

Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect



The first step in helping abused children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child abuse.

This pamphlet was prepared by the
Jefferson County Human Services Department.

How many children are abused?

In 2011, an estimated 2 million referrals alleging child abuse or neglect were accepted by CPS agencies for investigation and assessment. The referrals included more than 3 million children, and of those, approximately 681,000 children were determined to be the victims of abuse or neglect.

More than 75% of child victims were neglected by their parents or other caregivers. More than 15% were physically abused and less than 10% were sexually abused. In addition, an estimated 10% of victims experienced "other" types of maltreatment. A child could be a victim of more than one type of maltreatment.

Child fatalities are the most tragic consequence of maltreatment. In 2011, a nationally estimated 1,570 children died as a result of abuse or neglect. Approximately four-fifths of all child fatalities were younger than 4 years old. Overall, the youngest children experience the highest rates of fatalities.

While numbers help provide us with a better sense of the magnitude of child abuse and neglect across the nation, even one child being abused or neglected is one child too many.

(Statistics from National Child Abuse and Neglect Data Systems, 2011)

The following websites provide additional detailed information about possible signs of abuse/neglect and what you can do if you suspect that a child has been the victim of abuse/neglect.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services – Child Welfare Information Gateway

www.childwelfare.gov

WI Department of Children & Families

www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/Children/CPS/

Prevent Child Abuse Wisconsin

www.preventchildabusewi.org

What is child abuse?

Child maltreatment is generally divided into four basic types: Physical Neglect, Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Emotional Abuse.

Physical Neglect

Physical neglect is defined in the statute as "failure, refusal or inability on the part of a parent, guardian, legal custodian or other person exercising temporary or permanent control over a child, *for reasons other than poverty*, to provide necessary care, food, clothing, medical or dental care or shelter so as to seriously endanger the physical health of the child."

Wisconsin Statutes 48.981(1)(d)

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as "physical injury inflicted on a child by other than accidental means." Wisconsin Statutes 48.02(1)(a). "Physical injury" includes but is not limited to lacerations, fractured bones, burns, internal injuries, severe or frequent bruising or great bodily harm, as defined in s. 939.22(14). Wisconsin Statutes 48.02(14g)

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is defined by cross-referencing several crimes in other sections of the statutes. Briefly, sexual abuse includes the following:

- any person having sexual intercourse or sexual contact with a child 15 years of age or younger;
- any person having sexual intercourse or sexual contact with a 16- or 17-year old child without his or her consent;
- any person inducing a child to engage in sexually explicit conduct in order to videotape, photograph, etc., that child or videotaping, photographing, etc., a child for such purposes, or producing, distributing, selling or otherwise profiting from such a videotape, photograph, etc.;
- a person responsible for a child's welfare encouraging or permitting the child to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of videotaping, photographing, etc.;
- any person causing a child to view or listen to sexual activity;

- any person exposing genitals to a child; and
- any person permitting or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is defined as "Emotional damage for which the child's parent, guardian or legal custodian has neglected, refused or been unable for reasons other than poverty to obtain the necessary treatment or to take steps to ameliorate the symptoms."

Wisconsin Statutes 48.02(1)(gm) and (5j).

Signs/Indicators of Abuse and Neglect

Following are the major signs of physical neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. One of these, or even several in combination, may not indicate that abuse has occurred. They may indicate accidents or that other medical conditions, emotional illness, or problems exist. It is important to realize that you do not have to make that determination. If you have any reason to suspect child abuse or neglect, report your concerns to the appropriate agency and let them make the determination.

Signs of Physical Neglect

- Poor hygiene, body odor
- Inappropriately dressed for weather
- Needs medical or dental care
- Unsafe or unsanitary home conditions
- Left alone, unsupervised, for long periods of time (depending on child's age)
- Failure to thrive, malnutrition
- Extreme willingness to please
- Arrives early and stays late at school or play areas or other people's homes

Signs of Physical Abuse

- Bruises, welts on face, neck, chest, back
- Injuries in the shape of object (belt, cord)
- Bite mark, black eye, broken bones
- Unexplained burns on palms, soles of feet, back
- Fractures that do not fit the story of how an injury occurred
- Shaken Baby Syndrome

- Fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Delay in seeking medical help
- Extremes in behavior: very aggressive or withdrawn and shy (unlike typical behavior)
- Afraid to go home
- Frightened of parents/caregivers
- Fearful of other adults
- Child reports injury by parent or another adult caregiver

Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Pain, swelling, or itching in genital area
- Bruises, bleeding, discharge in genital area
- Difficulty walking or sitting, frequent urination
- Stained or bloody underclothing
- Sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy
- Refusal to take part in gym or other exercises
- Poor peer relationships
- Unusual interest in sex for age, unusual knowledge of sex terminology
- Excessive masturbation
- Drastic change in school achievement
- Runaway or delinquent behavior
- Regressive or childlike behavior
- Child makes report of sexual abuse

Signs of Emotional Abuse

- Low self-esteem
- Self-denigration
- Severe depression
- Unusual level of aggression
- Severe anxiety
- Extreme withdrawal
- Failure to learn

Emotional abuse is thought to be the most common form of abuse. However, it can also be the hardest to prove. It is important to note that the fact that a child is upset over an adult's behavior does not, in the absence of expert testimony, establish that the child suffered severe anxiety, depression, or were emotionally damaged by the adult. Therefore, testimony from a doctor is often necessary to show that emotional abuse has occurred.