



2012 Report On Child Protection in Vermont



Annual Report for Calendar Year 2012

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Message from the DCF Commissioner

While Vermont is one of the safest and healthiest states in the nation for children, child maltreatment remains a serious problem. As you read this report, consider this: the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) receives a report of suspected child abuse and neglect about once every 33 minutes.

Now think about the children behind the numbers. What will become of them? How will they deal with the trauma they experienced? Will they get the supports they need? Will they reach their fullest potential?

Research tells us that child abuse and neglect has a serious and long-lasting impact on children—affecting their development, ability to learn, and future. Children who have been abused and neglected are more likely than other children to experience suicide, depression, poverty, illness, incarceration, and unwanted pregnancy. According to Vermont data, 40% of teens who were in state custody during the last decade were incarcerated or on public assistance by the age of 23. The data is sobering. The cost to children and society is staggering.

DCF is committed to preventing and stopping abuse, making sure children are safe, and providing services that strengthen families and address the impact of trauma on children. Our efforts, however, are only part of the solution.

Preventing child abuse and protecting children is a shared community responsibility. Each one of us — as individuals, parents, and community members — has a moral imperative to protect children and do whatever we can to help them succeed as adults.

This report, issued annually, helps focus attention on this important issue. As you read it, ask yourself these fundamental questions: How are the children? What can *I do* to make Vermont a better place for them to grow up?

Remember, it is easier to build a child than it is to repair an adult.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yacovone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dave" and last name "Yacovone" clearly legible.

Dave Yacovone, DCF Commissioner

Message from the Family Services Deputy Commissioner

The Family Services Division of DCF is Vermont's child welfare and youth justice agency. We are responsible for making sure children and youth are safe, their basic needs are met, and families are supported to achieve these goals.

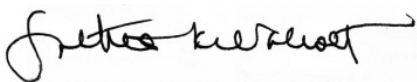
Our work is guided by these core values:

- *Safety*: Children are safe from abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.
- *Permanence*: Children have nurturing families who are legally committed to them and lasting relationships with other caring adults.
- *Well-Being*: Children do well in their families, schools, and communities.
- *Law Abidance*: Youth are free from delinquent behavior.

We believe:

- Children have the right to be safe;
- Families have both challenges and strengths;
- Everyone can grow and change;
- Families know their situations best;
- Children should only be separated from their parents/guardians when it's necessary to keep them or their communities safe;
- When children need out-of-home care, we should first consider extended family members and friends;
- Success is more likely when we involve relatives and friends in the process — early on;
- For real change to occur, we must work cooperatively with families, share responsibility, and hold each other accountable; and
- Each family's cultural, ethnic, and spiritual diversity deserves respect.

We want every family to succeed, and we engage with and support parents and extended family members to make that happen.



Cindy Walcott, Family Services Deputy Commissioner

Introduction

The Family Services Division of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) responds to reports of child abuse and neglect, evaluates children's safety through investigations and assessments, and works with families and community partners to make sure children are safe. The ultimate goal is for children to live in safe, supportive, and healthy environments where they can grow and thrive.

This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2012.

Reports to the Child Protection Line

The toll-free Child Protection Line (1-800-649-5285) is available statewide—24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- ➔ In 2012, we received 15,760 calls about suspected child abuse and neglect, an increase of 1.5% over 2011.
- ➔ Since 2008, calls about suspected child abuse and neglect have risen by more than 20%.

Reports to the Child Protection Line, 2008 to 2012		
Year	Total Reports ¹	Annual Change
2008	13,434	4.7%
2009	14,488	7.9%
2010	15,379	6.1%
2011	15,526	1.0%
2012	15,760	1.5%

¹ One report may involve more than one child. Similarly, we may receive multiple reports about the same child or situation; these may be counted separately.

Child/Family Factors Identified by Reporters in 2012

The following table identifies factors in both children and families that were identified by reporters when they contacted the Child Protection Line in 2012. While some factors may not have been validated during ensuing interventions, this list helps us better understand the difficult challenges families face.

Knowing about these factors can help supervisors and social workers plan effective intervention strategies. For example, if a language barrier is identified, a worker may arrange for an interpreter. If domestic violence is identified, a worker may consult with our domestic violence coordinator to plan interviews in a way that does not increase the risk to an adult victim.

Family Factors	Number	Percent
Cognitive/Physical Disabilities	636	4.0%
Domestic Violence	2,331	14.8%
Financial Stress	2,066	13.1%
Mental Health Issues	1,836	11.6%
Substance Abuse	4,555	28.9%

Child Factors	Number	Percent
Challenging Behavior	2,605	16.5%
Cognitive/Physical Disabilities	1,322	8.4%
Mental Health Issues	1,922	12.2%
Speech/Language Barriers/Hearing Problems	671	4.3%
Substance Abuse	470	2.9%

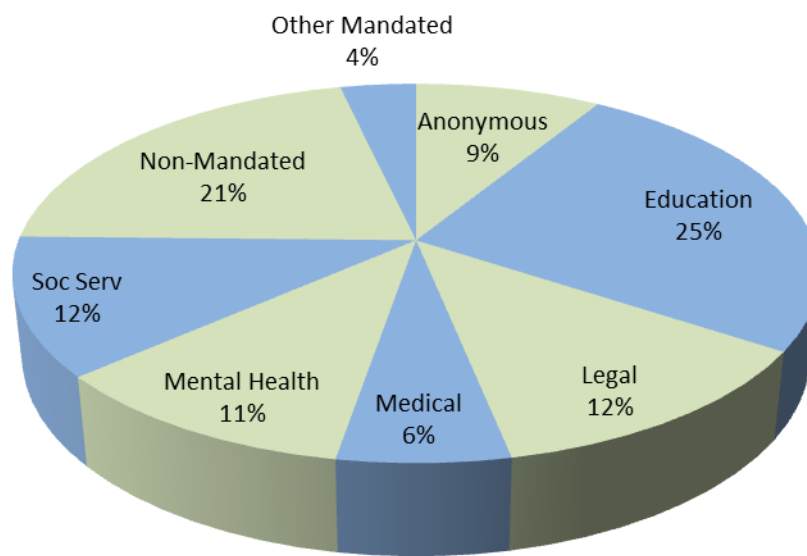
Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect

While anyone can voluntarily report suspected child abuse and neglect, certain people, called mandated reporters, are required by Vermont law to do so (Title 33, Chapter 49). What's more, they must report their suspicions to Family Services *within 24 hours*.

Mandated Reporters in Vermont

- Chiropractors, dentists, emergency medical personnel, licensed practical nurses, medical examiners, mental health professionals, osteopaths, pharmacists, physicians, physicians' assistants, psychologists, registered nurses, surgeons, and any other health care providers;
- Hospital administrators, interns, and resident physicians in any hospital in the state;
- School superintendents, principals, headmasters (independent schools), teachers, librarians, guidance counselors, and other individuals regularly employed by, or contracted and paid by, school districts or independent schools to provide student services;
- Childcare workers, police officers, probation officers, social workers, and clergy members;
- Residential and non-residential camp administrators, counselors, and owners; and
- Employees, contractors, and grantees of the Agency of Human Services who have contact with clients.

Reports Alleging Child Abuse and Neglect, by Reporter Type (2012)



What Happens to the Reports Received

1. A supervisor reviews the report.

A supervisor reviews each report to determine whether it can be accepted for intervention — according to Vermont law and departmental policy. The supervisor considers several factors, including:

- The age of the alleged victim;
- The alleged abuser's relationship to the child; and
- The nature of the allegation.

If the report *is not accepted*, the family may be referred to services in the community but no further action is taken by the Family Services Division.

2. If the report *is accepted*, the supervisor determines the appropriate intervention.

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention: assessment and investigation. The preferred intervention is typically assessment; however, an investigation is mandatory in certain situations, including when a report alleges that:

- A child was sexually abused by an adult (18+).
- A child is at risk of harm for sexual abuse by an adult.
- Something a *person responsible for a child's welfare* (see definitions on page 22) did or didn't do resulted in a child's death or serious injury to a child.
- A person responsible for a child's welfare abandoned a child, maliciously punished a child, physically abused a child under three or a child of any age who is non-verbal or nonambulatory, or allowed a child to be exposed to methamphetamine production.

Once the appropriate child safety intervention is determined, a social worker is assigned to the case and the selected intervention begins — usually within 72 hours, sooner if a child is in imminent danger.

Assessment to Investigation Track

A supervisor may approve changing a child abuse assessment to a child abuse investigation if it appears necessary to ensure the child's safety. In 2012, 28 interventions that began as child abuse assessments were later changed to the investigation track.

3. At the conclusion of the intervention, the supervisor determines the outcome based on the information gathered.

The possible outcomes are described below.

a) Assessments:

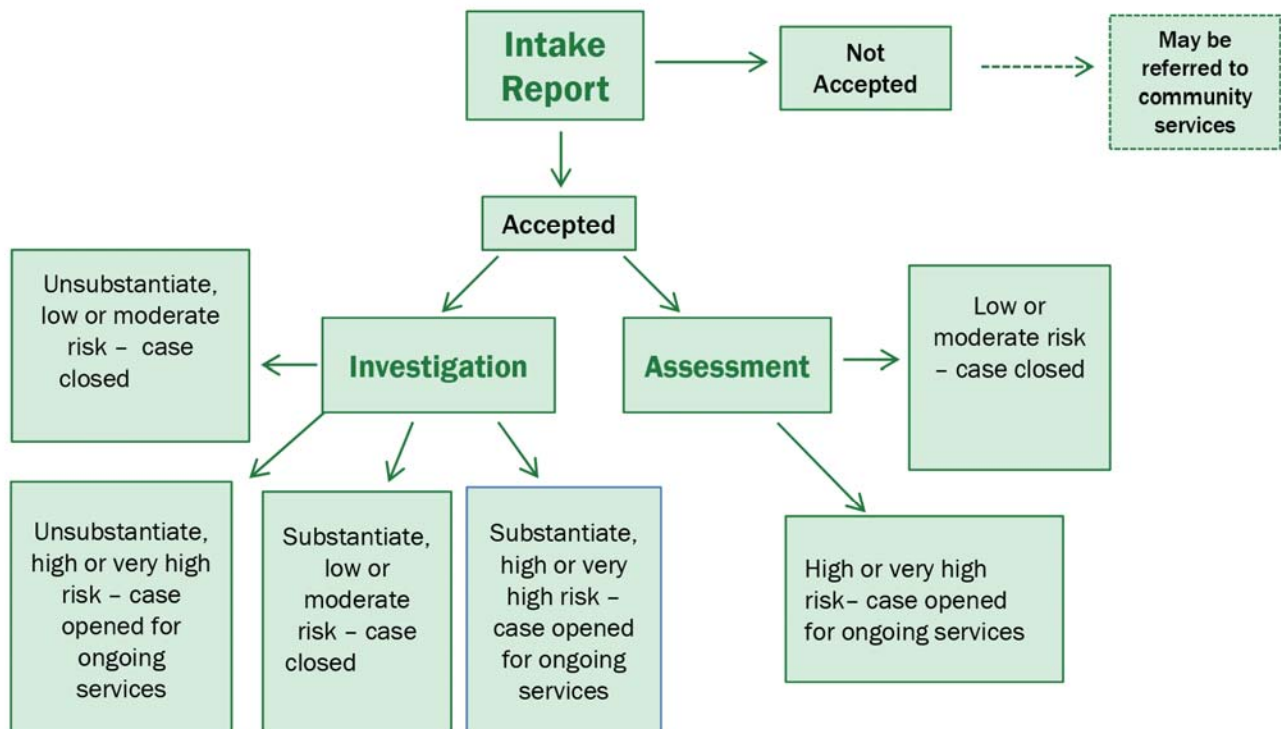
Assessments result in a determination of the need for ongoing services based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment. If the assessed risk is high or very high, Family Services opens a case to provide the family with ongoing services and develops a family support case plan to address the identified risks.

b) Investigations:

Investigation results in both:

- i. A determination of the need for ongoing services based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment. If the assessed risk is high or very high, Family Services opens a case to provide the family with ongoing services and develops a family support case plan to address the identified risks; and
- ii. A formal determination of whether the reported abuse or neglect occurred. The report is *substantiated* if the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected. Otherwise, the report is *unsubstantiated*. Information about substantiated persons is entered into Vermont's Child Protection Registry (see page 21 for more details about the Registry).

FSD Case Flowchart



Statewide Trends, 2008 to 2012

Traditionally, the only available response to an accepted report of child abuse or neglect was a child abuse investigation. In 2008, however, Vermont enacted legislation to implement differential response and starting on July 1, 2009, a child abuse assessment was available as an alternative response to a report of child maltreatment.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Reports To Vermont's Child Protection Line	13,434	14,488	15,379	15,526	15,760
Reports Accepted For:					
1. Child Abuse Investigation	2,896	2,831	2,465	2,591	2,536
2. Child Abuse Assessment ¹	-	638	1,058	1,192	1,119
3. Family Assessment	630	1,021	1,078	1,128	1,044
Total Reports Accepted For Intervention	3,526	4,490	4,601	4,911	4,699

¹ This intervention was not available prior to July 1, 2009.

Reports Accepted in 2011 & 2012 — by Intervention & District¹

District	Child Abuse Investigations		Child Abuse Assessments		Family Assessments		Total Reports Accepted for Intervention	
	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012
Barre	319	319	149	118	131	123	599	560
Bennington	151	162	75	92	64	78	290	332
Brattleboro	99	140	71	63	82	63	252	266
Burlington	399	416	248	201	161	162	808	779
Hartford	151	163	65	78	68	76	284	317
Middlebury	154	112	47	55	48	35	249	202
Morrisville	148	130	74	45	47	37	269	212
Newport	147	147	65	73	70	61	282	281
Rutland	276	239	107	101	142	100	525	440
Springfield	214	199	85	92	139	144	438	435
St. Albans	310	299	120	129	126	117	556	545
St. Johnsbury	138	133	67	63	49	45	254	241
Out of State	85	77	19	9	1	3	105	89
Statewide	2,591	2,536	1,192	1,119	1,128	1,044	4,911	4,699

¹ Means the district where the child's caregiver lives.

Outcomes of Investigations in 2011 & 2012 — by District¹

In 2012, we conducted 2,564 investigations: 2,536 that began as investigations and another 28 that began as assessments but were later changed to investigations. Of the 2,564 investigations conducted, 626 were substantiated² and 529 were opened for services³ based on the assessed risk of future maltreatment.

At the writing of this report, 45 investigations are still pending. This will affect the data related to the outcomes of investigations on pages 14 to 20.

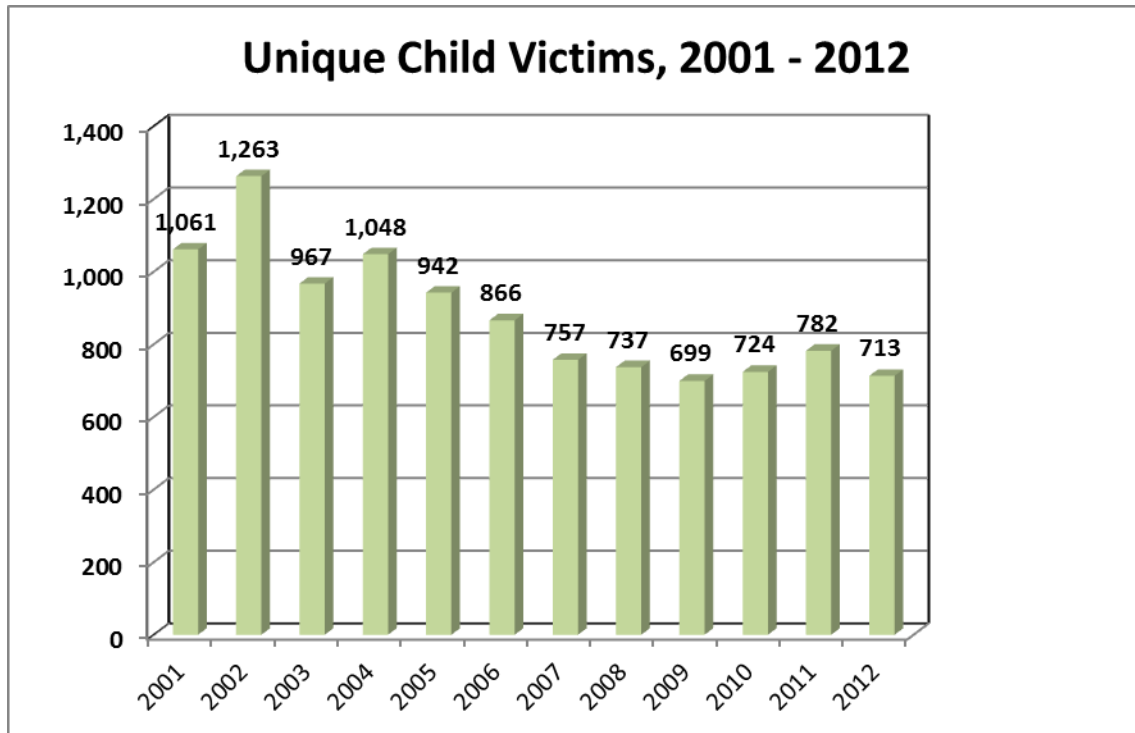
	Investigations Conducted		Substantiated		Case Open for Services	
District	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012
Barre	324	323	87	82	111	48
Bennington	152	164	35	35	48	43
Brattleboro	101	140	28	31	28	19
Burlington	402	418	79	79	100	107
Hartford	152	164	37	39	22	32
Middlebury	156	113	56	32	31	30
Morrisville	151	131	43	36	40	24
Newport	151	150	43	39	22	20
Rutland	279	240	51	25	63	38
Springfield	221	207	66	65	39	58
St. Albans	317	304	107	95	80	62
St. Johnsbury	140	133	29	38	39	45
Out of State	85	77	29	30	6	3
Statewide	2,631	2,564	690	626	629	529

¹ Means the district where the child's caregiver lives.

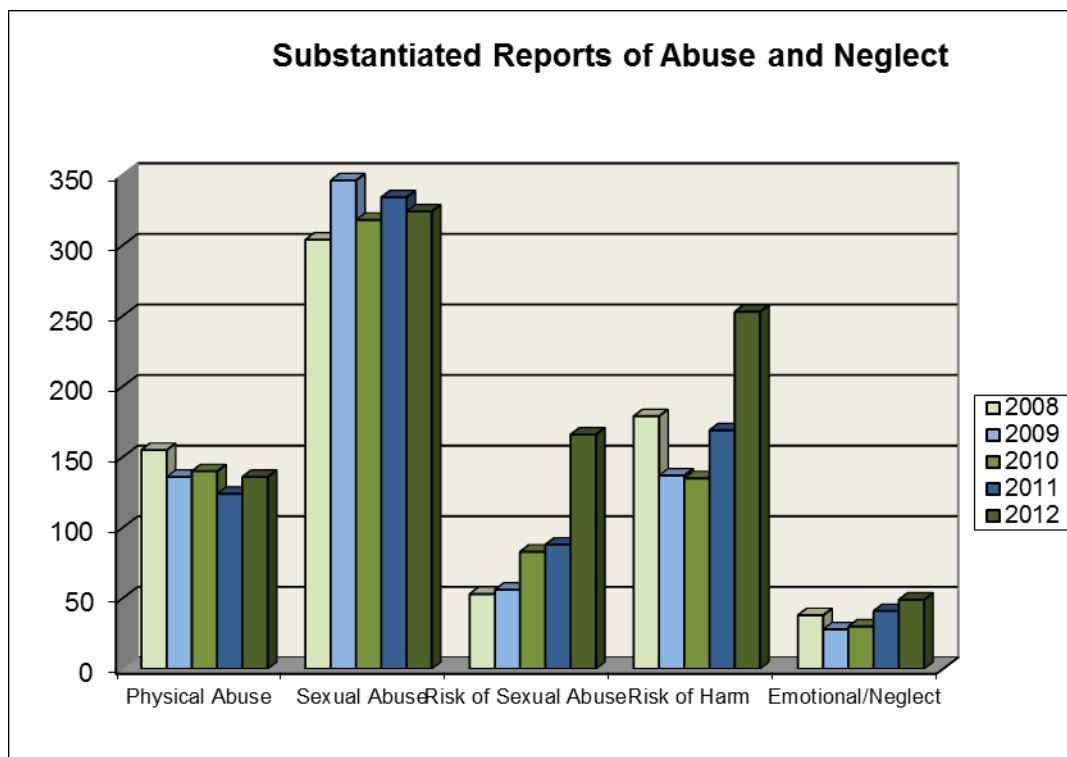
² Substantiated means the evidence would lead a reasonable person to believe the child was abused or neglected.

³ If the assessed risk is high or very high, a case is opened and a case plan developed to address the identified risks.

Note: the numbers in the graph below are an unduplicated count of victims of substantiated child abuse and neglect.

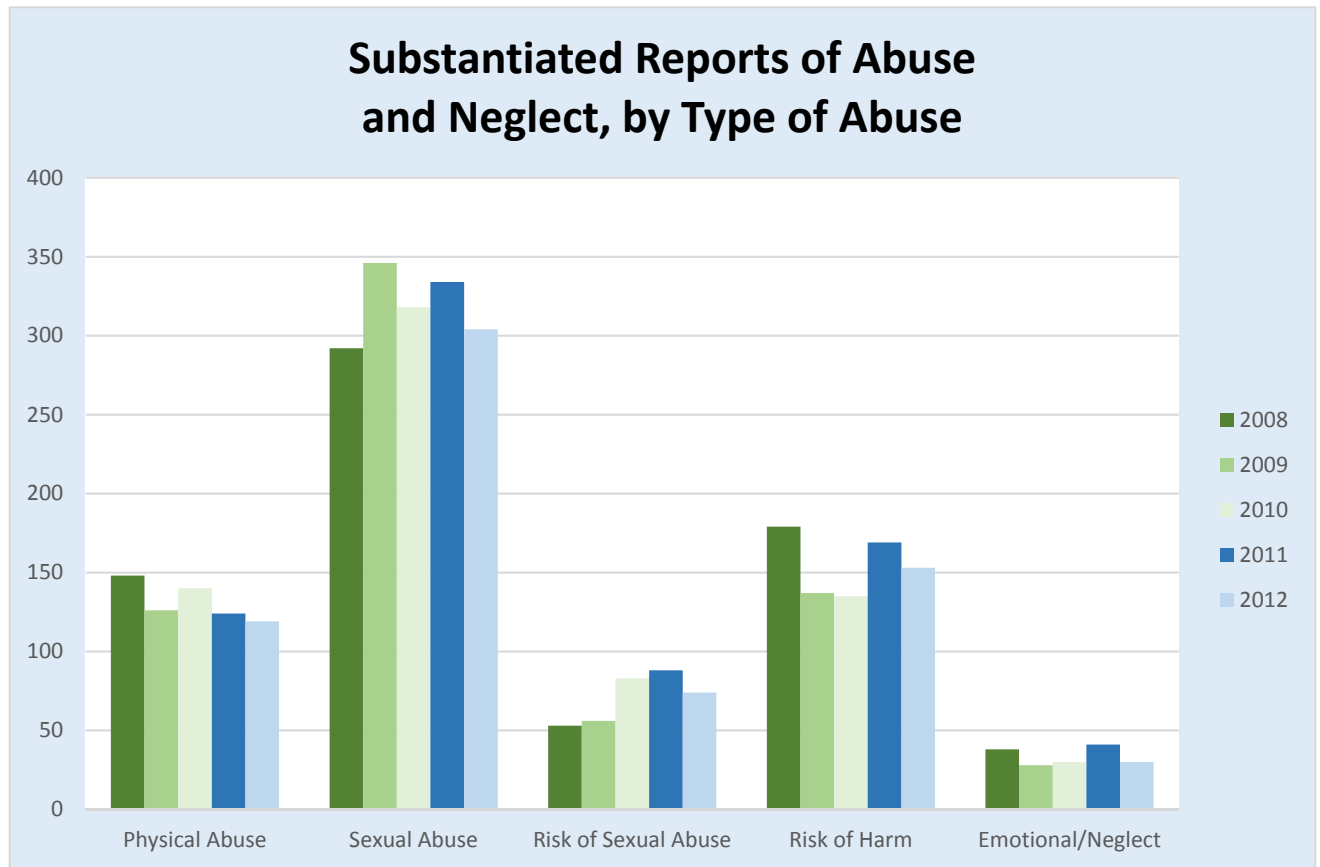


Note: since a report can be substantiated for more than one type of abuse, the numbers below reflect a total greater than the number of substantiated reports.



2012 Report on Child Protection in Vermont

Corrected Chart– Page 15



Reports Substantiated in 2012 — by Type of Abuse

Since a report can be substantiated for more than one type of abuse, the numbers below reflect a total greater than 626 — the number of reports substantiated in 2012.

District ¹	Physical Abuse	Sexual ² Abuse	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Emotional/ Neglect
Barre	15	33	1	34	8
Bennington	6	18	3	7	1
Brattleboro	6	14	2	4	1
Burlington	17	44	5	21	6
Hartford	9	20	4	8	0
Middlebury	9	13	2	8	1
Morrisville	6	18	8	7	0
Newport	14	14	7	8	2
Rutland	8	11	3	5	1
Springfield	9	34	5	18	7
St. Albans	12	51	22	16	2
St. Johnsbury	8	14	8	15	1
Out of State	0	20	4	2	0
Total Statewide	119 (17.5%)	304 (44.7%)	74 (10.9%)	153 (22.5%)	30 (4.4%)

¹ Means the district where the child's caregiver lives.

² The department investigates all valid allegations of sexual abuse and risk of sexual abuse regardless of the relationship between the alleged abuser and child.

Reports Substantiated in 2012 — by Age & Gender of Victim

The data below represents the age and gender of the victims of substantiated abuse or neglect. Please note that a child is represented more than once if he or she suffered more than one type of abuse or was involved in more than one substantiated report during the year.

Age	Percent	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
< 1	6.8%	9	1	7	34	7
1	4.4%	4	3	8	22	0
2	4.4%	7	5	5	18	2
3	5.2%	8	10	6	20	0
4	5.3%	5	16	8	14	2
5	5.4%	3	22	12	7	2
6	5.9%	13	12	11	11	3
7	7.3%	10	17	16	16	3
8	5.2%	6	22	2	11	3
9	6.1%	6	23	9	10	4
10	6.1%	9	13	11	15	4
11	3.8%	5	14	7	4	2
12	6.3%	15	22	4	11	1
13	6.4%	6	31	8	9	0
14	7.7%	5	49	5	6	0
15	6.3%	5	31	8	9	0
16	4.6%	6	22	5	5	1
17	2.9%	4	10	3	3	5
TOTAL	100%	126	323	135	225	39
Gender						
Male	43.4%	87	76	60	125	20
Female	56.6%	39	247	75	100	19
TOTAL	100%	126	323	135	225	39

Reports Substantiated in 2012 — by Age & Gender of Abuser

The data below represents the age and gender of substantiated abusers. An abuser may be represented more than once if more than one type of abuse was substantiated.

Age	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
<20	1	116	2	7	4
20 - 29	30	62	31	75	15
30 - 39	47	59	30	56	9
40 - 49	33	32	13	40 - 49	6
50 - 59	8	13	5	6	1
60+	3	12	8	1	0
Unknown	2	5	1	0	0
Gender					
Male	68	281	57	91	12
Female	54	17	33	78	23
Unspecified	2	1	0	0	0

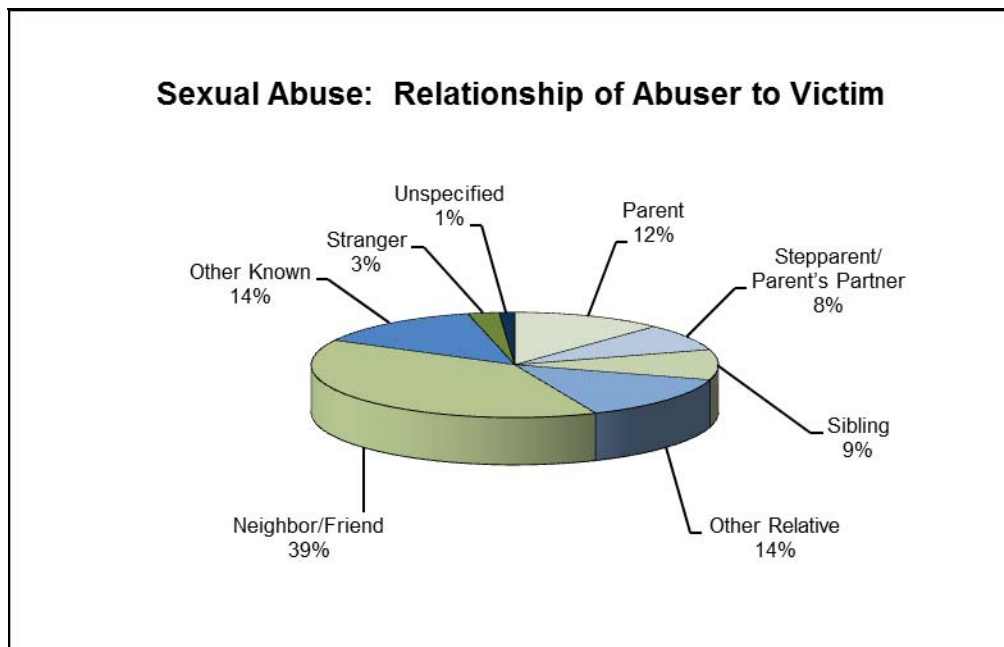
Reports Substantiated in 2012 — by Relationship of Abuser to Child

Relationship	Physical	Sexual	Risk of Sexual Abuse	Risk of Harm	Neglect/Emotional
Parent	99	39	92	190	44
Stepparent/Parent's Partner	22	27	18	43	2
Foster Parent	1	1	0	0	0
Sibling	1	30	3	2	0
Other Relative	6	45	13	3	2
Neighbor/Friend	0	127	18	4	0
Other Known	1	44	18	2	1
Stranger	0	8	0	0	0
Unspecified	6	4	3	9	0

Reports Substantiated for Child Sexual Abuse in 2012

The department investigates all valid allegations of sexual abuse and risk of sexual abuse — regardless of the relationship between the alleged abuser and child. Here's what the 2012 data tells us about child sexual abuse in Vermont:

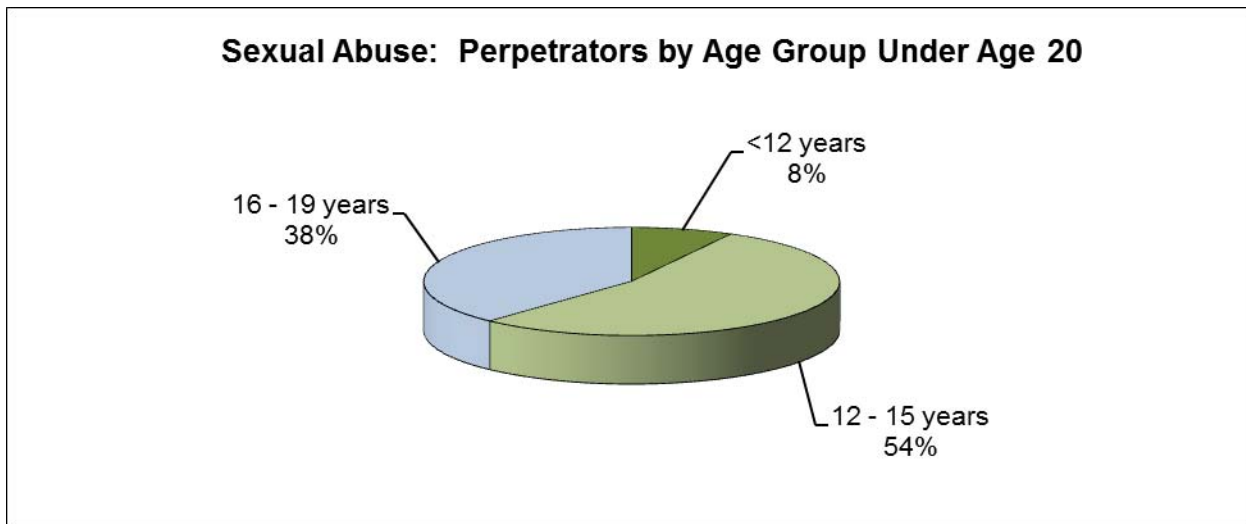
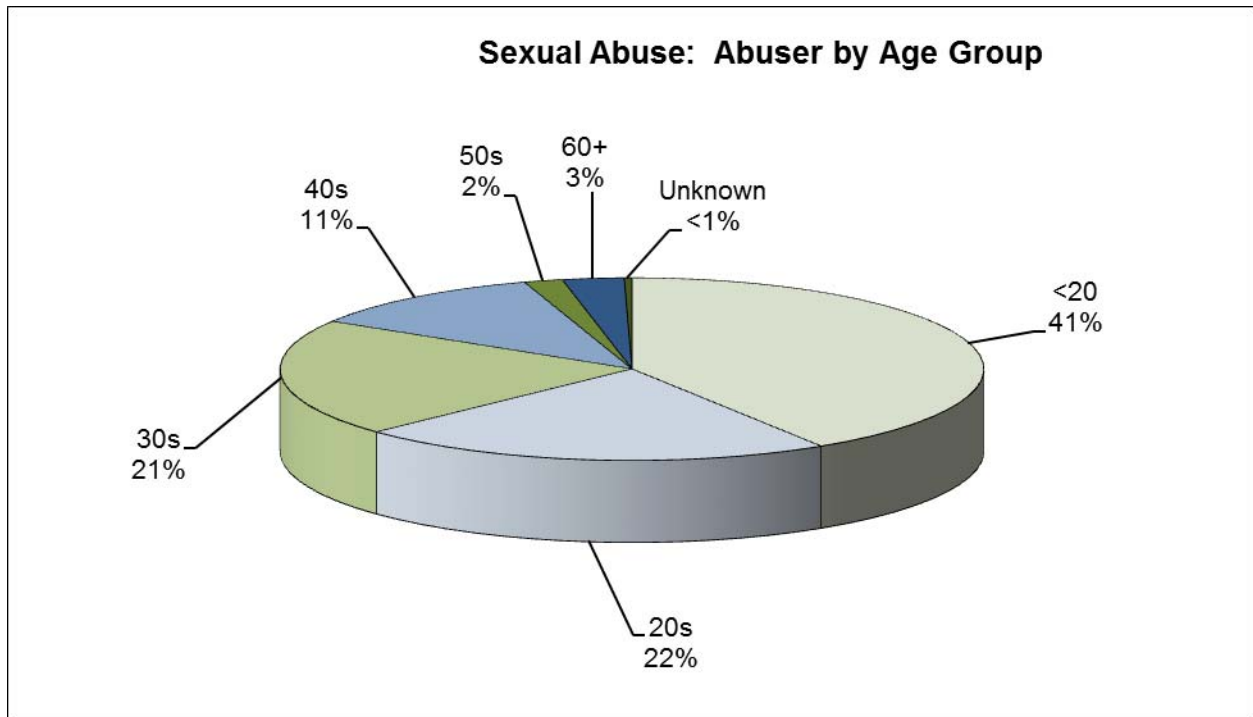
- At least 97% of child sexual abuse was committed by people the children know.



- 94% of the known abusers were male.



- At least 41% of the abusers were under the age of 20. Of these, 92% were between the ages of 12 and 19.



Vermont's Child Protection Registry

The Child Protection Registry is a database of substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect, dating back to January 1, 1992.

As of June 14, 2013, there were 16,919 individuals listed in the Registry.

What does a registry record include?

- The name of the individual substantiated for child abuse or neglect and at least one other personal identifier (e.g., date of birth, social security number);
- The date and nature of the finding; and
- For individuals placed on the Registry on or after July 1, 2009, it also includes a designated child protection level¹, related to the risk of future harm to children.

As of June 14, 2013, there were 2,312 individuals in the database with designated child protection levels: 1,783 were designated as Level 1² and 529 were designated as Level 2³. Only individuals placed on the registry on or after July 1, 2009 have child protection levels.

How is the Child Protection Registry used?

To help protect children, Vermont law authorizes DCF staff to search the Registry whenever:

1. Someone applies to become a foster parent, adoptive parent, child care provider, or employee of a residential facility for children or youth in Vermont; and
2. Someone authorized to receive registry information requests a search. This includes:
 - Employers whose staff provide care, custody, treatment, transportation, or supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults;
 - Schools (*Act One—AN ACT RELATING TO IMPROVING VERMONT'S SEXUAL ABUSE RESPONSE SYSTEM—signed into law in March 2009, makes it mandatory for schools to request checks of both the child protection and adult abuse registries for certain employees/contractors*);
 - Owners/operators of facilities regulated by DCF;
 - Adult protective services and child protection agencies; and
 - Others as provided for in statute.

We conducted 50,845 registry searches in 2012.

¹ Designated child protection levels related to the risk of future harm to children are assigned to individuals placed on the Registry on or after July 1, 2009. Two levels are assigned: Level 1 or Level 2.

² Level 1 is assigned if the substantiation involves substantial child endangerment, there are court adjudications for related conduct, or there is a high risk of future harm.

³ Level 2 is assigned to all other substantiations.

Child Abuse and Neglect Definitions

Vermont law (33.V.S.A. 49, § 4912) defines an “abused or neglected child” as:

A child whose physical health, psychological growth and development or welfare is harmed, or is at substantial risk of harm, by the acts or omissions of his or her parent or other person responsible for the child’s welfare. It also means a child who is sexually abused or at substantial risk of sexual abuse by any person.

Harm can occur by abandonment, emotional maltreatment, neglect, physical injury, or sexual abuse.

Risk of harm means a significant danger that a child will suffer serious harm other than by accidental means, which would be likely to cause physical injury, neglect, emotional maltreatment, or sexual abuse.

Child: an individual under the age of 18.

Person Responsible for a Child's Welfare: includes the child's parent, guardian, foster parent, and any other adult residing in the child's home who serves in a parental role; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare while in a residential, educational or child care setting, including any staff person.

Emotional Maltreatment: a pattern of malicious behavior, which results in impaired psychological growth and development.

Neglect: failure to supply a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter or health care.

Physical Injury: death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, or impairment of any bodily organ or function other than by accidental means.

Sexual Abuse: any act or acts by any person involving sexual molestation or exploitation of a child including but not limited to incest, prostitution, rape, sodomy, or any lewd and lascivious conduct involving a child. Sexual abuse also includes the aiding, abetting, counseling, hiring, or procuring of a child to perform or participate in any photograph, motion picture, exhibition, show, representation, or other presentation which, in whole or in part, depicts a sexual conduct, sexual excitement or sadomasochistic abuse involving a child.

HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected,
call Vermont's Child Protection Line to
report it — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1-800-649-5285

Preventing child abuse helps
ensure the safety, health, and
optimal development of our children.

<http://dcf.vermont.gov/fsd>