

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Preventing Child Abuse

Child care providers/early educators are in a unique position to protect children from child abuse and neglect. Since providers spend considerable time with young children, know them well, and understand child development, they are able to detect subtle signs that a child may be experiencing abuse or maltreatment. Providers also get to know families well, they are able to refer families to sources of support and to, perhaps, prevent abuse before it occurs. Providers can ensure that children are safe from abuse while in care.

What is the definition of child abuse?

Maltreatment is a general term that includes several types of child abuse. There are four major categories of child maltreatment:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological maltreatment
- Neglect

Each can occur alone but often children are the victims of more than one type of maltreatment. Child maltreatment can occur in any area, any economic group, and any cultural or ethnic group. Maltreatment may be a single event, as in shaken baby syndrome, or a pattern of behavior over time as in a child who is repeatedly the victim of extreme, inappropriate discipline.

What are the signs of child abuse?

Only a thorough investigation by Child Protective Services (CPS) or other authorities can determine if child abuse has occurred. But, there are some signs and symptoms that caregivers can watch for that may indicate that a child has been a victim of maltreatment. All caregivers should obtain training in recognizing the signs of child abuse. Additional information about the signs of child abuse can be found in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services publication *The Role of Professional Child Care Providers in Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect*. This document is available online at

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/childcare/childcare.pdf>.

The signs of maltreatment are only **possible** indicators of abuse. Many of the signs of maltreatment can also be signs of other problems such as medical conditions or a child's reaction to stressors. Still, it is important to be aware of the potential signs of maltreatment because caregivers play a crucial role in the reporting of child abuse.

What do you do when you suspect child abuse?

Child care providers/early educators, whether family child care providers or employees in child care centers, are *mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect*. This means that adults working with young children are required **by law** to report suspected maltreatment regardless of where the maltreatment took place. You do not need to have evidence or absolute proof that abuse took place to make a report. In fact, providers are required to report if they have a good faith reason to believe that abuse took place. Providers cannot experience negative legal consequences for making a report even if the investigation determines that the abuse did not occur. But, caregivers who fail to report can be subject to legal consequences.

The following information is typically required to make a report:

- Name of the child
- Age of the child
- Home address where the child can be reached
- Parents' names, phone numbers and addresses (if known)
- Specific physical or behavioral signs of the maltreatment (what prompted the report)
- Indication of whether the child is in imminent danger
- Name, phone number, and address of the reporter. Reports can be made anonymously; however, knowing the name and contact information of the reporter allows the agency to follow up if additional information is needed.

The agency staff member accepting the report may ask clarifying questions. Caregivers should provide honest answers about what they know and what they do not know to help the agency staff member make the best decisions about how to act on the report.

How do you report child abuse?

Most reports of suspected child abuse are made to the county social service agency's child protection unit. This group is tasked with investigating abuse that is believed to be committed by a parent, family foster care provider, guardian or family member. All child care providers/early educators should have contact information for the local county should the need to make a report arise. Reports of suspected abuse should be made as soon as possible to protect the child's safety. Verbal reports should be made within 24 hours.

If a child is in immediate danger, for example a child has been abandoned, providers may contact the local law enforcement agency. And, if there is reason to believe that a child has been maltreated in a child care center, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Division of Licensing (651-297-4123) must be contacted immediately. For additional information on reporting child abuse in Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Human Services has developed *Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: A Resource Guide for Mandated Reporters*. The document is available online at <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfsrserver/Legacy/DHS-2917-ENG>. This document is available in English, Hmong, [Somali](#), [Spanish](#) and [Vietnamese](#).

How do you help prevent abuse in your child care/early education program?

Sadly, child abuse can also occur in child care/early education programs. Those who maltreat children may be well educated and of any socioeconomic, religious, cultural, racial or ethnic group. The following suggestions may diminish the chances that abusive behavior will occur in a child care/early education program:

- Obtain training in child development and techniques for positive child guidance.
- Maintain the adult-to-child ratios required by law at all times.
- Provide open access for parents to the program: They should be able to visit at any time and unannounced.
- Work in pairs whenever possible: Minimize the amount of time adults are left alone with groups of children.
- Learn the signs of stress and look for them in yourself and others working in the program. Provide frequent breaks.
- Develop written reports of all child accidents, even minor bumps and scraps.

To help minimize the chances of a child being maltreated outside of the program, consider the following suggestions:

- Offer parent education opportunities that focus on realistic expectations for children's behavior and positive guidance techniques.
- Offer information to families on family support options in the area or refer families to early childhood family education in the local school district.
- Encourage family involvement in the program. Modeling can have a positive impact on parenting behavior.
- Communicate frequently with families. Watch for signs that family stressors may be impacting a parent's ability to address a child's behavior in a positive and healthy way.