

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING CHILD ABUSE

Types of Child Abuse and Neglect

Physical Abuse – A child who has received injuries from striking, beating, shaking or burning is physically abused.

Emotional Abuse – A child who has received psychologically harmful verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate belittlement or lack of worth is psychologically abused.

Sexual Abuse – A child who has been exploited for any sexual gratification by an adult (i.e. rape, incest, fondling, exhibitionism, voyeurism) is sexually abused.

Physical Neglect – A child who lacks the appropriate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, and cleanliness expected within his/her culture is physically neglected.

Emotional Neglect – A child who has not received the appropriate psychological nurturing from parents necessary for healthy psychological growth and development is emotionally neglected.

How to Protect Children from Abuse

Children need not be made afraid or suspicious of all adults in order to feel protected. Simply make your children aware that if someone touches them or does anything that makes them uncomfortable, they should report it to you or another adult they trust. You can teach your children that they have the right to say "NO" if asked to do something that makes them uncomfortable, even if this person is a relative or close friend. Use words your children understand. Let them know they can come to you to talk about anything that's upsetting to them. Answer any questions your children may have and remain calm. Be aware of all forms of abuse.

Lessen the Risk of Abuse

Know where your children are and what they are doing. Know who is with your children. Check out fully any baby-sitters or day care providers. Ask for references. And check references. Talk with your children about the day's activities. Be observant of anything they say or do that seems out of the ordinary.

Contacts and Services

For your information, the following chart shows what agencies may assist you in specific areas as listed below:

Agency to Telephone	Police or Sheriff	County Depart. Of Social Services	State or Local Division of Community Care Licensing
If you believe a child is being (or has been) abused by an individual (relative, friend).....	Telephone	Telephone 858-560-2191 800-344-6000	
If you believe a child has been Assaulted by a stranger.....	Telephone		
If you believe a child is being (or has been) abused in a licensed day care setting (child care center, school, recreational facility, family day care home).....	Telephone		Telephone 619-767-2200
If you have any questions or complaints concerning the licensing, organization, staffing or programs of a licensed child care setting.....			Telephone 619-767-2200

What If you Discover Your Child Has Been Sexually Abused?

Children's reactions to being sexually abused differ greatly from child to child because of the child's age, his or her personality, the nature of the offense, the offender's relationship to the child and adult reactions to the discovery of the abuse. Sometimes children do not appear overly upset by the abuse; often, they are confused or frightened by what they have encountered. You, as a parent, play an important part in how the abuse will affect your child both in the short and long term. The following are some suggestions if you discover your child has been sexually abused:

- Believe your child; reinforce the fact that he or she is not to blame for what happened.
- Immediately report the abuse to the proper authorities (see Contacts and Services)
- Assure your child that you still love him or her.
- Allow your child to talk about the incident(s) but do not pressure him or her to do so.
- Let your child know that he or she will be protected from further assault. Protection of your child should be your first concern.
- Seek medical care if you suspect any sexual abuse may have occurred. Although children are rarely seriously damaged physically by sex offenders, internal injury may have occurred and the risk of a sexually transmitted disease must be considered. Discuss any possible medical complications with your physician.
- Be aware of your own feelings concerning the abuse. Although you may have many feelings including shock, anger and disbelief, make sure your child understands your feelings are not aimed at him or her.

Not Just Sexual Abuse

Be aware of other forms of abuse, especially if your child is left in the care of others. Make it a habit to examine your child's body. (This can be done in a casual manner while dressing or bathing.) Question any unusual marks, bruises, burns, welts, etc.

Reporting Abuse

While everyone should report suspected child abuse and neglect, the California Penal Code provides that certain professionals and laypersons must report suspected abuse to the proper authorities. The mandated reporters include:

Any Child Care Custodian (teachers, licensing day care workers, foster parents, social workers)

Medical Practitioners (physicians, dentists, psychologists, nurses)

Nonmedical Practitioner (public health employees, counselors religious practitioners who treat children)

Employees of a Child Protective Agency (sheriff, probation officers, county welfare department employees)

Failure to report suspected abuse by a mandated reporter (listed above) within 36 hours is a misdemeanor punishable by time in jail, a fine or both.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES