

CHILD ABUSE

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To learn or review the different types of child abuse.
- 2) To be able to recognize child abuse by reviewing and/or learning the physical and behavioral indicators.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is any mistreatment or neglect that results in non-accidental harm or injury and which cannot be reasonably explained.

What are the most common types of maltreatment or abuse?

Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment or *abuse*, followed by physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

Who abuses and neglects children?

60% of the perpetrators are female with an average age of 31, and 40% are male with an average age of 34.

Approximately 84% of children are abused by a parent. Mothers alone are responsible for 47% of neglect and 32% of physical abuse.

More than half (51%) of all victims are white, 28% are African American, 18% are Hispanic, 2% are Indian/Alaska Natives, and 1% are Asian/Pacific Islanders.

What makes people abuse children?

It is difficult to imagine that any person would intentionally inflict harm on a child. Many times, physical abuse is a result of excessive discipline or physical punishment that is inappropriate for the child's age. The parent may simply be unaware of the magnitude of force with which he or she strikes a child. Most parents want to be good parents, but sometimes lose control and are unable to cope.

Factors which contribute to child abuse include the immaturity of parents,

lack of parenting skills, unrealistic expectations about children's behavior and capabilities, a parent's own negative childhood, experience, social isolation, frequent family crises and drug or alcohol problems. Child abuse is a symptom that parents are having difficulty coping with their situation.

Are victims of child abuse more likely to engage in criminality later in life?

Studies show that maltreatment in childhood increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38%, and for a violent crime by 38%. Being abused or neglected in childhood increases the likelihood of arrest for females by 77%. A related report showed that children who were sexually abused were 28 times more likely than a control group of nonabused children to be arrested for prostitution as an adult.

Is there any evidence linking alcohol or other drug use to child maltreatment?

A study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that children of substance-abusing parents were almost three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children of parents who are not substance abusers. Other studies suggest that an estimated 50 - 80% of all child abuse cases substantiated by CPS involve some degree of substance abuse by the child's parents.

Neglect

What is child neglect?

Child neglect, which is 63% of all substantiated cases of child abuse, is the most common form of child maltreatment reported to child protective services. It is defined as a "type of maltreatment that refers to the failure to provide needed age-appropriate care," such as shelter, food, clothing, education, supervision, medical care and other basic necessities needed for development of physical, intellectual and emotional capacities. Unlike physical abuse, neglect is usually typified by an ongoing pattern of inadequate care and is readily observed by individuals in close contact with the child.

Types of Neglect:

1) Physical neglect:

Accounts for the majority of cases of maltreatment. The definition includes the refusal of or extreme delay in seeking necessary health care, child abandonment,

inadequate supervision, rejection of a child leading to expulsion from the home, and failing to adequately provide for the child's safety and physical and emotional needs. Physical neglect can severely impact a child's development by causing failure to thrive, malnutrition, serious illnesses, physical harm in the form of cuts, bruises and burns due to lack of supervision and a lifetime of low self-esteem.

2) *Educational neglect:*

Occurs when a child is allowed to engage in chronic truancy, is of mandatory school age but not enrolled in school or receiving needed special educational training. Educational neglect can lead to underachievement in acquiring necessary basic skills, dropping out of school and/or continually disruptive behavior.

3) *Emotional neglect:*

Includes such actions as chronic or extreme spousal abuse in the child's presence, allowing a child to use drugs or alcohol, refusal or failure to provide needed psychological care, constant belittling and withholding of affection. This pattern of behavior can lead to poor self-image, alcohol or drug abuse, destructive behavior and even suicide. Severe neglect of infants can result in the infant failing to grow and thrive and may even lead to infant death.

4) *Medical neglect:*

Is the failure to provide appropriate health care for a child although financially able to do so. In some cases, a parent or caretaker will withhold traditional medical care during the practice of religious beliefs. These cases generally do not fall under the definition of medical neglect, however, some states will obtain a court order forcing medical treatment of a child in order to save a child's life or prevent life-threatening injury resulting from the lack of treatment. Medical neglect can result in poor overall health and compounded medical problems.

Signs of Neglect

Physical Indicators:

- 1) Poor hygiene, including lice, scabies, severe or untreated diaper rash, bedsores, body odors).
- 2) Squinting.
- 3) Unsuitable clothing, missing key articles of clothing (underwear, socks, shoes), overdressed or underdressed for climate conditions.
- 4) Untreated injury or illness.
- 5) Lack of immunizations.
- 6) Indicators of prolonged exposure to elements (excessive sunburn, insect bites, colds).
- 7) Height and weight significantly below age level.

Behavioral Indicators:

- 1) Unusual school attendance.

- 2) Chronic absenteeism.
- 3) Chronic hunger, tiredness, or lethargy.
- 4) Begging for or collecting leftovers.
- 5) Assuming adult responsibilities.
- 6) Reporting no caretaker at home.

Physical Abuse

What is physical abuse?

Physical abuse, which is 19% of all substantial cases of child abuse, is the most visible form of abuse and may be defined as any act which results in a non-accidental trauma or physical injury. Inflicted physical injury most often represents unreasonable, severe corporal punishment or unjustifiable punishment. This usually happens when a frustrated or angry parent strikes, shakes or throws a child. Physical abuse injuries result from punching, beating kicking, biting, burning or otherwise harming a child. While any of these injuries can occur accidentally when a child is at play, physical abuse should be suspected if the explanations do not fit the injury or if a pattern of frequency is apparent. The longer the abuse continues, the more serious the injuries to the child and the more difficult it is to eliminate the abusive behavior.

Signs of Physical Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- 1) Unexplained bruises and welts on the face, throat, upper arms, buttocks, thighs or lower back.
- 2) Unexplained burns, cigarette burns, especially burns found on palms, soles of feet, abdomen, buttocks; immersion burns producing “stocking” or “glove” marks on hands and feet, “doughnut shaped” on buttocks or genital area.
- 3) Rope burns.
- 4) Infected burns indicating delay in treatment; burns in the shape of common household utensils, or appliances.

Behavioral Indicators:

- 1) Behavioral extremes (withdrawal, regression, depression).
- 2) Inappropriate or excessive fear of parent or caretaker.
- 3) Antisocial behavior such as substance abuse, truancy, running away, fear of going home.
- 4) Unbelievable or inconsistent explanation for injuries.
- 5) Lies unusually still while surveying surroundings (for infants).
- 6) Unusual shyness, wariness of physical contact.

Sexual Abuse

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse, which is 10% of all substantiated cases of child abuse, is defined as the involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children in sexual activities that they do not fully comprehend and, therefore, to which they are unable to give informed consent and/or which violates the taboos of society.

Sexual abuse is any misuse of a child for sexual pleasure or gratification. It has the potential to interfere with a child's normal, healthy development, both emotionally and physically. Often, sexually victimized children experience severe emotional disturbances from their own feelings of guilt and shame, as well as the feelings which society imposes on them.

At the extreme end of the spectrum, sexual abuse includes sexual intercourse and/or its deviations. These behaviors may be the final acts in a worsening pattern of sexual abuse. For this reason and because of their devastating effects, exhibitionis, fondling, and any other sexual contact with children are also considered sexually abusive.

It is very difficult for most people to talk about sexual abuse and even more difficult for society as a whole to acknowledge that the sexual abuse of children of all ages...including infants...happens everyday in the United States. It is not an easy phenomenon to define, primarily because permissible childhood behavior varies in accordance with cultural, family and social tolerances.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- 1) Torn, stained or bloody underclothes.
- 2) Frequent, unexplained sore throats, yeast or urinary infections.
- 3) Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of the genitals.
- 4) Sexually transmitted diseases.
- 5) Bruises or bleeding from external genitalia, vagina, or anal region.
- 6) Pregnancy.

Behavioral Indicators:

- 1) The victim's disclosure of sexual abuse.
- 2) Regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark).
- 3) Promiscuity or seductive behaviors.
- 4) Disturbed sleep patterns (recurrent nightmares).

- 5) Unusual and age-inappropriate interest in sexual matters.
- 6) Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes.
- 7) Sudden decline in school performance, truancy.
- 8) Difficulty in walking or sitting.

Emotional Abuse

What is emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse, which is 8% of all substantiated cases of child abuse, is commonly defined as the systematic tearing down of another human being. It is considered a pattern of behavior that can seriously interfere with a child's positive development. Emotional abuse is probably the least understood of all child abuse, yet it is the most prevalent, and can be the cruellest and most destructive of all types of abuse.

Because emotional abuse attacks the child's psyche and self-concept, the victim comes to see him or herself as unworthy of love and affection. Children who are constantly shamed, humiliated, terrorized or rejected suffer at least as much, if not more, than if they had been physically assaulted.

An infant who is being severely deprived of basic emotional nurturing, even though physically well cared for, can fail to thrive and can eventually die. Less severe forms of early emotional deprivation may produce babies who grow into anxious and insecure children who are slow to develop or whom might have low self-esteem.

Types of Emotional Abuse:

- 1) **Rejecting**—Parents who lack the ability to bond will often display rejecting behavior toward a child. They tell a child in a variety of ways that he or she is unwanted. They may also tell the child to leave, call him or her names and tell the child he or she is worthless. They may not talk to or hold the young child as he or she grows. The child may become the family scapegoat, being blamed for all the family's problems.
- 2) **Ignoring**—Adults who have had few of their emotional needs met are often unable to respond to the needs of their children. They may not show attachment to the child or provide nurturance. They may show no interest in the child, express affection or even recognize the child's presence. Many times the parent is physically there but emotionally unavailable.
- 3) **Terrorizing**—Parents may single out one child to criticize and punish. They may ridicule him or her for displaying normal emotions and have expectations far beyond his or her normal abilities. The child may be threatened with death, mutilation, or abandonment.
- 4) **Isolating**—A parent who abuses a child through isolation may not allow the child to engage in appropriate activities with his or her peers; may keep a baby in his or her room, not exposed to stimulation; or may prevent teenagers from participating in extracurricular activities. Parents may require the child to stay in his or her room from the time school lets out until the next morning, or restrict eating to isolation or seclusion.

- 5) **Corrupting**—Parents permit children to use drugs or alcohol; to watch cruel behavior toward animals; to watch pornographic materials and adult sex acts; or to witness or participate in criminal activities such as stealing, assault, prostitution, gambling, etc.

Signs of Emotional Abuse

Physical Indicators:

- 1) Eating disorders, including obesity or anorexia.
- 2) Speech disorders (stuttering, stammering).
- 3) Developmental delays in the acquisition of speech or motor skills.
- 4) Weight or height level substantially below norm.
- 5) Flat or bald spots on head (infants).
- 6) Nervous disorders (rashes, hoives, facial tics, stomach aches).

Behavioral Indicators:

- 1) Habit disorders (biting, rocking, head-banging).
- 2) Cruel behavior, seeming to get pleasure from hurting children, adults, or animals; seeming to get pleasure from being mistreated.
- 3) Age-inappropriate behaviors (bedwetting, wetting, soiling).
- 4) Behavioral extremes, such as overly compliant-demanding, withdrawn-aggressive, listless- excitable.

