



PARTNERS FOR CHILDREN

Child Abuse Information Sheet



What is Child Abuse?

Under California law, child abuse is a crime. Children need protection because they are vulnerable and often unable to speak for themselves.

California law defines child abuse as any of the following:

- harm to the body that is not an accident
- cruel actions that are on purpose
- unfair punishment
- sexual acts toward a child or allowing a child to participate in sexual activity
- neglect by not providing enough food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision

A child could be abused by a parent, caretaker or care provider. Child abuse can happen to families of any pay level, culture, race, job, religion and age.

Signs of Child Abuse

You may see some signs of abuse on the body. But signs of abuse may also be what a child does and says. Children with disabilities may or may not act differently than children without disabilities. Below are some signs that can help you suspect that abuse may be happening.

Physical Abuse: acts that cause harm to the body that are not an accident

- Bruises, burns, scrapes, scratches, cuts, or swelling
- Belt buckle marks, hand prints, bite marks and pinches
- Injury unusual for the child's age
- Many earlier or repeated injuries
- No reason for injuries, or differences in reasons for injury
- Very unfriendly or violent actions toward others
- Harmful, out of control actions

Emotional Abuse: cruel actions that are on purpose and unfair punishment

- Sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Wants approval at any cost
- Very unfriendly or violent speech

Neglect: not providing enough food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision

- Not clean or dressed right for the weather
- Always sleepy or hungry
- Clingy or indiscriminate attachment
- Depression

Sexual Abuse: sexual acts toward a child or allowing a child to participate in sexual activity

- Signs of physical abuse in private areas
- Self-harm
- Very fearful or unusually quiet and withdrawn
- Child talks about sexual activities
- Understanding of sexual behavior beyond their age level
- Child has a sexually transmitted disease

Myths About Children with Disabilities and Child Abuse

Some think that children with disabilities:

- are not at risk for abuse because no one would abuse a child who has a disability
- are safe from abuse because they are always with familiar and trustworthy people
- who are mentally challenged do not understand what is happening, so abuse does not bother them
- do not feel physical or emotional pain as other children do

In fact, a child with a disability is between 2-4 times greater risk for going through all types of abuse. The signs of abuse they show may be ignored or thought to be part of the disability.

Reporting

Parents and other community members have an important role in protecting children from abuse and neglect. The life of a child may be saved if people get involved and report cases of child abuse. Fear of getting involved can result in family tragedy. Members of the community who are not required to report may make the report anonymously.

To report suspected child abuse and neglect, contact your CCNSL, Care Coordinator, local Police or Sheriff's Department or County Welfare Department.

Mandated Reporters

People who have to report child abuse by law are called mandated reporters. They include a wide variety of positions (examples below). Mandated reporters must identify themselves when making child abuse reports.

- Health Care Workers
- Law Enforcement Officers
- Teachers/Child Care Workers

After a Report

Many parents believe that if a family member is reported for child abuse and neglect the parent will always be arrested and the child will be taken away from the family. This may occur in serious abuse cases, but the family is usually referred to services such as counseling or parenting classes. The goal of Child Protective Services is to try to keep the family together unless the child is in serious danger now.

Resources for Participants, Parents and Circle of Support

- ✓ *Child Help USA Hotline* offers 24-hour crisis telephone help for people under stress. Telephone counseling is available in 140 languages.
www.childhelp.org 1-800-422-4453
- ✓ *Child Abuse Prevention Councils* or *Family Resource Centers* often have resources available locally.
www.capsac.org/crisisnumbers/ca-councils
www.familyresourcecenters.net
- ✓ *Parents Anonymous* offers self-help groups for potentially abusive parents at
www.parentsanonymous.org
- ✓ A listing of *California's Emergency Response Hotline Number for Child Abuse Reporting* can be found at:
www.cchildsworld.ca.gov/CFSDChildA_317.htm