

Child Abuse

Crime and Violence Prevention Center, California Attorney General's Office



It Shouldn't Hurt To Be A Kid!

Yet, children continue to be hurt every day. For these children there is no hope unless each one of us realizes that our most important duty is the protection, welfare and growth of our children.

Child abuse can leave a scar that is carried throughout life. In fact, statistics show that the abused child all too often grows up to be an abuser. We know that breaking the cycle of abuse will not only protect our children, but will reduce crime now and in the future. Studies suggest that 85 percent of convicted felons were abused as children.

Without individual and community concern and involvement there are really three "victims" of child abuse: the child, the abuser and the community. However, each of us may make a valuable contribution to the protection of children and the prevention of abuse. Our concern and involvement is critical — it may save a life.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is legally defined as:

- A physical injury which is inflicted by other than accidental means on a child by another person.
- Sexual abuse, including both sexual assault and sexual exploitation.
- Willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment of a child.
- Cruel or inhuman corporal punishment or injury.

- Neglect, including both severe and general neglect.
- Abuse (all of the above) in out-of-home care.

INDICATORS OF CHILD ABUSE

Below are some indicators of child abuse which can help you recognize an existing or potential problem of abuse.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse may be defined as any act which results in a nonaccidental physical injury.

Indicators of physical abuse:

- Bruises, burns, abrasions, lacerations, or swelling caused by other than accidental means.
- Belt buckle marks, handprints, bite marks and pinches.
- Child states injury was caused by abuse.
- Injury unusual for a specific age group.
- A history of previous or recurrent injuries.
- Unexplained injuries; conflicting explanations or reasons for injury.
- Child excessively passive, compliant or fearful.
- Caretaker attempts to hide injuries.

Neglect

Neglect is essentially the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child by a parent or caretaker under circumstances indicating harm or threatened harm to the child's health or welfare.

Indicators of neglect:

- Child lacking adequate medical or dental care.
- Child is always sleepy or hungry.
- Child is always dirty or inadequately dressed for weather conditions.
- There is evidence of poor supervision.
- Conditions in home are extremely or persistently unsafe or unsanitary.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined as acts of sexual assault on and the sexual exploitation of minors.

Indicators of sexual abuse:

- Child reports sexual activities to a trusted person.
- Detailed and age-inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior (especially by younger children).
- Child wears torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
- Child is victim of other forms of abuse.

REPORTING

The law requires certain professionals to report suspicion and/or knowledge of child abuse, which includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and cases of severe emotional abuse that constitute willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment of a child. But, community members also have an important role in protecting children from abuse and neglect. The life of a child may be saved if community members become involved and report cases of suspected child abuse.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

Involvement does not mean physical intervention or snooping on your neighbor. It simply means not ignoring the obvious. Fear of involvement has resulted in family tragedies in which neighbors reported they knew what was going on, but declined to get involved.

If a member of the community, who is not required by law to report, does not want to identify himself or herself, the report may be made anonymously.

AFTER YOUR REPORT

Many people are under the misconception that if a family is reported for child abuse the parent will always be arrested and the child will be taken away from the family. Although this may occur in serious abuse cases, the family is usually referred to services such as counseling or parenting classes. In neglect cases, the family may be referred to public assistance agencies. However, the goal of child protective agencies is to try to keep the family unit intact unless the child is in danger. The goal of all of us is to protect our children and help them grow up healthy and happy.

To report suspected child abuse contact your local:

- Police or Sheriff's Department;
- County Welfare Department; or
- County Juvenile Probation Department.

For more information, contact your Local Child Abuse Council.



Daniel E. Lungren
Attorney General

Crime and Violence Prevention Center
California Attorney General's Office