Feelings Surrounding Reporting of Suspected or Known Abuse

Read the following vignette and reflect on the questions below to explore your feelings on making a report to child protective services.

Vignette:

Mia, 18 months, is in your daily care. She is typically a happy child who smiles and giggles easily and is eager to engage in play. Recently, you have observed that she is sullen upon arrival and withdrawn throughout the day with peers. She is clinging to you, which is unusual. In your daily health check, she doesn't appear ill. You have asked her mom if she has been ill, and the mother says she has not. After a few days of Mia's behavior, you ask her mother if she has noticed anything different about Mia. Her mother says she is moody and it is just a phase, probably just overtired. You decide to record your observations to see if there is a pattern or something you are missing.

That afternoon, Mia spills her milk and soils her shirt. While changing her shirt you notice bruises around both of her upper arms. The bruises circle her arms and appear to be the shape of fingers. You also notice finger-shaped bruises circling her left wrist. Seeing where the bruises are and their shape, and considering Mia's change in behavior, you wonder if someone has hurt her. But she has been coming to your program since she was an infant and her mom and dad appear to be loving parents. Mia is always well dressed, fed and taken care of. You can't believe her family would do this. You and the other staff members really like the family.

When Mia's mom arrives to pick her up, you explain the spilled milk and hand her the soiled shirt. You mention that you saw bruises on Mia's arms and was wondering if her mom was aware of them and knew how Mia got them. Her mother replies that the bruises were probably from swinging her around like a helicopter—they hold her arms and twirl in circles, and it makes Mia giggle. You mention that this also could dislocate Mia's arms and shoulders and that it isn't safe to do. Mia's mom explains the bruised wrist occurred when Mia fell down while her dad was holding her arm while taking a walk. Mia's mom averts her eyes and says that they are very careful when they play this game. She quickly gathers their things and departs.

Mia's mom's explanation of the bruises don't seem to add up to you, and with Mia's drastic change of behavior, you suspect she was injured by an adult.
Questions to reflect upon:

1. Describe what feelings you had while you were reading this vignette? Did your feelings change as you read further, and if so how?

2. Is there a possibility that what Mia's mom said happened really occurred? How does this possibility affect your thoughts on reporting suspected abuse?

3. How do your positive feelings about Mia's family play a role in your need to make a suspected child abuse report?

4. What are other feelings you have about filing a report with child protective services?

5. Are you aware that if you suspect abuse or are aware of known abuse, you MUST call protective services?