

## Child Abuse and the Child Care Center

Child abuse and neglect often occur in families under stress, in the middle of a crisis or at the "end of the rope." Child maltreatment can include the following:

- Physical Abuse - the non-accidental injury to a child.
- Sexual Abuse - any act of a sexual nature upon or with a child.
- Neglect- the failure to act on behalf of a child.
- Emotional Abuse – Control over the child's emotions and feelings about self.

### **How to Spot Abuse**

#### **Physical Abuse Indicators:**

##### Physical Signs

- Unexplained, chronic or repeated bruising
- Unexplained burns
- Other unexplained or repeated injuries

##### Behavioral Signs

- Behavioral extremes (withdrawal, aggression, regression)
- Excessive fear of the parent or caregiver
- Unusual shyness, wariness of physical contact
- Attempt to hide injuries
- Depression, excessive crying

### **Bruises**

Bruises are due to the leakage of blood into the skin tissue that is produced by tissue damage from a direct blow or a crushing injury. Bruising is the earliest and most visible sign of child abuse. Early identification of bruises resulting from child abuse can allow for intervention and prevent further abuse.

Bruises seen in infants, especially on the face and buttocks, are more suspicious and should be considered non-accidental until proven otherwise. Injuries to children's upper arms (caused by efforts to defend themselves), the trunk, the front

of their thighs, the sides of their faces, their ears and neck, genitalia, stomach, and buttocks are also more likely to be associated with non-accidental injuries.

Injuries to their shins, hips, lower arms, forehead, hands, or the bony prominences (the spine, knees, nose, chin, or elbows) are more likely to signify accidental injury.

### **Age Dating of Bruises**

It is important to determine the ages of bruises to see if their ages are consistent with the caretaker's explanation of the times of injury. Age dating of bruises can often be determined by looking at the color of the bruise. The ages and colors of bruises may therefore show if more than one injury is present. Table 1 shows the ages associated with the colors of bruises.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Determining the Age of a Bruise by Its Color</b>	
<b>Color of Bruise</b>	<b>Age of Bruise</b>
Red (swollen, tender)	0–2 days
Blue, purple	2–5 days
Green	5–7 days
Yellow	7–10 days
Brown	10–14 days
No further evidence of bruising	2–4 weeks

For example, a 2-year-old boy, not toilet trained, has several yellow-to-brown bruises on his buttocks. The caretaker's explanation for the bruises is that the child tripped in the hallway the day before and fell on his buttocks. This would be suspicious because:

- Children seldom bruise their buttocks in accidental falls.
- Bruises on the buttocks are in the primary target zone for non-accidental injury.
- The child's diaper (whether disposable or cloth), plastic pants, and clothing would have afforded some protection to his buttocks.
- If the injuries causing the bruises were sustained the previous day, the bruises should be red to purple.

A child has both bright red and brown bruises. The caretaker maintains that all of the bruises were the result of a fall that day. However, the bright red color indicates fresh bruises, while the brown bruises are older. The caretaker's explanation is, therefore, suspicious, and separate explanations must be obtained for each bruise.

### **Bruise Configurations**

Bruises will sometimes have a specific configuration. This may you to determine whether bruises are accidental or non-accidental. One of the easiest ways to identify the weapon used to inflict bruises is to ask the caretaker: How were you punished as a child? This is a good question to ask parents on a random survey with many other questions about their child and their own childhood. This will give you information on what to look for in the child you care for.

The pattern of a skin lesion may suggest the type of instrument used. Bruise or wound configurations from objects can be divided into two main categories: those from "fixed" objects, which can only strike one of the body's planes at a time, and those from "wraparound" objects, which follow the contours of the body and strike more than one of the body's planes. Hands can make either kind of bruise, depending on the size of the offender's hands and the size of the child.

Examples of fixed and wraparound objects include:

- Fixed objects: coat hangers, handles, paddles.
- Wraparound objects: belts, closed-end (looped) cords, open-end cords. (Closed-end cords leave a bruise in parallel lines; open-end cords leave a bruise in a single line.)

### **Natural or Normal Bruising**

Injuries inflicted by human hands, feet, or teeth or those inflicted by belts, ropes, electrical cords, knives, switches, gags, or other objects will often leave telltale marks (e.g., gags may leave down-turned lesions at the corners of the mouth).

For example, the size of bite marks may help to determine the biter's approximate age; their shape may help identify whose teeth made the marks.

In some cases, however, bruises are acquired innocently, through play and accidental falls, or when a child has a defect in his or her clotting mechanism.

Other incidents of "easy bruising" in children can be explained by a low blood platelet count. Multiple bruises can occur in children with leukemia. Diseases causing easy bruising, however, are rare, and inflicted bruises are much more common. The medical diagnosis of clotting disorders requires blood tests and interpretation of those tests by qualified physicians.

Mongolian spots (a kind of birthmark) also resemble bruises but can be distinguished by their clear-cut margins, the fact that they do not fade, and their steel gray-blue color. Mongolian spots may be found anywhere on the body (but are typically found on the buttocks and lower back). In addition, they are commonly found in African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. Investigators should await medical reports when investigating such marks.

### **Sexual Abuse Indicators:**

#### **Physical Signs**

- Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of genitals
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Bruises or bleeding from external genitals, vagina or anal region
- Genital discharge
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothes

- Frequent, unexplained sore throats, yeast or urinary infections

### Behavioral Signs

- Poor peer relationships, inability to relate to children of the same age
- Regressive behaviors, such as thumb sucking, bedwetting, fear of the dark
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Promiscuity or seductive behavior
- Reluctance to participate in recreational activity
- Recurrent nightmares, disturbed sleep patterns or fear of the dark
- Sudden decline in school performance
- In young children, preoccupation with his/her sexual organs, his/her parents' or other children's.

### **Neglect Indicators:**

#### Physical Signs

- Chronic uncleanliness or poor hygiene including lice, scabies, or severe or untreated diaper rash
- Untreated illness or injury
- Unsuitable clothing, missing key articles of clothing such as socks, shoes or a coat
- Height and weight significantly below age level

#### Behavioral Signs

- Chronic hunger, tiredness or lethargy
- Begging or collecting leftovers
- Unusual school attendance (frequent or chronic absence, lateness, coming to school early or leaving late)
- Assuming adult responsibilities

#### Environmental Signs

- Lack of food, heat or utilities in the house
- Parent/caregiver uses food stamps to buy drugs
- The child is outside late at night while the parent is under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- The child is left home alone without supervision

### **EMOTIONAL ABUSE:**

**Verbal Abuse:** Examples of verbal abuse include belittling the child by calling him/her names like "stupid", "worthless", "a mistake" and more. This also includes blaming the child constantly for things that may not even be their fault, and threatening the child with physical pain.

**Extreme Punishment:** Children sometimes do need to be punished, but there is a line between "right" and "wrong" when it comes to punishing a child. Acceptable forms of punishment might be taking away television time, or no dessert. Unacceptable forms of punishment include anything that would seriously scare a child, like locking them in a dark closet, leaving them somewhere dangerous by themselves, or tying them up.

**Corruption:** Growing up in today's world, it's hard to keep certain things away from a child's eyes. They are most likely going to see violence, sex and drugs on TV or in a movie at least once, even if it's an accident. However, this type of emotional abuse includes purposely subjecting a child to inappropriate behavior such as crime, sex, violence and excessive alcohol and drug use. Children look up to parents as their role models, and if they see them doing drugs or criminal acts, it's likely that they are going to try to imitate them.

**Not Showing Affection:** Children need to be loved and cared for. When a parent purposely ignores the child, doesn't give them hugs and doesn't express their love, the child is going to feel like they are not wanted or loved. No child would ever want to feel that kind of pain.

### **What are the Effects and Signs of Emotional Abuse?**

Emotional abuse affects a child's emotional, mental and behavioral well-being. Even adults who were abused as children can display these signs. Children who display these signs have a greater chance of getting in trouble or being arrested as they get older. According to HelpGuide.org, 1 of every 3 children who were raised in an abusive or neglectful home will grow up to become an abusive parent.

Emotional Effects: low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, aggressiveness, anxiety, difficulty with relationships, alienation, personality disorders, neediness and clinginess and having nightmares.

### **What Causes People to Emotionally Abuse a Child?**

So you may be asking "why would anybody abuse a child?" I'm not trying to make excuses for this kind of abuse, but there are outside factors that may play a part in the emotional abuse itself.

**Stress and Personal Issues:** Anybody under stress is likely to be in a bad mood, and sometimes adults under stress can go as far as taking it out on a child. The stress of taking care of kids, especially those with a disability or difficult behavior, can take a toll on a person. However, there are other options to lower stress levels than yelling and belittling a child. Also, people who are dealing with personal issues such as divorce, financial problems or other issues may want to take out their frustration on someone. Unfortunately, children can get in the way of this.

**Immaturity:** A number of emotionally abused children come from teenage parents. I'm not saying that all teenagers are bad parents, some may just lack the mature qualities of older parents, or they may lack the nurturing qualities necessary for child care. Most of the time, the child was an "accident" and was never meant to be had anyway, therefore teenage parents may take those regrets out on the child once it's born.

**Anger Issues and History of Abuse:** People may have trouble dealing with anger, so they don't know how to control it. Or, they may have a history of emotional abuse themselves.

**Drug and Alcohol Use:** Many times, children of drug addict and alcoholic parents are emotionally and mentally abused. People act much different when they are under the influence of drugs and alcohol, sometimes even becoming angry and violent.

## **How to Report If You Suspect Abuse**

Although everyone has an obligation to protect the vulnerable, certain professions are legally required to contact appropriate authorities if they suspect abuse. Child care is one of these professions.

### **Who Must Report**

- Mandatory reporters almost always include medical personnel and those in the education system. In other states, law enforcement personnel, such as police, parole and probation officers must also report suspected abuse. Public employees, such as social workers or those who provide public assistance for families are included. Religious leaders, counselors, firemen, child care providers and foster care parents must report suspected abuse as well.

### **What Must be Reported**

- Mandatory reporting does not mean that the person reporting the abuse must witness the abuse. Verbal confirmation and visible injuries require reporting. Professionals who are privy to information regarding abuse to vulnerable individuals hold a 24-hour responsibility to report it. If they fail to make a report, they can be held liable.
- This means that for the child care provider, if you suspect that a child is being abused and do not report it you can and will be held criminally liable.

If a child indicates that they are afraid to return home, call the appropriate [Children Services agency](#) or the local police immediately. For all other cases, follow the procedures below.

When making a report you should try to include the following information, although it is not required:

- The name and address of the child you suspect is being abused or neglected
- The age of the child
- The name and address of the parents or caretakers
- The name of the person you suspect is abusing or neglecting the child and the address if available
- The reason you suspect the child is being abuse or neglected
- Any other information which may be helpful to the investigation



With this information, contact the appropriate Children Services agency, which is determined by the county in which the custodial party resides. In the child care setting this number can be found posted in the front lobby or on the parent board as this is required by law.

In case of an emergency, dial 911. In non-emergency situations, you should contact your local public Children Services agency to make a report about the abuse. If you need additional help determining what to do in the case of suspected abuse, call the Center for Family Safety and Healing at Nationwide Children's at (614) 722-3278.

### **Talking to a Child Who Has Been Abused**

One thing that many people do not know about abused children is that they often love the person who is hurting them. This is very hard to believe but it is true. This happens because the person who is abusing them is often someone they know well and trust a lot. Children are therefore hesitant to reveal that they are being abused because they fear that they will get the person into trouble if they do so. Another reason for children not wanting to disclose abuse is that many times they have been frightened or threatened by the abuser.

The children in your care love and trust you. A child who has been abused may start talking to you about it. He may do so because he trusts you and wants to share the burden he is carrying with you. Hearing a child talking about being abused is very difficult. You may react in different ways. Your reaction is very important to the child. If you react with disgust or don't believe what he is saying, he may stop talking to you about it. He will feel that you don't trust him. This will prevent him from getting help. It also prevents the abuse from stopping.

Be very sensitive and listen carefully when a child is talking to you about abuse. Keep in mind that it is very difficult for the child to talk about being abused. This is especially hard for children who have been sexually abused. The child has gathered up all her courage to tell you about the abuse. How you handle the conversation will determine how you will be able to help the child.

Keep the following considerations in mind when talking to a child who is disclosing abuse:

- *Help the child feel comfortable.* Talking about abuse is not easy for the child. Respect the child's privacy and talk to him in a quiet and private place. The place should be familiar to the child. This will help the child feel comfortable.
- *Reassure the child that it is not her fault.* Most children who are abused feel, or are told by

their abusers, that they are to blame for their own abuse. It is very important to tell the child that she is not guilty and that she is not responsible for the abuse. Let them know that they have not done anything wrong.

- *Don't react with shock, anger, disgust.* Your reaction to that the child tells you is very important to the child. He will be watching your reaction closely. Be calm. When you react with disgust or anger, he will not feel comfortable talking to you anymore. He may also feel scared and confused. This will prevent you from acting promptly and getting help immediately.
- *Don't force a child to talk.* Give the child time. Let her talk to you at her own pace. If the child is unwilling to talk or seems uncomfortable, don't pressurize her to do so. If the child seems uncomfortable when talking about certain specific things, don't press her for details. You can change the topic to something that the child is more comfortable talking about.
- *Don't force a child to show injuries.* If the child is willing to show you his injuries, you may allow him to do so. However, when a child is unwilling to show you his injuries, you may not insist that he do so. Also, you cannot insist that a child take off his clothing so that you can see his injuries.
- *Use terms and language that the child can understand.* If the child says something that you don't understand, like a word for a body part, ask the child to explain or to point to the body part. Don't correct or make fun of the words the child is using. When you use the same words as the child does, it helps the child feel less confused and more relaxed. The child will feel that you understand him.
- *Don't 'interview' the child.* The purpose of your discussion with the child is to gather enough information so that you can make an informed report to the local CPS agency or to your supervisor. When you have the information you need, you must stop the discussion. Don't try to prove that abuse has happened.
- *Ask appropriate questions.* The questions that you ask the child must be appropriately worded. Choose your language carefully. This ensures that you get correct information from the child. For example, if you see a bruise on a child and you suspect that it is the result of abuse, you may say to the child, "That looks painful. Do you want to tell me how you got it" or "Do you want to talk about that bruise you have". It would be inappropriate to say, "Did you get that bruise when someone hit you?" Remember that you can do more harm by supplying a child with words and ideas. Let the child tell her own story and give you the answers.
- *Don't ask 'why' questions.* Why questions like, "Why did he hit you?" or "Why she do that?" will only confuse a child more. Remember that children who are abused often do not understand

why it is happening. These types of questions will force them to think about the reasons for the abuse. 'Why' questions also will not give you any helpful information.

- *Don't teach the child new terms or words.* Don't teach the child new words or give her new ideas. This is harmful. When you do this, you are biasing the child. Also, when you teach a child a new term or word, you are changing the child's original disclosure. This is important in relation to the court and law.
- *Find out what the child wants from you.* A child may ask you to promise not to tell anyone. He may ask you to take him home with you. He may ask you what you are going to do. It is good to know what the child is expecting from you. This will help you in deciding what your course of action should be.
- *Be honest with the child.* Let the child know what you are going to do. This will build trust. Be honest about what you can do for him. Don't promise him things that cannot be done. For example- let him know that you may have to tell someone so that he will not be hurt anymore. Then he will not be surprised or afraid when he finds out that someone knows.
- *Confirm the child's feelings.* Let the child know that it is okay to feel scared, hurt, confused or angry.
- *Be supportive.* Let the child know that you are glad she told you about the abuse. Let her know that you believe her and that you care about her. Some children may think that you will not like them anymore because of what they told you. Assure her that you are still her friend.
- *Remember: the safety of the child is most important.* Be sensitive to and aware of the child's safety. Keep in mind that a child might be further abused if he reports that he has spoken to someone about the abuse. If you feel that the child is in danger, you must contact CPS immediately.

## CASE ONE:

OLNEY - April 9, 2009 - (WPVI) -- A Philadelphia daycare worker is under arrest after police say she beat a one-year-old boy.

Investigators say the special victims unit received a report of possible abuse at a daycare Wednesday morning at around 11:00 a.m.

The one-year-old was complaining of pain in his side and could hardly walk.

His mother took him to the hospital and staffers there called police.

Investigators went to the daycare and reviewed video tape.

They say the tape shows that the teacher kicked, beat, and dragged the child, named Anthony.

"He was crying because of his leg, his leg was hurting. When I went to straighten his leg, he couldn't straighten it or bend it backwards," the mother said.

Doctors put Anthony's leg in a splint.

The mother says that when she inquired about the injury, the Director offered to show her the tape. They not only watched the teacher rough around three children, but another daycare worker comes in and picks up a fourth child in the same way.

Both women have been fired and police have charged both teachers with simple assault and endangering the welfare of a child.

The daycare center's Director tells Action News that the teacher has worked at the daycare center for about five years without any problems.

The teacher was taken into custody and is charged with abusing a child.

"My son is a year old. If she didn't like her job as a teacher she shouldn't have worked there," the mother said.

Anthony wasn't the only child who was abused at the center.

Another parent said daycare workers called her in to look at the tape too.

She couldn't believe she saw her daughter, Eva, being treated that way.

"Just to wake her up from a nap, when they could have done just like a normal person does and pick them up and wake them," the mother said.

The owner of the Daycare Center says she gives her workers over the state mandated hours of training per year and took swift action in firing the two women involved, calling other parents to notify them of the incident and invite them to review the tapes.

Both of the parents Action News talked to have returned at least one of their children to the daycare center. They said they will take advantage of an opportunity to make unannounced visits to the center, and feel their kids are safe since the women in question have both been fired.

What do you think of this situation?

Do you think the Director could have kept this incident from happening?

Do you think the Director handled this situation correctly after the allegation of abuse?