



Guide to Dealing with Child Abuse

The Center for Disease Control reported that in 2014 alone, an estimated [702,000 children](#) were confirmed to be the victims of child abuse.

The agency also estimates that at least 25% of children will experience child abuse at some point in their lives, and one in seven have experienced it in the past year.

While childhood is supposed to be a time of development, exploration, learning, and safety, it's clear that it can be the opposite of that for a shocking number of children. What's more, since the abuse occurs during the developmental stages, the effects of this mistreatment may be felt for the rest of an individual's life.

Helping put an end to child abuse takes education about what actually constitutes child abuse, learning to recognize its signs, and knowing how and where to report it. Taking the time to inform yourself about such information is not only important, it could end up saving a life.

The Four Types of Child Abuse

While many people may think of child abuse only as **physical abuse**, the truth is that there are three other types of abuse that can occur as well, each with their own immediate and lasting impacts. These hidden types of abuse are **emotional abuse**, **neglect**, and **sexual abuse**.

The most recognizable form of child abuse is **physical abuse**. Any action that results in unreasonable physical harm of a child is considered physical abuse. This might include slapping, hitting, yanking, and grabbing a child too roughly, among other things.

One of the biggest problems when it comes to identifying physical abuse is knowing where discipline ends and abuse begins. For example, despite carrying a greater probability for lasting effects such as [aggressive and defiant behavior](#), spanking a child is still considered by many people to be a reasonable method of discipline.

It is worth noting, however, that each state has different laws regarding what constitutes abuse. You can find out your state's laws on the issue [here](#).

In general, physical abuse and discipline is differentiated by the motivation behind the action. Discipline, for instance, is meant to instruct a child – to show them why a certain behavior or act is inappropriate. Their future behavior then is shaped by the clear boundaries that a parent's discipline reflects.

Abuse, on the other hand, is built on unpredictability and a lack of self-control. A parent might hurt their child for a certain action one day and brush it aside on another. It just depends on how they're feeling. The key here is the discipline which constitutes physical abuse comes as a result of *emotion* and not out of a desire to *teach* the child. However, the desire to teach a child can be taken too far by an abusive person and can be used as an excuse for the abuse.

Emotional abuse is another form of child abuse and is commonly overlooked. Don't be fooled by a lack of physical scars; emotional abuse can be just as crippling as physical abuse. This kind of abuse can be broken down into [six types](#): rejecting, ignoring, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting, and exploiting. Listed below are some examples of each:

- **Rejecting:** harsh and unreasonable criticism, humiliating remarks, refusing affection, kicking a child out of the home, excessive teasing
- **Ignoring:** lack of emotional engagement, failure to provide medical care or attention, inability or refusal to meet developmental needs of the child
- **Terrorizing:** either verbally or physically threatening the child, belittling the child in front of friends and family, promoting a hostile atmosphere
- **Isolating:** refusing to allow the child to see other children, not allowing interaction at social events, leaving unattended for extended periods
- **Corrupting:** allowing use of or exposing a child to illegal substances like drugs and alcohol, promoting sexual activities that are inappropriate for their age, encouraging behaviors that may be unethical like lying and stealing
- **Exploiting:** having an unreasonable expectation of a child to care for his/her siblings, giving a child an excessive number of chores, setting unrealistic intellectual and physical developmental standards

Another type of child abuse is **neglect**. Like the other forms of abuse, sometimes they overlap. For instance, physical abuse is commonly accompanied by emotional abuse like terrorizing and ignoring. Neglect is also similar to certain types of emotional abuse but is more focused on the inability to meet the child's basic needs.

A child has a wide variety of needs for development and growth such as a safe home, adequate food, a healthy level of hygiene, and general supervision. Failure to meet such needs is considered neglect.

It could be that a parent is physically or mentally disabled and unable to care for the child properly, or maybe that they are working long hours and leaving their children to care for themselves, or possibly the parent has a drug problem. In any case, not providing the right environment to meet these needs, whether it's a parent's fault or not, is still considered neglect.

The last type of child abuse is **sexual abuse**. While other forms of abuse can be particularly hard to spot and are often underreported, sexual abuse typically carries with it a social stigma. As such, many instances of sexual abuse are never brought to light and the victims can carry the guilt and shame with them for the rest of their lives.

One aspect of sexual abuse that is generally misunderstood is that it doesn't always involve physical touching. Some acts that constitute non-physical child sexual abuse are sexual phone messages or online interactions, exposure to pornographic material, owning or sharing child pornography, masturbation in the child's presence, or even talking about inappropriate sexual topics.

It's also important to note that while some sexual abuse can come from an adult, the perpetrator can also be an older sibling or a similarly-aged friend.

Long-Term Effects of Child Abuse

Child abuse is an especially harmful type of abuse because the victim is still developing both physically and mentally. As such, any form of abuse may have lasting effects that extend well into adulthood. In addition, these effects may not even be noticeable until years after the instance of abuse due to repression.

Some of the long-term effects of such child abuse may include stunted mental development, lack of social and emotional development and skills, decreased linguistic ability, a higher risk of psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, dissociative identity disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and even higher risks of physical problems like heart and lung diseases and obesity.

Another long-term effect of child abuse is the perpetuity of abuse. For instance, about [30% of child abuse victims](#) go on to abuse their own children. As such, the cycle of abuse can start with a single individual and continue throughout multiple generations.

Signs of Child Abuse

One of the first steps to stopping child abuse is identifying the signs. While signs of general abuse may include rebellious behavior, psychological disorders like depression or anxiety, or sudden changes in behavior or school performance, the [Mayo Clinic](#) provides specific signs to look for that correspond with each of the four types of abuse.

- **Physical Abuse**

- Injuries and bruises with inadequate explanation
- An attempt to hide such injuries by wearing inappropriate clothing (e.g. long sleeves or a jacket during summer)
- Continually untreated medical issues

- **Emotional Abuse**

- Desperately seeking the affection of an adult
- Lack of emotional development
- Depression or lowered self-esteem
- Decreased school performance
- Social withdrawal

- **Neglect**

- Noticeably poor hygiene
- Weather-inappropriate clothing (e.g. shorts during the winter)
- Frequently misses school
- Eating large amounts of food at once or keeping food for later
- Lack of necessary medical attention

- **Sexual Abuse**

- STD or pregnancy
- Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge or behavior
- Sexually abusing other children
- Complaints of genital pain
- Blood in the underwear of the child

If you consistently notice these signs in a child, it's important that you take the steps to address the possibility of abuse.

How to Report Child Abuse

If you think a child is being abused there are a variety of resources you can use to report the abuse.

If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, you can contact the [Childhelp](#) organization through the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453) for more advice. You can also find a list of various numbers and services for reporting abuse [organized by state here](#). This list is provided by the [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

If you have seen signs of sexual abuse and would like to contact organizations specifically devoted to this type of abuse, you can contact [RAINN](#) (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) at (800) 656-HOPE (656-4673) or [Darkness to Light](#) at (866) 367-5444. The [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) can also offer valuable information at (800) THE-LOST (843-5678). You can also contact your local law enforcement.

For more information on child abuse, including what it is, how to recognize it, and steps to take to correct or report it, use the search terms “child abuse signs,” “child abuse resources,” and “report child abuse” on any search engine.

No child deserves to be abused. By educating yourself about what constitutes child abuse and learning to recognize the signs, you can help put an end to this incredibly damaging type of abuse.

DISCLAIMER: This guide is provided only for informational purposes and is not intended to be a substitute for legal or other professional advice. This guide does not contain nor is it intended to provide legal or other professional advice for any specific situation and readers should not take action or refrain from taking action, based only on the information provided in this guide. Goldberg & Osborne has attempted to provide accurate and current information in this guide, but cannot and does not guarantee that the information is accurate, complete, or up to date. This guide may contain links and/or search terms that will lead to external websites as a convenience to the reader, but Goldberg & Osborne is not responsible for the content or operation of any website other than its own website. The presence of a link or a search term does not imply and is not an endorsement by Goldberg & Osborne of the website provider or the information contained on any linked website or on any website contained in search results from a search term provided in the guide.