



Child Abuse

Child abuse is defined as a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child. Child abuse is damage to a child for which there is no “reasonable” explanation. Child abuse includes non-accidental physical injury, neglect, sexual molestation, and emotional abuse.

Child abuse has become a national epidemic. More than one million children are confirmed each year as victims of child abuse and neglect by state departments of child protective services. And every day a minimum of three children die as a result. Violence in the home has been listed as a major factor contributing to the growth or reports of child abuse and neglect.

Domestic violence plays a significant part in child abuse.

Domestic violence often includes child abuse. Children may be victimized and threatened as a way of punishing and controlling the adult victim of domestic violence. Or they may be injured unintentionally when acts of violence occur in their presence. Often episodes of domestic violence expand to include attacks on children. However, even when children are not directly attached, they can experience serious emotional damage as a result of living in a violent household. Children living in this environment come to believe that this behavior is acceptable.

Neither domestic violence nor child abuse is an isolated event. Both occur with some regularity, often increasing and becoming more serious. Adults who were abused as children have an increased risk of abusing their children; adults who grew up in a violent home are more likely to become perpetrators or victims of domestic violence. For a number of reasons including shame, secrecy, and isolation, both types of abuse are under-reported. Shrouding the violence in secrecy allows this behavior to continue. Educating the public about the extent of the problem establishes a foundation that permits victims to come forward.

Prevention efforts that reach patients before or soon after the birth of their baby, and provide intensive services on a moderately long-term basis can greatly reduce the incidence of child abuse as well as identify other problems such as domestic violence. Home visitors using a comprehensive approach can tailor their services to match a family’s need. After establishing a trusting relationship with the family, the home visitor will be able to identify problems. While the home visitor may not be able to offer intervention services, he or she can provide resources and ensure the safety of the children.

Physical Abuse

Battering and beating, physically harming or injuring a child under the age of 18 by a person who is responsible for the child’s welfare. Abuse is never a child’s fault.

Indications of physical child abuse:

- Unexplained bruises and welts
- Unexplained burns
- Unexplained fractures
- Unexplained lacerations or abrasions
- Head injuries
- Human bite marks
- Frequent Injuries that are “accidental” or “unexplained”
- Wary of adult contacts
- Anger, aggression, hyperactivity (consistent)
- Apprehensive when other children cry
- Behavioral extremes
- Aggressiveness, withdrawal, introverted, extremely passive
- Frightened of parents or unnaturally dependent
- Frequently truant or late to school
- Afraid to go home
- Terrified to make a mess
- Reports injury by parents
- Young child who “takes care” of the parent
- Wears a long-sleeved or similar clothing to hide injuries
- Seeks affection from any adult with no discrimination
- Non-expression of his needs, non-communicative

Indications of physical child abuse:

Sometimes a parent’s demeanor or behavior can be an indicator that the child may be at risk or abuse or neglect:

- Seems unconcerned about child
- Seems anxious and overwhelmed by the child’s needs
- Takes an unusual amount of time to obtain medical care for the child
- Offers an inadequate or inappropriate explanation for the child’s injury
- Gives different explanations for the same injury
- Misuses alcohol or drugs
- Disciplines the child too harshly considering the child’s age or what he/she did wrong
- Sees the child as bad, evil, different, etc.
- Has a history of abuse as a child
- Attempts to conceal the child’s injury
- Takes the child to a different doctor or hospital for each injury
- Has poor impulse control

How to Report Child Abuse

Both the reporting party and the child who is allegedly being abused must reside in the same state for the following number to be valid. You may call Child Help/IOF Foresters National/Abuse Hotline **1-800-4-A-Child**.

Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is forced, tricked or coerced sexual behavior between a young person and an older person. Sexual abuse may consist of any one of the following acts: nudity, disrobing, genital exposure, observation of the child, kissing, fondling, masturbation, oral-genital contact, child pornography, digital penetration, and vaginal or anal intercourse. There is no rule governing the age range between a victim and a perpetrator. However, when the perpetrator is under 18 years of age, often an age discrepancy of five years has been required to verify cases of sexual abuse where no force was involved.

While many estimates have been made that one in four girls and one in ten boys are abused prior to age 18, the national incidence rate of sexual abuse remains unknown. The estimate that one in four girls and one in ten boys are abused prior to age 18 became widely known simply from being repeated.

Sexual abuse occurs among all groups of the population. It happens to children in both rural and urban areas and in all socioeconomic and educational levels, and across all racial and cultural groups. Research has found that the absence of a parent from the home increases the child's risk. In addition, interviews with perpetrators suggest that they look for vulnerable children. Such children are young and appear to be isolated, depressed, or lonely.

The degree of harm a child experiences as a result of sexual abuse depends upon the nature of the act, the age of the child, and the child's general environment. Physical harm may include cuts, disfigurement, deformity, and pregnancy. Mental harm may consist of feelings of pain, panic, devastation, betrayal, shame, fear, guilt, and vulnerability that may persist throughout the victim's life. While child sexual abuse may not always lead to permanent injury, one should assume that all sexual abuse experiences are potentially harmful. Also, it is important to reassure the child that he or she is not responsible for the assault.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Symptoms of sexual abuse may include physical behavioral signs as well as indirect comments made by the child. There are several clues to look for when considering the possibility of child sexual abuse. A physical sign may be a discharge from the vaginal area or penis, irritation, pain, bleeding, injury to the genital or anal area, or discomfort in walking or sitting. A behavioral sign may be nervous, aggressive, hostile, or disruptive behavior towards adults, especially parents. But remember, one sign alone may not be a positive indication. If a number of signs are present, it is wiser to consider the possibility of sexual abuse.

Perpetrators of Sexual Abuse

Generally, children are sexually abused by adults who are related to them or known by them or their families. Acquaintance perpetrators are the most common abusers. Perpetrators of sexual abuse are not only adults. Many clinical settings currently are witnessing a dramatic increase in the number of adolescent offenders who have committed sexually aggressive acts against other children. The most vulnerable age for sexual abuse is between 7 and 13 years. Reported victims of sexual abuse are most often children of school age, although cases have been documented from infancy to adulthood.

You can get more information on sexual abuse or sexual abuse prevention programs from the American Association for Protecting Children, a division of the American Humane Association, at **(800) 227-5242** or **(303) 695-0811** or from Prevent Child Abuse America at (312) 663-3520.

DEFINING CHILD MALTREATMENT

There are four forms of child maltreatment: emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

Emotional Abuse: (also known as: verbal abuse, mental abuse, and psychological maltreatment) Includes acts or failures to act by parents or caretakers that have caused or could cause serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders. This can include parents/caretakers using extreme and/or bizarre forms of punishment, such as confinement in a closet or dark room or being tied to a chair/or bed for long periods of time or threatening or terrorizing a child. Less severe acts, but no less damaging are belittling or rejecting treatment, using derogatory terms to describe the child, habitual scapegoat or blaming.

Neglect: The failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, or emotional. **Physical neglect** can include **not** providing adequate food or clothing, appropriate medical care, supervision, or proper weather protection (heat or coats). It may include abandonment. **Educational neglect** includes failure to provide appropriate schooling or special educational needs, allowing excessive truancies. **Psychological neglect** includes the lack of emotional support and love, never attending to the child, spousal abuse, drug and alcohol abuse including allowing the child to participate in drug and alcohol use.

Physical Abuse: The inflicting of physical injury upon a child. This may include, burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating, or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child, the injury is not an accident. It may, however, be the result of over-discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age.

Sexual Abuse: The inappropriate sexual behavior with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals; make the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. To be considered child abuse these acts have to be committed by a person responsible for the care of a child (for example a baby sitter, a parent, or daycare provider) or related to the child.

If these acts were committed, it would be considered child assault and handled solely by the police and criminal courts. If you know or suspect any acts of the sort please report it to the authorities or you may call ChildHelp/IOF Foresters National/Abuse Hotline **1-800-4-A-Child.**