

The confidential centre on child abuse and neglect (= VK) is an advice and assistance centre in case of presumption of child abuse.

These specialized centres are set up by the Flemish government in order to inform people about child abuse and to organize assistance if necessary. The assistance is free of charge. Underneath you find more information about our centre. You can always contact us when you have a question. If necessary, we provide an interpreter to enable you to tell your own story.

What does child abuse mean ?

Child abuse and neglect concern any situation of a child being victim of physical, psychological or sexual violence, in a passive or an active way. There are different kinds of child abuse:

- Physical abuse:
Hitting, kicking, beating, inflicting burns and cuts on someone,
- Emotional abuse:
Tormenting, belittling, cursing, imposing impossible demands, being witness of partner violence
- (emotional/physical)neglect:
Lack of sufficient attention, love, food, clothes, (medical)care,...
- Sexual abuse:
Involving or forcing a child to sexual acts, not corresponding with his age or development
e.g.: feel up, having sex, showing genitals, watching porn, observing, playing 'games', rude language,

Who can contact us ?

- Any minor who is/was involved in a situation of violence, neglect or abuse
- Anyone who has a suspicion or worries about child abuse can contact us for advice or assistance

Social workers (doctors, teachers,...) as well as parents, neighbours, acquaintances, ... can consult us.

What can a confidential centre on child abuse and neglect do ?

- Be a reporting station for any situation of child abuse
- Deliver information about child abuse
- Offer advice about the diagnosis and how to supply assistance
- Coordinate the assistance
- Offer and organize the assistance

What's the procedure if you want to report or discuss a situation?

One of our social workers will respond your call. You can express your concerns to this person. One phonecall sometimes can be sufficient. But it's also possible we invite you for a more elaborate talk to find out a possible solution. We consider together the expectations, the seriousness of the situation and what we can offer as a team.

How can you report to our centre ?

- By personal contact
- By phone
- By letter
- By email

Together with the informant, we take our time in order to know better the situation. We prefer to have personal contact or by phone. As a matter of course your details are dealt with confidentially and only used like we agreed.

Where can you make a reporting ?

Each Flemish province and Brussels has its own confidential centre on child abuse and neglect, that is recognized by the Flemish government. The contact details of each centre you find under "Where do you find us ?"

When can you make a reporting ?

You can contact us from Monday till Friday from 9am till 5pm. In case of urgency outside ordinary business hours, phone permanence is supplied.

What happens with your reporting ?

When a situation is mentioned, the VK tries to make an assessment of the problem of the child or adolescent. The VK tries to get an idea of the seriousness and the dimension. This happens in different ways:

- By contacting other social workers: a "personal" doctor, a centre for student assistance, services concerning child welfare. The information reported is bound by professional secrecy.
- By means of a conversation with the child or adolescent, his parents or other directly related people

In each situation is considered which steps have to be taken to gather more information about a child and his situation. Sometimes the information is so alarming, that we have to interfere urgently. The VK then tries to organize a conversation on the same day with the parents, child or other people concerned. When the child's safety cannot be guaranteed, other steps are considered, such as a mentioning to the office of the public prosecutor in juvenile affairs.

What happens if you receive an invitation to have a personal talk ?

When the confidential centre wants to examine further a reporting of child abuse, the parents and/or other directly related people are often invited for a personal talk with us. The invitation happens mostly by letter. This letter often evokes bad and anxious reactions. However, we don't want to punish or judge parents, but we want to get an idea of the problems and to organize help if necessary. The social workers are bound by professional secrecy which enables an open conversation. People are asked to participate voluntarily to this.

What's the difference between justice and the confidential centre?

Justice and assistance have their own way of working aimed at the child's safety and wellness. It's our duty to realize this by way of assistance. We try to make the violent situation discussible and start assistance that makes change possible. The centre tries to reach these aims without interference of justice. The confidential centre doesn't make part of police or youth tribunal.

Our assistance in short:

- The child's interest and safety take priority
- Confidentially and discretely
- Free of charge
- More disciplines offering assistance can be involved