

How is Child Abuse Defined?



“Child Abuse” is the mistreatment of a child by a person who is responsible for the child or who has power/authority over the child. Child abuse also includes allowing a child to endure unjustifiable pain or mental suffering or to be in a dangerous situation or environment. Because of its potential for physically harming the child, as well as its known serious emotional impact on children, acts of domestic violence are considered reportable child abuse if children are present.

Types of Child Abuse

Physical Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Neglect

Emotional Maltreatment

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as a physical injury inflicted upon a child by another person by other than accidental means. In other words, physical abuse is an intentional act that results in physical injury of any kind.

Physical abuse is the most visible form of child abuse and therefore is reported more often than less obvious types of maltreatment. Physical abuse usually occurs when a parent, other adult, or older/larger child hits, punches, squeezes, pinches, bites, kicks, or shakes a child to the point where the child sustains injury. *Even if the person did not intend to cause injury, it is the intentional act itself that constitutes abuse.* Most acts that result in physical abuse are administered in the name of discipline or punishment. While parents and legal guardians are the only persons who have a legal right to use corporal (i.e. physical) punishment on their children, even they have absolutely no right to abuse or inflict any degree of cruel or inhuman corporal punishment or injury on their child.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse means sexual assault on or sexual exploitation of a child. Sexual abuse ranges from non-touching sexual activity (talking seductively, propositioning, showing lewd pictures) to sexual body contact (fondling, oral copulation, penetration). In spite of its prevalence - one in three girls and one in five boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18 — sexual abuse is the most under-reported form of child abuse because of the shame, fear, and “conspiracy of silence” that so often characterizes these cases.



Breaking the Silence

The secrecy surrounding sexual abuse exists primarily because the vast majority of sexual abusers are family members or people well known to and trusted by the child. This relationship makes it nearly impossible for the child to discuss his abuse and, if he does, for people to believe him.

Neglect

Neglect is the most reported form of child maltreatment. Neglect includes any act or lack of action by a person responsible for the child that results in the child being harmed or being put at risk for harm. Neglected children are deprived of basic essentials. Their parent or caretaker fails to provide them with adequate food, clothing, hygiene, shelter, medical/dental care, and/or supervision.

Neglect is not synonymous with poverty. Neglect occurs when the responsible person has, is offered, or is able to obtain assistance in providing basic necessities for his child, but does not do so.

Most neglected children suffer from General Neglect — these are the latchkey children, the ones whose food lacks proper nutrients, who often are dirty, or whose teeth are rotten.

Children subjected to Severe Neglect are at immediate risk — they may be starved, made to sleep outdoors, or locked up for long periods of time. These are the children we read about in the newspaper.

We’ve all skipped a doctor’s appointment on occasion or missed giving our child a bath now and then. This would not be considered neglect. It’s when these behaviors continue and are extreme that they cross the line and result in children being deprived, at risk, and neglected.

Emotional Maltreatment

Emotional maltreatment is a pattern of destructive interaction between a parent and a child. It consists of behaviors by the parent or caretaker that negatively affect the child's self-esteem. These behaviors directly or indirectly tell the child that he's no good, worthless, unattractive, unloved, or unlovable.

Emotional maltreatment can be direct (*Emotional Abuse*) or indirect (*Emotional Neglect*).

Emotional Abuse batters the child's self-worth with verbal assaults (screaming, name calling, threats, blaming, put-downs), constant negativity, unexpected / inappropriate responses, or sarcasm.

Emotional Neglect deprives the child of love, nurturing, attention, and affection. By ignoring or rejecting the child, he is made to feel unwanted and unworthy.

When children are physically abused, sexually abused, and/or neglected, they automatically are subjected to emotional maltreatment.

Emotional maltreatment is the most prevalent type of child abuse, but the most difficult to identify and treat. Many feel that while the scars of emotional maltreatment are "invisible," they go the deepest and last the longest.

Source:

Project P.A.R.E.N.T.

(Prevent Abuse through Respect,
Education, Non-Violence and Training)

Office of the
Los Angeles City Attorney

BREAKING THE SILENCE
Child Abuse Awareness Training

Reporting Agencies

Your Local Law Enforcement Agency

The Phone Number

LAPD
Los Angeles Police Department

(213) 485-4700

Sheriff's Dept.
LA County Sheriff's Department

(323) 267-4800

DCFS
LA County Department of Children & Family Services

(800) 540-4000



Office of the Chief Operating Officer, School Operations

Reporting Agencies

The agencies on the front of this card can help you determine the correct substation or agency to which you are to report. Do not be dissuaded if you must make a few calls to reach the right agency.

For children who are in imminent danger, have visible injuries, or disclose sexual abuse, a reporter should call the Local Law Enforcement Agency that covers the location in which the suspected abuse occurred. Otherwise, call DCFS.

Please talk with your school-site administrator to determine which Local Law Enforcement Agency or agencies cover your location and write the number(s) on the front of this card.



BREAKING THE SILENCE

Child Abuse Awareness Training

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Breaking the
Silence
Published
June 12, 2009

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<http://schoolsafety.lausd.net/childabuse/awareness>