

IDENTIFYING & REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is any deliberate act that causes harm or mistreatment to a person under the age of 18. Abuse can take many forms, and more than one type often occurs at the same time.

TYPES OF ABUSE AND INDICATORS

PHYSICAL ABUSE occurs when a child is intentionally injured or placed in situations that could cause physical harm.

- Unexplained injuries, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other noticeable marks after an absence from school
- Injuries in various stages of healing
- Seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive
- Seems frightened of his or her parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shows changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Abuses animals or pets

NEGLECT is the failure to meet a child's basic needs, including adequate food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, supervision, education, affection, or medical and dental care.

- Frequent or unexplained absences from school
- Asking for food or taking food from others
- Untreated health needs, such as missing glasses, unaddressed dental pain, or vaccinations that appear to be overdue
- Consistently poor hygiene or strong body odor that doesn't seem situational
- Wearing clothing that isn't appropriate for the weather or season
- Mentioning that no adult is home to care for them

SEXUAL ABUSE involves any sexual act with a child under the age of 18. This includes any sexual act of physical contact and non-contact acts, such as grooming, exposure of sexual acts, or nudity. Child sexual abuse also includes any form of child sex trafficking.

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Frequently runs away from home
- Suddenly refuses to go to school, activity or relative's home
- Reports nightmares or bed-wetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

EMOTIONAL ABUSE harms a child's emotional health or self-worth. This can include constant criticism, insults, threats, rejection, isolation, or ignoring a child's emotional needs.

- Low self-esteem or frequent self-criticism
- Excessive fearfulness, anxiety, or depression
- Withdrawal from friends, activities, or social interactions
- Extreme behavior (overly compliant, people-pleasing, or overly aggressive)
- Delayed emotional development
- Frequent crying or emotional distress without a clear reason
- Negative self-talk (e.g., "I'm stupid," "I'm bad")/Describing themselves as unwanted or unloved
- Sudden drop in academic performance/Difficulty concentrating or frequent daydreaming

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In many cases, abuse is committed by someone the child knows and trusts, such as a parent or other family member. If you suspect a child is being abused, it is important to report your concerns to the appropriate authorities.

DISCLOSURE

Disclosure is often a process, not a one-time event.

- » Less than 1/4 of victims disclose immediately after abuse occurs.
- » Less than 1/4 may disclose from 1 month to 5 years later.
- » Over 1/2 may wait more than 5 years to disclose, if at all.
- » Some children never disclose during childhood.

Ways children may attempt to disclose abuse:

- » **Hinted Disclosure:** "A neighbor is messing with me."
- » **Questioned Disclosure:** "What would happen if somebody was hurting a kid and they told someone about it?"
- » **Conditional Disclosure:** "I need to tell you something, but if I do, you have to promise not to tell."

Do...

- » Support, believe, and reassure the child
- » Understand your limits, you are not an investigator
- » Provide a quiet, safe environment
- » When you are done talking to the child, write down the child's exact words
- » Ask limited, open-ended questions
- » Respect the child's right to privacy
- » Seek help and advice
- » Report any suspicions of abuse/neglect

Don't...

- » Make assumptions or promises
- » Show shock or other emotions
- » Interrogate or investigate
- » Put words in the child's mouth
- » Be judgmental about the abuser; it is often someone the child loves/trusts
- » Assume someone else will report abuse

Reporting Abuse

In all states, professionals that work with children are **Mandatory Reporters**. In some states, **EVERY ADULT** is a **Mandatory Reporter**. You do not have to have proof abuse is occurring. If you have a **reasonable suspicion** that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected, you **must report** it to your state's child welfare agency. Visit www.childwelfare.gov/organizations for a list of state agencies and contact information. For abuse in sports organizations, report to the U.S. Center for SafeSport.