

Introduction

Children have a right to be safe. Adults have the responsibility to ensure this basic right for all children.

Children are the most vulnerable citizens of our society. Because of this, they are at risk for abuse and neglect. The effects of child abuse and neglect can be traumatic and long lasting and in some cases result in the death of a child. In the last 10 years, the number of children reported as abused and neglected have doubled in North Carolina.

The information in this booklet is designed to help you understand what child abuse and neglect are, how to report a suspected case of child abuse and neglect, and what happens after a report has been made.

To report child abuse you will need to know:

- what abuse is
- how to identify it
- why, when, and how to make a report
- what happens next



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Prevent Child Abuse
North Carolina

Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect



Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina
and the
NC Division of Social Services

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse can be defined as a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child. Child abuse includes non-accidental:

Physical Abuse

Examples of physical abuse include, but are not limited to: beating, harmful restraint, use of a weapon or instrument, or actions that result in or could result in serious physical injury.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual behavior imposed on a juvenile. This involves a range of activities, including the fondling of the genital area, masturbation, oral sex, or vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis, or other object. It includes exhibitionism, child pornography, and suggestive behaviors or comments.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is expressing attitudes or behaviors toward a child that create serious emotional or psychological damage.

What is Child Neglect?

Child neglect can be defined as any serious disregard for a juvenile's supervision, care, or discipline.

The Law

North Carolina Statutes define an abused child as:

Any juvenile less than 18 years of age whose parent, guardian, custodian, or caretaker inflicts or allows to be inflicted serious physical injury by other than accidental means, or creates or allows to be created serious risk of injury, inappropriate behavior modifications, or sexual abuse.

North Carolina Statutes define a neglected child as:

Any juvenile who does not receive proper care, supervision, or discipline from the juvenile's parent, guardian, or caretaker; or who has been abandoned, or not provided necessary medical care, or who lives in an environment injurious to the juvenile's welfare, or who has been placed for care or adoption in violation of law. In determining whether a juvenile is neglected, it is relevant whether that juvenile lives in a home where another juvenile has died as a result of abuse or neglect or lives in a home where another juvenile has been subjected to sexual abuse or severe physical abuse by an adult who regularly lives in the home.

For a complete copy of the statutes, contact your county Department of Social Services, the Child Protective Services Division.



Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

Abuse is rarely one physical attack or one isolated incident. Often there is a pattern of behavior that occurs over a period of time. A child may find it difficult to tell anyone that the abuse is occurring. The child may "act out" as a way of expressing his or her hurt or anger.

It is important to remember that even if you see signs, this does not necessarily mean that a child has been abused. The signs will vary according to the type of abuse, its intensity, and the age of the child.

Some children who are abused display no signs. For this reason, it is important to listen carefully to any child who tells you about an act of abuse. Be aware of unexplained changes in the behavior of children with whom you have regular contact.

Signs of Possible Physical Abuse:

- Unexplained bruises in various states of healing
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Welts, human bite marks, bald spots
- Unexplained burns, especially cigarette burns or glove-like burns
- Unexplained fractures, injuries, or abrasions
- Nervous, hyperactive, aggressive, disruptive, and destructive behaviors
- Unusually wary of physical contact
- Unduly frightened of parent or caretaker
- Expresses little or no emotion when hurt
- Unduly shy, withdrawn, and passive

Signs of Possible Sexual Abuse:

- Engages in sexual activity that is not appropriate for the child's age
- Has a detailed and sophisticated understanding of sexual behaviors
- Goes back to behaviors such as bed-wetting, speech loss
- Suffers sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Has pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding in the genitalia
- Has venereal disease
- Has frequent urinary tract or yeast infections

The Sexually Abused Older Child May:

- Exhibit delinquent or aggressive behavior
- Show signs of depression
- Display self-injurious behaviors such as substance abuse, self-mutilation, attempts at suicide, prostitution, and running away.

Signs of Possible Emotional Abuse:

- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical or emotional development
- Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies
- Habit disorders, sucking, rocking
- Unduly passive and undemanding
- Very low self-esteem
- Extremely demanding, aggressive, and angry
- Antisocial, destructive
- Depressed and/or suicidal
- Attention seeking
- Delinquent behavior, especially in adolescents

Why You Should Report Child Abuse:

Reporting suspected child abuse can be the first important step in stopping the abuse and protecting the child from future harm. By reporting, you are helping the family get services and help that they need.

Failing to report suspected cases of child abuse may result in continuing abuse. Abused children may carry the trauma associated with the abuse throughout their entire lives unless treatment, assistance, and support are provided.

Because child abuse rarely stops without intervention and help, it is the law that every citizen report suspected child abuse and neglect.

You can help stop the cycle of abuse by notifying your county Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services Division, when you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected.

Your report can be anonymous. You do not have to give your name when making a report.

If a report is not accepted for investigation and the reporter still has concerns, he/she may request a review of the agency's decision by contacting the agency.

If the decision is made by DSS not to file a petition and the reporter does not agree, he/she can request a review by the District Attorney.

What Happens After a Report of Child Abuse Has Been Made?

After you have discussed your concerns with the social worker at Child Protective Services, a determination will be made as to whether or not the Department of Social Services will investigate.

If intervention is warranted, Child Protective Services is required to initiate an investigation within 24 hours for abuse and within 72 hours in the case of suspected neglect.

The investigation will include a visit to the child's home and school and interviews with those who are in contact with the child. The safety of the child is the top priority.

A full assessment will be made to determine future actions involving the child(ren) and the family.

Help Can Be Provided to the Family Through:

- counseling
- referrals to other helping agencies
- emergency foster care services
- intensive in-home services provided by trained volunteers, paraprofessionals, or professionals
- help with housing, finances, medical needs, and child care

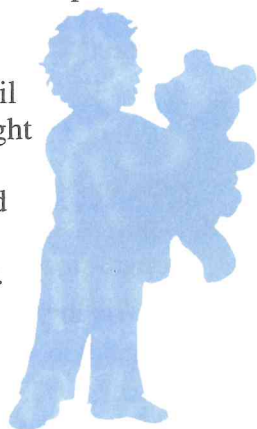
Signs of Possible Neglect:

- Abandonment by parent or caregiver
- Unattended medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Consistent hunger, inappropriate dress, poor hygiene
- Lice, distended stomach
- Poor social skills
- Indiscriminate with his or her affection
- Pale, listless, begs or steals food, frequently absent from school
- Falls asleep in class, regularly displays fatigue
- Self-destructive

Who Should Report Suspected Child Abuse

Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected is required by law to report.

If you make a report in good faith, you will receive immunity from possible civil or criminal liability that might result from your report. Failure to report a suspected case of child abuse can be punished as a misdemeanor.



How to Make a Report

You can make a report of child abuse by calling, writing, or visiting your county Department of Social Services, the Child Protective Services Division. The address and phone number can be found in the front of the local phone book in the county government section, or by calling **1-800-354-KIDS** or **1-919-733-2580**.

A social worker will listen to you and take down all the information you give. It is helpful if you can share the following:

- the name, address, and age of the child
- the name and address of the child's parent, guardian, or caretaker
- the child's condition, including the nature and extent of the injury
- any information regarding the presence of weapons in the home, alcohol/drug abuse, or other factors affecting a social worker's safety are helpful

Important

- You do not need to prove that abuse has taken place; you only need reasonable grounds for suspicion.
- You do not need permission from parents or caregivers to make a report. In fact, you do not need to inform them you are making a report.
- You do not need permission from your workplace to make a report, but there may be guidelines to help you in making a report.

Helping a Child You Suspect Has Been Abused or Neglected

When a child tells you that he or she has been abused, the child may be feeling scared, guilty, ashamed, angry, and powerless. You may feel a sense of outrage, disgust, sadness, anger, and sometimes disbelief.

It is important, however, for you to remain calm and in control of your feelings in order to reassure the child that something will be done to keep him or her safe.

You Can Show Your Care and Concern by:

- listening carefully to what the child is saying
- telling the child you believe him or her
- telling the child the abuse was not the child's fault
- letting the child know that you will make a report to help stop the abuse

You Will NOT Be Helping the Child if You:

- make promises you cannot keep, such as promising that you will not tell anyone
- push the child into giving details of the abuse (your role is to listen to what the child wants to tell you)
- ask direct questions of the child (this might be harmful to the investigation)
- discuss what the child told you with others who are not directly involved with helping the child