



# RECOGNIZING & REPORTING

*Child Abuse & Neglect*

PRESENTED BY



care  
center

CHILD ABUSE RESPONSE & EVALUATION

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# The CARE Center

*We listen. We heal. We educate.*

The CARE Center is Oklahoma County's child advocacy center committed to helping children find their voice and begin to heal after abuse.

When a child experiences abuse, law enforcement or DHS refers to The CARE Center for our victim services of forensic interviews, medical exams, family advocacy, and mental health services.

We work together with our multidisciplinary team of law enforcement investigators, child protective service workers, assistant district attorneys, medical professionals, mental health professionals, and family advocacy personnel on the investigation, treatment, and management of child abuse cases. We are here to ensure the best possible outcome for children, while creating a caring, supportive, and safe environment for the brave children we serve.

# The Reality of Child Abuse

Learning how to recognize and report child abuse is our first step in being a voice for the many child victims that silently suffer abuse.

In Oklahoma County, *1 in 3 girls* and *1 in 5 boys* will be victims of abuse before their 18th birthday.

In addition, it is estimated that only *1 in 10 children* will disclose their abuse to a trusted adult.

As adults, it is our responsibility to learn ways to identify abusive situations. There are a number of reasons as to why children do not disclose abuse, but they need someone—they need you—to step in and be an advocate.

Children are often abused by someone they *know, love, and trust.*

These children are in our schools, our neighborhoods, and even our homes. In addition, abuse knows no boundaries as it occurs in all economic groups and across all races and religions.

## TYPES OF ABUSE AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

These are not absolutes, but rather a guide to help identify if abuse may of occurred.

# Physical Abuse

### *Definition:*

a non-accidental physical injury to a child

### *Examples:*

kicking, cutting, biting, burning, hitting

### *What to look for:*

- Injuries on the backs of hands, abdomen, back or sides of the body
- Fear of going home or seeing parents
- Seasonally inappropriate clothing that may cover marks or bruises
- May shy away from touch
- May exhibit aggress and disruptive behaviors
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Parent/child cannot adequately explain cause of injury(ies)

### *Note:*

If a child is not mobile, they should not experience injuries. A baby who is not yet crawling should not have any injuries.

## TYPES OF ABUSE AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

These are not absolutes, but rather a guide to help identify if abuse may of occurred.

# Neglect

### *Definition:*

failure to provide a child's basic needs

### *Examples:*

leaving a child alone for long periods of time (depends on age and maturity of the child), exposing them to risk, not seeking medical attention, not providing food or clothing, abandonment

### *What to look for:*

- Obvious malnourishment or inadequate nutrition
- Need for glasses, dental care, or other unattended medical needs
- Regular displays of fatigue (falls asleep in class)
- Lack of cleanliness, unwashed clothing, or foul odor
- Extreme loneliness and need for affection
- Food issues—such as hoarding
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school

## TYPES OF ABUSE AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

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# Emotional Abuse

### *Definition:*

injury to a child's psychological growth

### *Examples:*

verbal abuse, rejection, criticism, isolation, exposure to family and domestic violence

### *What to look for:*

- Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, biting)
- Developmental delays and difficulty building relationships
- Speech disorders
- Antisocial, destructive behaviors
- May have low self-esteem
- Attachment issues
- May exhibit delinquent behaviors
- Excessive demands on a child's performance

### *Note:*

90% of the time emotional abuse is tied to another type of abuse.

In teenagers, emotional abuse often presents itself as dating violence. Dating violence is prevalent among teenage children and is a form of emotional abuse

## TYPES OF ABUSE AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

These are not absolutes, but rather a guide to help identify if abuse may of occurred.

# Sexual Abuse

### *Definition:*

any sexual activity or propositioning between an adult and a child

### *Examples:*

rape, sodomy, incest, prostitution, indecent proposals, exposure to pornography, intentional exposure

### *What to look for:*

- Extreme fear of being alone with adults of a particular gender
- Major change in normal mood or behavior
- Role reversal, an older sibling might become overly concerned for younger siblings
- Changes in body image or self-care
- Premature/very advanced understanding of sex
- Sexual victimization of other children

# Sexual Behaviors in Young Children

Like all human development, sexual development begins at birth. Any given child's sexual knowledge and behavior is strongly influenced by the following:

## AGE

### *The Child's Age*

The child's sexual knowledge should reflect their age.

## OBSERVATIONS

### *What the Child Observes*

Including the sexual behaviors of family and friends. Media can also play a role in a child's sexual development.

## INFLUENCES

### *What the Child is Taught*

Including cultural and religious beliefs concerning sexuality and physical boundaries.

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"Young people do not wake up on their thirteenth birthday somehow transformed into a sexual being overnight. Even young children are sexual in some form."

*Heather Coleman, Ph.D. & Grant Coleman Ph.D.*

**Most sexual play is an expression of children's natural curiosity and should not be a cause for concern or alarm. In general, the following are examples of "typical" childhood play and exploration:**

- Occurs between children who play together regularly and know each other well.
- Occurs between children of the same general age and physical size.
- Spontaneous, unplanned, and infrequent
- Voluntary—the children agreed to the behavior, none of the involved children seem uncomfortable or upset.
- Easily diverted when parents tell children to stop and explain privacy rules.

# *Problematic Sexual Behavior*

**Problematic sexual behaviors include any act that:**

- Is clearly beyond the child's developmental stage
- Involves threats, force, or aggression
- Involves children of widely different ages or abilities
- Provokes strong emotional reactions in the child such as anger or anxiety

# Responding to Problematic Sexual Behavior

**If you see a child engaging in problematic sexual behavior, use the following to properly navigate the conversation:**

- Remain calm before you talk to the child. Step away for a couple minutes if needed.
- Keep an even tone of voice and ask open-ended questions.
- Take to the child one-on-one

**Then, ask the following questions:**

- What were you doing?
- How did you get that idea?
- How did you learn about this?
- How did you feel about doing it?
  - If the child seems a little embarrassed, but not otherwise distressed, use this conversation as an

## RESPOND ACCORDINGLY IF BEHAVIOR IS:

### *Concerning*

- Establish prohibited areas/activities
- Monitor future behavior
- On or off-site suspension
- Reinforce why behavior is unacceptable
- Inform parents/caregivers and counseling of behavior

### *Serious*

- If sexual abuse occurred, call 911
- After calling 911, call DHS to report the abuse
- Keep child supervised and supported until other agencies arrive
- Use suspension/take home options as appropriate
- Inform parents/caregivers

# *Additional Signs of Sexual Abuse*

**How do you distinguish between developmentally appropriate curiosity and inappropriate sex play? Here are three indicators that the child's behavior may be a result of sexual abuse:**

- The child is unusually pre-occupied with exploring their bodies or acting out sexually
- The child engages other children in sex play
- The child is unwilling to stop, even after repeated instructions that the behavior is inappropriate

# Adverse Childhood Experience Survey (ACEs)

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful or traumatic negative experiences before the age of 18 that have long-lasting effects on physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Evidence shows that early experiences, both positive and negative, are critical in building and shaping brain development.



## POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

support healthy development and give the brain a strong foundation for all future learning, development, and health.



## NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

disrupt healthy brain development and cause changes to the chemicals and structure of the growing brain.

# THE ACE SURVEY

**Every question you can answer “yes” to becomes one point toward your overall ACE score**

- Did a parent or adult in the household after swear at you, insult you, or humiliate you?
- Did a parent or adult in the household often hit, push, grab, slap, or throw something at you so hard that it left marks or injured you?
- Did an adult or person 5+ years older ever touch or fondle you, attempt or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you, or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
- Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?
- Did you often feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or that your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you?
- Were you parents ever separate or divorced?
- Was your mother/stepmother hit, pushed, grabbed, slapped, kicked, threatened with a gun or knife, or had something thrown at her?
- Did you live with someone who was an alcoholic or a street-drug user?
- Was a household member depressed or suicidal?
- Did a household member go to prison?

**As your ACE score goes up, so does your risk for the following:**

- Smoking
- Disease
- Alcoholism
- Depression
- Suicide attempts
- Have several lifetime sexual partners
- STDs
- Rape
- Hallucinations
- Domestic violence
- Addiction
- Job problems
- Parenting problems
- Early death

# Building Resilience

**Resiliency is the ability to “bounce back” after something traumatic has happened. Increase resilience from the effects of ACEs by:**

- Building nurturing and competent relationships
- Surround those in environments that foster individual abilities
- Join a support group
- Learn healthy coping skills
- Establish a sense of hope

**Those who work with children with high ACES can help establish resilience by:**

## **PRIORITIZING RELATIONSHIPS**

- The bond between child and adult is essential—be reliable, be honest, be dependable.

## **LISTEN**

- Listen, acknowledge to them that they've been heard, validate the child's feelings without judgement, thank them for sharing.

## **ESTABLISH ROUTINE**

- Children feel safe when limits are understood. Express clear timelines, expectations, and consequences.

# Abuse Disclosures

If a child discloses abuse to you, your primary goal is to find out:

- WHO did
- WHAT
- WHERE (location)

## *Dos*

- Remain calm and do not overreact. Any reaction that you have sends a message to the child.
- Always believe the child—children rarely lie about abuse.
- Thank the child for telling you.

## *Don'ts*

- Don't criticize the child or abuser.
- Don't make promises you can't keep. It is your job to keep the child safe.
- Don't take pictures.

### **Failure to report child abuse is a crim in the State of Oklahoma.**

Any person who knowingly and willfully fails to immediately report suspected abuse or neglect or who interferes with the prompt reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect may be reported to law enforcement or criminal investigation, and upon conviction thereof, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

# Reporting Child Abuse

**If you suspect child abuse follow these steps to reporting:**

- Talk to the child
- Believe the child
- Report the situation immediately to the DHS Statewide Hotline: **1-800-522-3511**
- If the child is in immediate danger, discloses to sexual abuse or physical abuse, or lives with their perpetrator, call the police (911). They can respond immediately and will inform DHS.

**When you call DHS, you will need the following information:**

- Gather all locating information—home address, phone number(s), schools/daycare
- Gather identifying information—age/birthdate, sibling(s) information, household members, concerns.

**You do not need a disclosure to report child abuse, only a suspicion.**