



Letter to Parents/Guardians Regarding Abuse and Neglect

What is Child Abuse?

Child abuse and neglect occurs when a child is mistreated, resulting in injury or risk of harm. Abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual.

Physical Abuse is non-accidental physical trauma or injury inflicted by a parent or caretaker on a child. It also includes a parent's or a caretaker's failure to protect a child from another person who perpetrated physical abuse on a child. In its most severe form, physical abuse is likely to cause great bodily harm or death.

Physical Neglect is the failure to provide for a child's physical survival needs to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm to the child's health or safety. This may include, but is not limited to abandonment, lack of supervision, life endangering physical hygiene, lack of adequate nutrition that places the child below the normal growth curve, lack of shelter, lack of medical or dental that results in health threatening conditions, and the inability to meet basic clothing needs of a child. In its most severe form, physical neglect may result in great bodily harm or death.

Sexual Abuse includes penetration or external touching of a child's intimate parts, oral sex with a child, indecent exposure or any other sexual act performed in a child's presence for sexual gratification, sexual use of a child for prostitution, and the manufacturing of child pornography. Child sexual abuse is also the willful failure of the parent or the child's caretaker to make a reasonable effort to stop child sexual abuse by another person.

Emotional Abuse includes verbal assaults, ignoring and indifference or constant family conflict. If a child is degraded enough, the child will begin to live up to the image communicated by the abusing parent or caretaker.

Child abuse can happen anywhere – in poor, middle-class or well-to-do homes, in rural or urban areas.

Possible Indicators of Abuse and Neglect:

- The child has repeated injuries that are not properly treated or adequately explained.
- The child begins acting in unusual ways ranging from disruptive & aggressive to passive & withdrawn.
- The child acts in the role of parent toward their brothers and sisters or even toward their own parents.
- The child may have disturbed sleep (nightmares, bed wetting, fear of sleeping alone, needing nightlight).
- The child loses his/her appetite, overeats, or may report being hungry.
- There is a sudden drop in school grades or participation in activities.
- The child may act in stylized ways, such as sexual behavior that is not normal for his/her age group.

- The child may report abusive or neglectful acts.

The above signs indicate that something is wrong but do not necessarily point to abuse. However, if you notice these signs early, you may be able to prevent abuse or neglect.

- Parents who abuse or neglect their children may show some common characteristics:
 - Possible drug/alcohol history
 - Disorganized home life
 - May seem to be isolated from the community and have no close friends
 - When asked about a child's injury, may offer conflicting reasons or no explanation at all
 - May seem unwilling or unable to provide for a child's basic needs
 - May not have age appropriate expectations of their children
 - May use harsh discipline that is not appropriate for child's age or behavior
 - Were abused or neglected as a child

Parents who abuse their children need help, but few are able to admit the problem and seek assistance. Long-term trends show that more than 85 percent of the perpetrators of child abuse and neglect in Tennessee were the parents or relatives of the victims.

Staffs at schools, day cares and institutions were perpetrators in only 2 percent of the investigations. Adolescents as well as adults can be perpetrators of abuse.

What Happens in an Investigation?

The process of investigation can include talking with the alleged child victim (or observing a young, nonverbal child), parents and/or alleged perpetrator. CPS workers will gather pertinent medical and psychological information and will work with their counterparts in the medical, psychological, judicial and law-enforcement fields. The investigations can also include interviews of neighbors or friends who have knowledge of the child's situation.

The emphasis remains on constantly evaluating the risk to the alleged child victim during the entire investigative process.

In reports involving severe child abuse, DCS will notify the local district attorney and law enforcement offices. These include reports that involve a child's death or serious injury or situations involving torture, malnutrition and child sexual abuse.

Furthermore, Tennessee law requires local Child Protective Investigation Teams review certain cases. The CPIT in each county includes representatives from DCS, the local district attorney general's office, juvenile court, law enforcement and the mental-health profession.

To report abuse or neglect: 1.877.237.0004 or <https://reportabuse.state.tn.us/>

When a person notifies the Department of Children's Services regarding possible abuse or neglect of a child, Children's Services case managers determine how quickly to respond with an investigation. They must assess the referral information and focus on the present and future risks to the child.

Considering the condition of the child and the risk of future maltreatment helps a case manager know how to quickly to respond to an abuse or neglect referral and what priority to assign that referral.

DCS accepts reports of child maltreatment provided it meets the following three criteria:

- The report pertains to a child under the age of 18 years.

- The report alleges harm or imminent risk of harm to the child.
- The alleged perpetrator is:
 - a parent or caretaker
 - a relative or other person living in the home
 - an educator, volunteer, employee of recreational/organizational setting who is responsible for the child
 - any individual providing treatment, care or supervision for the child.

DCS accepts all referrals involving sexual abuse of children under the age of 13 years regardless of the previous relationship between the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.

DCS does not investigate sexual abuse allegations of a child 13 to 18 years old by an alleged perpetrator who does not have a relationship with the child, as defined above unless the child is in the department's custody. DCS may assist law enforcement or the district attorney's office in such cases.

Here's the information you'll be asked to provide if you call to report child abuse:

- Nature of the harm or specific incident(s) that precipitated the report
- Specific allegation(s), date(s) and descriptions(s) of the injuries or dangers Identities of alleged perpetrator(s) and their relationships to the victim
- Witnesses to the incident(s) and how to reach those witnesses
- Details of any physical evidence available
- Perpetrator's current access to the child Present condition of the child (alone, in need of medical attention, etc.)
- The location of the child and directions to get there
- Any statements from the child Parent's or perpetrator's explanation of the alleged child victim's condition or the incident
- Parent's current emotional, physical or mental state, especially feelings about the child and reactions to the report
- How the reporter came to know the information and the reporter's thoughts about the likelihood of further harm to the child.

The reporter's identity is confidential, but a name should be given so the department could follow up with the reporter if necessary. The reporter is free from civil or criminal liability for reports of suspected child abuse or neglect made in good faith.