experiencing homelessness, or exposure to domestic violence as defined in RCW 26.50.010 that is perpetrated against someone other than the child does not constitute negligent treatment or maltreatment in and of itself.
[iii] A member of the clergy, a Christian Science practitioner listed in the Christian Science Journal, or a priest shall not, without the consent of a person making the confession or sacred confidence, be examined as to any confession or sacred confidence made to him or her in his or her professional character, in the course of discipline enjoyed by the church to which he or she belongs.