

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect

Child abuse, also known as child maltreatment, occurs when an adult abuses or neglects a child who is younger than age 18. The adult is often in a caregiving role. Abuse can happen to any child. Child abuse can be grouped into four types, which may occur together:

- Physical abuse. This includes hitting, shaking, dropping, biting, or burning a child.
- Emotional abuse. This includes yelling, threatening, ignoring, rejecting, withholding affection, or withholding social interaction with other adults or children.
- Sexual abuse. This can include any sexual act that a child cannot understand or consent to. Sexual abuse ranges from improper viewing and touching to penetration.
- Neglect. This means failing to provide a child's basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

What actions can I take to protect my child from abuse?

Make sure your child knows that he or she can tell you if there is a problem. Listen carefully if your child says that something happened to him or her. Make sure your child knows that if there ever is a problem:

- It is not his or her fault.
- He or she will not be in trouble.

Pay attention to your child and notice if he or she has any sudden physical, emotional, or behavioral changes. These can be signs of abuse or neglect.

If you are the caregiver and you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed:

- Contact an abuse hotline or talk to a health care provider to get help.
- Seek help by joining a parenting support group.
- Talk to a counselor or a religious leader.
- Seek the advice of friends and family members.

If you have a child care provider:

- Make sure you know and trust that person and any other adults who will be around your child.
- Do a background check to assure yourself that the child care provider will take good care of your child.
- Report signs of abuse to your child's health care provider, child protective services, or local police. Also, report to authorities if your child tells you about abuse.

As your child becomes more independent:

- Stay involved in your child's life. Make sure you know:
 - Your child's teachers and other adults in your child's life. Volunteer at your child's school, if you are able to.
 - Where your child is spending his or her time, and with whom.
 - Who will be supervising your child if you are not there.

Talk to your child about:

- Healthy boundaries. Let your child know that no one should look at or touch his or her body in ways that do not feel safe or comfortable.
- Appropriate touching. Even very young children can usually tell what is an "okay" touch and what is not.
- Personal safety. Talk to your child about not going anywhere with strangers.
- Trusting his or her gut feelings. Encourage your child to leave or ask for help in a situation that does not feel safe.
- Speaking up. Let your child know that he or she has the right to be safe and to say "no."
- Not keeping secrets. Encourage your child to tell you if something happens that made him or her feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
- Internet safety. Tell your child that he or she should never give out personal information online. Instruct your child to stay out of chat rooms or other online forums.



Where to find support

- City, county, and state child protective services agencies.
- Local police departments with child abuse units and specialists.
- Faculty members at local colleges and universities that specialize in child abuse research and treatment.
- Local counselors, social workers, and psychologists who specialize in treating child abuse.

Where can I get more information?

Learn more about child abuse from:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov>
- American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://www.healthychildren.org>
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: <https://www.childhelp.org/hotline/resources-parents>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov>
- Prevent Child Abuse America: <http://preventchildabuse.org>
- Your local health department, medical center, hospital, or other social services providers. They can refer you to an organization that provides specific services to help.

Get help right away if you:

- Think your child is being abused or neglected.
- Are worried that you may harm your child.

If you believe your child is in immediate danger, call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).

Summary

- Child abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect and can happen to any child.
- Encourage your child to talk to you if he or she has any problems. Make sure your child understands that he or she will not get into trouble for telling you about a problem.

- Teach your child ways to stay safe when you are not around. This will help your child feel more confident and capable to handle situations that he or she does not feel comfortable with.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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