

TYPES AND SIGNS OF ABUSE IN CHILDREN

Brought to you by INFONET, a subsidiary committee of the Metrocouncil of Community Mental Health Centers and Associations.

Child abuse is as shocking as it is common in today's society. Every day, child abusers inflict physical, sexual, and emotional trauma on defenseless children. Abuse to a child can be physical, neglect, emotional, sexual or abuse to one's self. Unfortunately, the more subtle forms of child abuse such as neglect and emotional abuse can be just as traumatizing as violent physical abuse. The following are signs often associated with child abuse and neglect. These types of abuse are typically found in combination. A physically abused child is often emotionally abused, and a sexually abused child also may be neglected. The first step in helping abused children is recognizing the symptoms of child abuse.

SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is the most visible form of abuse and may be defined as a non-accidental trauma or physical injury. A physical injury most often represents an unreasonable or unjustifiable punishment and usually happens when a frustrated or angry parent strikes, shakes or throws a child.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Becomes fearful when adults approach
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver:**

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- Describes the child in a negative way, such as evil
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child

INFONET AGENCIES

COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

10901 Winner Road, Independence, MO 64052
816-254-3652
www.thecmhs.com

JOHNSON COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

6000 Lamar, Mission, KS 66202
913-831-2550
www.jocogov.org/mentalhealth

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOC. OF THE HEARTLAND

739 Minnesota Ave., Kansas City, KS 66101
913-281-2221
www.mhah.org

REDISCOVER

901 NE Independence, Lee's Summit, MO 64086
816-246-8000
www.rediscovermh.org

SWOPE HEALTH SERVICES BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

3801 Blue Parkway, Kansas City, MO 64130
816-922-7645
www.swopehealth.org

TRI-COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

3100 NE 83rd Street, Kansas City, MO 64119
816-468-0400
www.tri-countymhs.org

TMC BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

2200 Charlotte Street, Kansas City, MO 64108
816-404-5700
www.trumed.org

WESTERN MO MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

600 E. 22nd Street, Kansas City, MO 64108
816-512-4558

WYANDOT CENTER

7840 Washington Ave., Kansas City, KS 66112
913-328-4600
www.wyandotcenter.org

SIGNS OF NEGLECT

Neglect is a failure to provide for the child's basic needs. The types of neglect are physical, educational and emotional. Physical neglect is not providing for a child's physical needs, including food and clothing. Educational neglect is the failure to enroll/enforce child going to go school. And emotional neglect refers to a lack of emotional support and love. Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Has poor hygiene
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a strange manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Although it is very difficult for most people to talk about sexual abuse or acknowledge its existence, sexual abuse happens to children, even infants, everyday. 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.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **child**:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates strange, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away from home/school
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the **parent or other adult caregiver**:

- Is excessively protective or limits the child's contact with other children, especially the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is 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 cruelest and most destructive of all types of abuse.

Because emotional abuse attacks the sense of self-esteem, 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. Parents who emotionally abuse children often display rejecting behavior toward the child, ignore emotional needs, criticize or punish beyond what is normal, isolate the child from peers and permit inappropriate behavior such as use of drugs and alcohol. Consider the possibility of emotional abuse when the child:

- Shows extremes in behavior
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately childish (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide

Consider the possibility of emotional abuse when the parent or other adult caregiver:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Openly rejects the child

SELF-ABUSE OR INJURY

Another form of abuse is to one's self. Self-injury behavior is defined as deliberate, repetitive, impulsive, non-lethal harming of one's body. Self-injury can include:

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Picking scabs or interfering with healing wounds
- Burning
- Punching self or objects
- Inserting objects in body openings
- Bruising or breaking bones
- Hair pulling



These behaviors pose serious risks and may be symptoms of a mental health problem. The following are facts about self-injuring behavior:

- Occurs more often in females
- Typically begins at puberty
- Behaviors last for 5-10 years, but can persist much longer without treatment
- Individuals are usually from a middle to upper-class background, of average to high intelligence and have low self-esteem
- Nearly 50% report physical or sexual abuse during his/her childhood

- Many report they were discouraged from expressing emotions, particularly anger and sadness
- Many who inflict self-injuries use multiple methods
- Cutting/scratching arms are the most common self-injury
- A significant number of people who self-inflict injuries struggle with eating disorders and/or substance abuse problems. An estimated two out of three of these individuals have eating disorders
- These individuals often become desperate about their lack of self-control and the addictive-like nature of their acts, which may lead to suicide attempts

If someone displays signs and symptoms of self-injury, a mental health professional should be consulted immediately.

WAYS PARENTS AND SCHOOLS CAN HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE

- Be a nurturing parent. Children need to know that they are special and loved.
- Help a friend, neighbor or relative. Being a parent isn't easy. Offer a helping hand to take care of children so parents can rest or spend time together.
- Help yourself. When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed and out of control, take time out. Don't take it out on your child.
- Learn what to do if your baby won't stop crying. Never shake a baby – shaking a child may result in severe injury or death.
- Get involved. Ask your community leaders, clergy, library and schools to develop services to meet the needs of healthy children and families.
- Teaching children, parents and teachers prevention strategies can help to keep children safe.
- Monitor your child's television and video viewing. Watching violent films and TV programs can harm young children.
- Report suspected abuse or neglect. If you have reason to believe a child has been or may be harmed, call your local department of children and family services or your local police department.

ALTERNATIVES TO LASHING OUT AT YOUR CHILD

- Remember – you are the adult. Take a deep breath.
- Close your eyes and imagine you're hearing what your child is about to hear.
- Press your lips together and count to 10.
- Put your child in a time-out chair (remember this rule: one-minute for each year of age).
- Put yourself in a time-out chair. Think about why you are angry: is it your child, or is your child simply a target for your anger?
- Phone a friend.
- If someone can watch the children, go outside and take a walk.
- Take a hot bath or splash cold water on your face.
- Hug a pillow.
- Relieve stress by listening to music or having a sing along.
- Pick up a pencil and write down as many helpful words as you can think of. Save the list.
- Call for help and prevention – 1-800-CHILDREN

GETTING TREATMENT

In Kansas City there is a network of mental health facilities that can help with these problems. The Community Mental Health Centers listed on the front of this flier provide treatment, referrals and support. For more information, visit our website at www.mentalhealthkc.org.