

# CARE FOR U PLUS

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## Identification and Reporting Child Abuse

Child abuse is when someone, whether through action or failing to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm, or risk of serious harm to a child. Every year more than 3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States. It's a terrible epidemic that we need to put an end to.

### Major Types of Child Abuse and Neglect:

- **Physical abuse** is a nonaccidental physical injury to a child caused by a parent, caregiver, or other person responsible for a child and can include punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise causing physical harm. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child. Injuries from physical abuse could range from minor bruises to severe fractures or death.
- **Neglect** is the failure of a parent or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect generally includes the following categories:
  - *Physical* (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, lack of appropriate supervision)
  - *Medical* (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment, withholding medically indicated treatment from children with life-threatening conditions)
  - *Educational* (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
  - *Emotional* (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, permitting a child to use alcohol or other drugs)

Sometimes cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may contribute to what is perceived as maltreatment, indicating the family may need information or assistance. It is important to note that living in poverty is not considered child abuse or neglect. However, a family's failure to use available information and resources to care for their child may put the child's health or safety at risk, and child welfare intervention could be required. In addition, many States provide an exception.

- **Sexual abuse** includes activities by a parent or other caregiver such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure, and exploitation through prostitution or the production of pornographic materials. Sexual abuse is defined by CAPTA as "the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or interfamilial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children"(42 U.S.C. § 5106g(a)(4)).
- **Emotional abuse** (or psychological abuse) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to

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prove, and, therefore, child protective services may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm or mental injury to the child (Prevent Child Abuse America, 2016).

- **Abandonment** is considered in many States as a form of neglect. In general, a child is considered to be abandoned when the parent's identity or whereabouts are unknown, the child has been left alone in circumstances where the child suffers serious harm, the child has been deserted with no regard for his or her health or safety, or the parent has failed to maintain contact with the child or provide reasonable support for a specified period of time. Some States have enacted laws—often called safe haven laws—that provide safe places for parents to relinquish newborn infants.
- **Parental substance use** is included in the definition of child abuse or neglect in many States. Related circumstances that are considered abuse or neglect in some States include the following:
  - Exposing a child to harm prenatally due to the mother's use of legal or illegal drugs or other substances
  - Manufacturing methamphetamine in the presence of a child
  - Selling, distributing, or giving illegal drugs or alcohol to a child
  - Using a controlled substance that impairs the caregiver's ability to adequately care for the child
- **Human trafficking** is considered a form of modern slavery and includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Sex trafficking is recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining someone for a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, pornography, or stripping. Labor trafficking is forced labor, including drug dealing, begging, or working long hours for little pay (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Although human trafficking includes victims of any sex, age, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, children involved in child welfare, including children who are in out-of-home care, are especially vulnerable (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

## Recognizing Signs of Abuse and Neglect:

It is important to recognize high-risk situations and the signs and symptoms of maltreatment. If you suspect a child is being harmed, reporting your suspicions may protect him or her and help the family receive assistance. Any concerned person can report suspicions of child abuse or neglect. Reporting your concerns is not making an accusation; rather, it is a request for an investigation and assessment to determine if help is needed.

While it's important to know the signs of physical, mental, and emotional abuse and neglect, the following signs of general maltreatment also can help determine whether a child needs help:

- **Child:**
  - Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
  - Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention
  - Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes
  - Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen

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- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Is reluctant to be around a particular person
- Discloses maltreatment
- **Parent:**
  - Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child’s problems in school or at home
  - Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves
  - Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome
  - Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
  - Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of the parent’s emotional needs
  - Shows little concern for the child
- **Parent and child:**
  - Touch or look at each other rarely
  - Consider their relationship entirely negative
  - State consistently they do not like each other

The preceding list is not a comprehensive list of the signs of maltreatment. It is important to pay attention to other behaviors that may seem unusual or concerning. Additionally, the presence of these signs does not necessarily mean that a child is being maltreated; there may be other causes. They are, however, indicators that others should be concerned about the child’s welfare, particularly when multiple signs are present, or they occur repeatedly.

## Signs of Physical Abuse:

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of physical abuse:

- Has unexplained injuries, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other noticeable marks after an absence from school
- Seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive
- Seems frightened of his or her parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Shows changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when a parent or other adult caregiver exhibits the following:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child’s injury or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Shows little concern for the child
- Sees the child as entirely bad, burdensome, or worthless

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- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets

## **Signs of Neglect:**

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of neglect:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical care (including immunizations), dental care, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when a parent or other caregiver exhibits the following:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

## **Signs of Sexual Abuse:**

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of sexual abuse:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Experiences bleeding, bruising, or swelling in their private parts
- Suddenly refuses to go to school
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when a parent or other caregiver exhibits the following:

- Tries to be the child's friend rather than assume an adult role
- Makes up excuses to be alone with the child
- Talks with the child about the adult's personal problems or relationships

## **Signs of Emotional Maltreatment:**

A child who exhibits the following signs may be a victim of emotional maltreatment:

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- Shows extremes in behavior, such as being overly compliant or demanding, extremely passive, or aggressive
- Is either inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (e.g., frequently rocking or head-banging)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Shows signs of depression or suicidal thoughts
- Reports an inability to develop emotional bonds with others

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the parent or other adult caregiver exhibits the following:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Describes the child negatively
- Overtly rejects the child

## **How and When to Report Child Abuse/Neglect:**

In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as 1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873). A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.

## **What information will I be asked to provide to the hotline screener?**

SCR screeners are trained caseworkers who know how to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect. Whenever possible, a caller should provide all of the following information:

- **Who:** The child and parent/caregiver's name, age and address and the name of the alleged perpetrator and that person's relationship to the child.
- **What:** Type and frequency of alleged abuse/neglect, current or previous injuries to the child and what caused you to become concerned.
- **When:** When the alleged abuse/neglect occurred and when you learned of it.
- **Where:** Where the incident occurred, where the child is now and whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.
- **How:** How urgent the need is for intervention and whether there is a likelihood of imminent danger for the child.

## **Do callers have immunity from civil or criminal liability?**

Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of child abuse or neglect or testifies in a child abuse hearing resulting from such a report is immune from any criminal or civil liability as a result of such action. Calls can be placed to the hotline anonymously.

## **Is it against the laws of New Jersey to fail to report suspected abuse/neglect?**

Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse or neglect according to the law or to comply with the provisions of the law is a disorderly person.

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## **What happens after I make the call?**

When a report indicates that a child may be at risk, an investigator from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (formerly Youth and Family Services) will promptly investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours of receipt of the report. or example, if you cannot reach an object on a high shelf, use a step stool rather than climbing on a counter or straining to reach.