

As an adult in the State of Texas, you are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse.  
You may remain anonymous.

**CALL THE CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE  
AT 1-800-252-5400  
OR LOG ONTO  
WWW.TXABUSEHOTLINE.ORG**

IF YOU BELIEVE THE CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER,  
please call local law enforcement or dial 911.

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**IT IS ESTIMATED THAT  
ONLY 1 IN 10 CHILDREN WILL TELL SOMEONE  
ABOUT THEIR ABUSE.**

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## **WHY LEARN?**

If only 1 in 10 children tell about abuse, then we must learn other ways to identify abusive situations. Children often cannot be their own voice. They need someone – they need you – to step in and be an advocate.

Here are some of the common reasons why children do not tell about abuse:

- Children often believe the abuse is their fault and that they will get into trouble if they tell their parent or any adult.
- Children don't want anyone to get hurt or in trouble, but simply want the abuse to end.

**90% OF THE TIME,  
CHILDREN ARE ABUSED BY SOMEONE  
THEY KNOW, TRUST AND LOVE.**

- Perpetrators often threaten or manipulate children to keep them from telling anyone. They often tell children that no one would believe them, or threaten them with consequences if they do share this "secret."
- Children don't realize that it is wrong. Young children may never have been exposed to teaching that tells them that sexual behaviors between adults and children are wrong.

**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.** THESE CHILDREN ARE IN OUR PLACES OF WORSHIP, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND EVEN OUR OWN HOMES.

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**IF WE DON'T PROTECT THEM,  
WHO WILL?**

# DEFINITIONS and SIGNS OF ABUSE

## PHYSICAL ABUSE

**DEFINITION** Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, **including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given** and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent or guardian that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm. Physical abuse also includes failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child.

*Definitions taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001*

**EXAMPLES** Any act that would not be considered acceptable and reasonable punishment that results in substantial harm to the child. Kicking, cutting, biting, burning, or striking a child with an inappropriate object, such as a board, extension cord, belt buckle, etc.

**SIGNS OF ABUSE** The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Frequent injuries that are unexplained and/or when the child or parent cannot adequately explain their causes such as: bruises, cuts, black eyes, fractures, burns
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate the use of an instrument
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Evidence of delayed or inappropriate treatment for injuries
- Injuries that involve the face, backs of hands, buttocks, genital area, abdomen, back, or sides of the body
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Complaints of soreness or discomfort when moving
- Aggressive, disruptive and destructive or self-destructive behavior
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Fear of going home or seeing parents/caregivers

## NEGLECT

**DEFINITION** The leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and the demonstration of an intent not to return by a parent or guardian of the child.

*Definitions taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001*

**EXAMPLES** Leaving a child alone for long periods of time, exposing them to risk. Not seeking medical attention for an injury or serious illness. Not providing adequate food, clothing, or care for the child.

**SIGNS OF ABUSE** The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Obvious malnourishment or inadequate nutrition
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn and/or dirty clothes
- Need for glasses, dental care or other unattended medical attention
- Consistent hunger, stealing or begging for food
- Distended stomach, emaciated
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school
- Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness or falls asleep in class
- Reports that no caretaker is at home
- Self-destructive behavior
- Extreme loneliness and need for affection

# EMOTIONAL ABUSE

**DEFINITION** Inflicting mental or emotional injury to a child, and/or causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

*Definitions taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001*

**EXAMPLES** Verbal abuse, excessive demands on a child's performance, frequently exposing children to family violence, and depriving them of affection on a regular basis.

**SIGNS OF ABUSE** The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical development
- Substance abuse
- Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies
- Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, biting)
- Antisocial, destructive behavior
- Delinquent behavior (especially adolescents)
- Developmentally delayed

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## 1 IN 4 GIRLS, AND 1 IN 6 BOYS WILL BE SEXUALLY ABUSED BY THE TIME THEY ARE 18.

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# SEXUAL ABUSE

**DEFINITION** Sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault; failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child; **compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct**; and causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene or pornographic.

*Definitions taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001*

**EXAMPLES** Any inappropriate touching of genitalia between an adult and a child or even between two children that would be prohibited by law. Intentionally exposing genitalia to a child, or having the child expose their genitalia, for one's sexual gratification. Exposing a child to pornography or an indecent act.

**SIGNS OF ABUSE** The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Pain, swelling or itching in genital area
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Excessive seductiveness, inappropriate sex play or premature understanding of sex
- Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
- Significant weight change
- Suicide attempts (especially adolescents)
- Threatened by physical contact, closeness
- Extreme fear of being alone with adults especially if of a particular gender
- Sudden refusal to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Sexual victimization of other children
- **Major change** in normal mood or behavior
- A sexually transmitted disease (STD)

# GROOMING

Sexual abuse is a unique form of child victimization. It is almost always perpetrated by someone who is in a position of trust – the last person we would expect. So, how does a perpetrator gain access to children and the trust of a family and/or community?

**GROOMING** involves building a relationship with the child and building trust. It may include the following:

- Treating the child as more special than others
- Buying the child gifts or giving money
- Making excuses to be alone with the child
- Tickling and wrestling
- Touching – appropriate or inappropriate
- Viewing the child when nude or exposing the child to nudity
- Telling the child about his/her sexual activity with others
- Showing pornography

Grooming makes it difficult to escape the abuse and keeps the child from telling, as he/she often trusts the person and feels a loyalty to him/her. It makes the child feel that it is his/her fault. At times power and authority are used as tools.

Perpetrators not only groom children for abuse; they also groom parents, families and communities. **WE MUST BE AWARE.**

# RISK FACTORS FOR VICTIMIZATION

- Child is disabled, chronically ill, or perceived as different
- Family dysfunction or family member(s) experiencing a life crisis
- Substance abuse by family members
- Parent has a physical or mental health problem
- Young or single parent
- **POOR COMMUNICATION\***

\*Regular, open and supportive communication with a trusted adult is the best protection for children. If they know we are a safe adult that cares for them they are more likely to come to us if something is wrong or someone is making them uncomfortable.

# POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF ABUSE

These are some of the potential long-term effects that are commonly associated with victims of childhood abuse who never disclosed or received any kind of support or intervention. These are not absolutes but rather a guide to help us identify if abuse may have occurred.

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Somatic complaints
- Withdrawal
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns
- Running away and self-destructive behaviors
- Substance abuse
- Regressive behavior including bed-wetting after this stage has already passed
- Low self-esteem and poor social skills
- Distorted body image
- School related problems including learning difficulties
- Blurred boundaries and role confusion
- Guilt and/or shame
- Fear and/or anxiety
- Anger and/or hostility
- Difficulties in interpersonal relationships
- Potential difficulties in parenting
- Vulnerability to further victimization

**WHAT KIND OF IMPACT COULD IT MAKE ON OUR SOCIETY IF CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED RECEIVE HELP SOONER?**

# WHEN YOU SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE

## TALKING TO CHILDREN: QUESTIONS TO ASK

Children who are victims of abuse have often been sworn to secrecy and are afraid and ashamed to talk to anyone about it. If you suspect a child is being abused, do not be surprised if they do not disclose. However, if you are a safe person that they can trust you may create the opportunity for them to finally tell. It is important that we do not interrogate children when we have suspicions of abuse. It is best to ask children simple, open-ended questions. Open-ended questions avoid one-word answers and are non-specific. Here are some examples that may help you when talking to a child:

- Tell me about your family. What do you like or not like?
- Has anyone told you to keep a secret?
- Do you feel safe at home?

### PHYSICAL ABUSE

- When you get in trouble at home or school, what happens?
- Do they ever leave any marks or bruises?
- Do they ever say anything to you about not telling or what will happen if you do?

### SEXUAL ABUSE

- Are there places on your body where it's not ok for someone to touch?
- Where are those places?
- Has anyone done something that makes you feel uncomfortable?

### BE SURE NOT TO TAKE THESE QUESTIONS TOO FAR!

Use the questions to help you get a better idea of what may be going on with a child. Keep in mind it may only require one of these questions to allow a child to understand that you are available to hear what they have to say.

## TALKING TO CHILDREN: HANDLING DISCLOSURES

If a child has made an outcry of abuse to you, your next steps are critical to that child's safety. By believing the child and reporting the abuse, you affirm the trust this child has in you to protect him/her.

- **ALWAYS BELIEVE THE CHILD.** Children rarely lie about such an intense and painful topic. In fact, statistics indicate that children only lie about abuse 2 - 8% of the time!
- Remain calm - don't overreact! Children will interpret that your anger or disgust is directed at them. If children feel that they are in trouble, they will stop talking.
- Ask a few open-ended questions that allow the child to tell his/her story. Let the child use his/her own words to tell you what happened. If you can't think of any questions to ask, simply use the phrase, "Tell me more about that."
- Reassure the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling you and that what happened is absolutely not his/her fault.
- Don't criticize the child or the abuser.
- Don't make promises you can't keep! Don't promise a child that you will make things better. Sometimes, even if justice is served, things may not feel "better" to that child. It is also important to let a child know that you can't keep this a secret. Tell them that your job is to keep them safe.

# MAKING the REPORT

## WHY REPORT?

### TEXAS FAMILY CODE: SECTION 261.101

“If a professional has cause to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected, the professional shall make a report not later than the 48th hour after the hour the professional first suspects that the child has been or may be abused or neglected. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report.”

Many professionals have genuine concerns about reporting abuse. Here are some of the most common:

- What if I’m wrong?
- My organization’s policy requires me to report to another member of my staff, not CPS or law enforcement.
- What if the parents know that I made the report?

All of these concerns are legitimate and understandable. While easy answers are hard to come by, what you have to remember is that reporting is your legal obligation and the first step in the healing process for a child abuse victim. When you hesitate to make a report or avoid the responsibility altogether, you may be causing additional harm to the child. If you’re not sure, make the report and allow the authorities to determine whether or not to investigate. Err on the side of protecting children.

### TEXAS FAMILY CODE: SECTION 261.109

“A person commits an offense if the person has cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect and knowingly fails to report as provided in this chapter.”

# ALWAYS REPORT ABUSE!

## 1-800-252-5400

### STEP ONE: Gather Information

The more identifying and locating information provided, the more effective CPS can be when investigating the case. This should include:

- Locating information such as: home address, where child can best be located (school, sitter, etc.), phone number(s).
- Identifying information including: child’s age and/or birth date, child’s current condition, injuries or any emotional or behavioral problems, similar information about child’s sibling.

### STEP TWO: Make the Report

Call Statewide Intake: **1-800-252-5400**

Or make a report online at: [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)

- This number is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You may have to wait. BE PATIENT!
- Provide relevant information (see: Step One), identify the suspected abuser, if possible, and his/her relationship to the child. Be sure to give CPS every detail you remember. Even things that seem insignificant can have meaning to an investigator.
- CPS asks that you DO NOT tell the child’s parent or person responsible that you are reporting.
- CPS considers the following factors when determining substantial risk of harm:
  - Extent and severity of the injury
  - Location of the injury on the child’s body
  - The child’s age: the younger the child, the higher the risk
  - Frequency and duration of the same behavior or similar incidents
  - Previous history of abuse or neglect
  - How the injury occurred or was inflicted

**IF THE CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, CALL THE POLICE (911).  
THEY CAN RESPOND IMMEDIATELY AND WILL INFORM CPS.**



## WHAT IS A CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER?

Before the Children's Advocacy Center opened its doors, child abuse victims and their families were bounced from one agency to another – from the child welfare office, to the police department, to the hospital, to the prosecutor's office – repeatedly telling their stories of abuse. The criminal justice system, one primarily designed for adult perpetrators not child victims, lacked coordination between police, child protective services, prosecution, mental health and medical agencies. Duplication of efforts, along with multiple unnecessary and traumatic interviews for the children, had become the norm in child abuse cases.

Transforming the system, Children's Advocacy Centers provide a child-friendly setting where a skilled team of professionals come together to investigate serious child abuse allegations and conduct forensic interviews aiding in the prosecution of offenders - always keeping the best interest of the child in mind.

Local centers provide an array of child-focused services including the following core components:

- Specialized forensic interviewing
- Medical/Mental health assessments and treatment
- Multidisciplinary team case reviews
- Comprehensive advocacy and recovery services

*For more information about Children's Advocacy Centers, or to locate the one closest to your community, visit the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas website at [www.cactx.org](http://www.cactx.org).*

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*presented by the*  
Dallas Children's Advocacy Center  
[www.dcac.org](http://www.dcac.org)

