

Keeping Kids Safe: Recognizing and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

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Agenda

- The legal definitions of Child Abuse and Maltreatment/Neglect in New York State
- Child Abuse in various contexts
- Effects of abuse and/or maltreatment on children
- Warning signs of Abuse/Maltreatment
- How is Child Abuse or Maltreatment/Neglect handled when reported
- How to report suspected Abuse/Maltreatment
- Myths regarding Child Abuse and Maltreatment/Neglect
- How to avoid abusive behaviors

Child Abuse Hot Line Number 1 800 342 3720

The Family Court Act of New York defines Child Abuse and Neglect:

Child Abuse occurs when a child whose parent or other person legally responsible for his/her care inflicts serious physical injury, creates a substantial risk of serious physical injury, or commits an act of sex abuse against the child.

Sex Abuse is defined as sexual contact with a person below a specified age* who is incapable of giving consent due to age or mental or physical incapacity. It also includes exposing a child to social situations or materials of a sexual nature.

* Age – 18 years

- Maltreatment/Neglect is a failure of a parent or caretaker to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety and well being are threatened with harm.
- ▢ Neglect is considered abuse when a parent or caretaker potentially damages a child's mental health or social development

Risk Factors

- ▶ Abuse affects a child's sense of worth, their ability to develop healthy relationships and to function responsibly at home, work and school.
- ▶ Survivors are at greater risk for physical, emotional, education and relationship problems throughout childhood and into adulthood
- ▶ All types of abuse leave lasting scars, which can be physical or emotional

Discipline

- ▶ Original definition: *to teach*
- ▶ Current definitions:
 - ▶ Positive - focused; committed goal
reasonably modify a behavior
 - ▶ Negative – excessive – involves mental or
physical or actual harm
 - ▶
 - ▶
 - ▶

Discipline

Discipline: To Teach

Discipline Today: A quality of being able to *behave and work/play* in a way that involves obeying particular rules or standards.

Discipline runs on a continuum- from reasonable to excessive consequences

- ▷ Reasonable – positive spin to consequences
- ▷ Middle ground: most of the time
- ▷ Excessive use that results in physical or emotional harm

Warning Signs of Abuse/Sexual Abuse

- ▶ Physical Abuse
 - ▶ Frequent injuries; unexplained injuries
 - ▶ Always watchful – on alert for something bad happening
 - ▶ Injuries with a pattern (hand or belt marks)
 - ▶ Shies from touching; flinches at sudden movements; afraid to go home
 - ▶ Inappropriate clothing to cover injuries
- ▶ Sexual Abuse
 - ▶ Trouble sitting or walking
 - ▶ Knowledge of or unusual interest in sexual acts
 - ▶ Avoids a certain person
 - ▶ Acts inappropriately *adult* or *infantile* (sexualized, thumb-sucking, tantrum

Warning Signs of Maltreatment/Neglect

Neglect

- ▶ Clothing (ill-fitting, filthy or inappropriate for weather)
- ▶ Poor hygiene (unbathed, matted and unwashed hair, noticeable body odor)
- ▶ Untreated illnesses or injuries
- ▶ Frequently unsupervised, left alone, allowed to play in unsafe situations

▶ Maltreatment

- ▶ Poor social skills
- ▶ Excessively withdrawn
- ▶ Excessively aggressive

Effects of Abuse

Abused Children are at a greater risk, throughout their lifespan for:

- ▶ Poor physical health
- ▶ Emotional difficulties – poorer self concept, less self-confidence
- ▶ School difficulties
- ▶ Less satisfying social interactions
- ▶ Less curiosity about work, leisure and family interests
- ▶ Work and relationship problems
- ▶ Less socio-economic success
- ▶ Become abusive themselves

Family Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect

- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Alcohol and drug use
- ▶ Untreated mental illness
- ▶ Lack of parenting skills
- ▶ Excessive discipline

What Happens When Abuse or Neglect Is Reported

A call is placed (1 800 342 3720) where a trained representative interviews the caller for relevant information and then decides if the information meets Abuse/Maltreatment criteria.

The person making the call is not informed of this decision.

If abuse is suspected, it is assigned to a Child Protective Specialist for investigation:

- The reported family must be contacted within 24 hours
- A full report must be completed within 60 days of the Abuse/Maltreatment call with a
- A 'finding' of "Unfounded" or "Indicated" must be made

Investigation

- The investigation involves:
 - Family history review
 - Contact with the reporter
 - Interviews with the alleged victim, parent/caretakers; other necessary people

Final Report

The final report must conclude that the suspected abuse/maltreatment was Unfounded (no credible evidence) or Indicated.

If Indicated, it must report:

- Immediate Danger i.e. Foster Care
- High Risk - Court mandated services
- No or Low Risk - Voluntary preventive services

Tips for Reporting Child Abuse

- ▶ Be specific
- ▶ Understand that you might not know the results of the investigation
- ▶ If you see future incidents, continue to call and report incidents



Common Worries About Reporting

- ▶ I don't want to interfere in someone else's family
- ▶ What if I break up someone's home
- ▶ They will know it's me who called
- ▶ What I have to say won't make a difference



Head Start Responsibilities

- ▶ Each staff member is a mandated reporter
- ▶ Each staff member must complete a NYS Child Abuse/Maltreatment training every two years
- ▶ At our yearly orientation with parents, we inform parents that we are mandated reporters
- ▶ Teachers are directed to look for any unusual marks on the children each day

- ▶ We ask parents to call us about any unusual marks on the children each morning, and, in turn, we contact parents regarding any new marks on the children during the school day

Myths Around Child Abuse and Neglect

- ▶ It's only abuse if its violent
- ▶ Only “bad” people abuse their children
- ▶ Child abuse doesn't happen in “good “ families
- ▶ Most abusers are strangers
- ▶ Abused children always grow up to be abusers

Recognizing Signs of Frustrations or Abusive Behavior in Yourself, a Loved One or a Neighbor

Some thoughts/questions to consider:

Raising children is a mix of emotions – some wonderful, some frustrating; when frustrated, how intense is your frustration?

- Do you find yourself screaming at the children, threatening the children or wanting to hurt them?
- Does your or a spouse's anger seem uncontrollable/too frequent?
- Do you or someone close to you feel or seem disconnected from the children?

Some suggestions for handling frustration and stress:

- ▶ Recognize your stress and work on a strategy to relieve the frustration
- ▶ Find someone to confide in
- ▶ When necessary, seek professional help.
Professional help is out there and can be very supportive and life changing

- ▶ To report a suspected case of Child Abuse in New York City:
 - ▶ Call 311 and be directed to a hot line
 - ▶ Call 800-342-3720
- ▶ In an emergency, call 911
- ▶ Any questions or comments

Child Protective Services

- ▶ **Do You Suspect Abuse or Maltreatment?
Report it Now!**
- ▶ **Call our Statewide Toll Free Telephone Number:
[1-800-342-3720](tel:1-800-342-3720)**
- ▶ **If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call TDD/TTY at
[1-800-638-5163](tel:1-800-638-5163)
OR have your Video Relay System provider call
[1-800-342-3720](tel:1-800-342-3720)**
- ▶ **If you believe that a child is in immediate danger,
call 911 or your local police department.**

▶ Many thanks for joining us.