

## CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Child abuse is an ugly and unfortunate element in our society. One in twenty households are affected by child abuse. It is vital that child care workers understand and recognize signs of child abuse in children.

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any physical action that injures a child is considered to be physical abuse. It includes, but is not limited to: hitting, pushing, biting, punching, slapping, burning, cruel and unusual punishment, or extreme punishment. Visible signs of physical abuse include welts, bruises, scratches, burns, bite marks, bald areas, and unexplained fractures, lacerations, or abrasions.

Behavior that may indicate that a child has been physically abused include:

1. Self destructive behavior
2. Withdrawn or aggressive
3. Uncomfortable with physical contact
4. Arriving early to school or staying late to avoid being home
5. Chronic runaway
6. Complains or soreness or moving uncomfortably
7. Wearing clothing that is inappropriate to weather conditions in order to cover the body.

### PHYSICAL NEGLECT

Physical neglect or abandonment is withholding physical necessities in a way that endangers the child's health or well-being and leaving a child alone at too young an age or in a potentially dangerous situation. This may include improper nutrition, clothing, housing, or medical conditions as well as leaving a small child unattended in a car, or in their own home. It also includes consistent lack of supervision or poor hygiene.

Physical signs that a child may be suffering from physical neglect or abandonment include poor personal hygiene, clothing that does not fit or is dirty or even inappropriate for the weather conditions, consistent hunger, consistent lack of supervision, lice, distended stomach, and being overweight or underweight.

Behavior that might indicate that a child has been physically neglected includes:

1. Regular fatigue or listlessness
2. Stealing food or begging for food from peers
3. Habit disorders such as excessive sucking, rocking or biting
4. Suicide or attempted suicide
5. Frequently absent or tardy
6. Self-destructive
7. Speech disorders
8. Hyperactivity
9. Extreme behavior patterns (too passive and compliant or too aggressive and demanding)

**SEXUAL ABUSE**

Sexual abuse of children is the exploitation of a child for sexual gratification by someone at least three years older than the child. The offenses can be classified as either touching or non-touching. Non-touching offenses include verbal stimulation, obscene phone calls, exhibitionism, and voyeurism. Touching offenses include fondling, intercourse (vaginal, oral and anal), touching of the genitals, prostitution and rape. Incest is any of these offenses occurring between family members.

It is believed that one in four girls and one in eight boys are sexually abused by the age of 18. Unfortunately, most incidences of abuse go unreported. In 85-90% of all child sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is someone the child knows and trusts. For this reason, sexual abuse is even more likely to go unreported.

Physical signs of sexual child abuse include torn, stained or bloody underclothing, pain, swelling or itching in the genital area, difficulty walking or sitting, bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, frequent urinary or yeast infections, frequent urination, vaginal or penile discharge, or sexually transmitted diseases.

Behavior that might indicate that a child has been sexually abused might include:

1. Abrupt change in personality
2. Withdrawal or chronic depression
3. Poor self-esteem or confidence
4. Advanced sexual knowledge or behavior
5. Threatened by physical contact or closeness
6. Excessive crying
7. Clinging behavior
8. Alcohol or drug abuse
9. Sleep disorders (nightmares, bed-wetting, fear of sleep)
10. Excessive seductive behavior
11. Peer problems, lack of involvement
12. Massive weight change
13. Running away
14. Eating disorders
15. Excessive biting
16. Unwillingness to change clothes
17. Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
18. Suicide attempts
29. Inappropriate sex play
20. Sudden school difficulties
21. Hysteria, lack of emotional control

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Emotional maltreatment is abuse of a child's self-esteem. It can cause mental harm to the child. It can take the form of insufficient love, guidance and support, or may be name-calling, belittling, or constant put-downs by others which causes mental suffering. Children who are emotionally abused may have speech disorders, delayed physical development, substance abuse, or experience physical problems such as ulcers, asthma or severe allergies.

Behavior that might indicate that a child has been emotionally abused may include:

1. Habit disorders (sucking, rocking)
2. Antisocial, destructive behaviors
3. Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play)
4. Behavior extremes (passive or aggressive)
5. Delinquent behavior
6. Developmentally delayed
7. Destructive
8. Refusal to talk
9. Excessive clinging or crying
10. Withdrawn
11. Unusual or unpredictable behavior

#### HELP FOR THE ABUSED CHILD

Utah law requires that any person who suspects abuse or possible abuse of a child must report it immediately to the nearest peace officer, law enforcement agency, or child protective services. Failure to do so is a class B misdemeanor. The laws also provide the person reporting the abuse to be immune from any legal liabilities, civil or criminal for making a report. Remember that action is imperative--this child is at risk and other children may also be at risk. You may be the only responsible adult with whom the child has contact, and he/she is dependent upon your help.

The following steps may be taken to help the abused child:

1. If the child confides in you, believe him/her. Help him/her to understand that it is not his/her fault and that there is help available.
2. Remain calm. Do not overreact. Do not convey your own horror to the abuse.
3. Respect the privacy of the child. Do not discuss the situation with others in the presence of the child, and discuss it only with those who need to be aware of the problem.
4. Make the child feel secure and safe. Speak warmly to the child, and do not touch the child without permission. Help the child to feel comfortable around you.
5. Structure helps children to feel secure. Consistent rules and schedules will help the child to feel direction and belonging during the recovery period.
6. Help the child to rebuild self esteem through sincere praise and reassurance of the child's abilities.
7. Display the child's work and name in appropriate areas around the room to allow the child to feel accepted and important.
8. Develop a personal relationship with the child by sharing positive events from your life and interacting with the child.
9. Provide opportunities for the child to express emotions through artwork (drawing, painting, sculpting with clay).
10. Make the child feel worthwhile and important. This may be done through positive interactions such as winking, smiling, friendly tone of voice, etc.