

WHAT KIDS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Child abuse is when a parent injures a child on purpose. It is also abuse if a stepparent or someone else in the family hurts a child. It is parents' job to protect children from being hurt by anyone in the family. Spanking is not abuse. But if a child is injured when the parent spanks her or him, then that is abuse. Sometimes parents use words that hurt. When they do that all the time it can be child abuse too.

Sexual abuse is when an adult or older teenager tricks or forces a child into some kind of sex. It may be undressing, or touching private parts of your body or their body. It can be having sex. The person might try to make the child think it is the child's fault. But it is never the child's fault.

Neglect means not taking care of a child. Children need food and clothing. They need someone to watch out for them and be sure they are safe. They need to see a doctor when they are sick or hurt. Parents need to be sure that their children have the things they need to stay healthy and safe. If the parents don't, then that is neglect.

Child abuse and neglect can happen to small children, older children or teenagers. It happens in all kinds of families, rich or poor, and in all kinds of neighborhoods. Parents who abuse or neglect their children are not monsters. Most of them love their kids and want to do what is best. But they don't know how. They haven't learned how to raise kids. Or they don't understand what children need. Or they haven't learned how to deal with problems.

Why do some parents abuse or neglect their kids?

Some parents are treating their children the same way they were treated when they were kids. Their parents were mean to them, and they are mean to their own children. Because that is what they learned when they were growing up. Some parents don't know much about how to take care of children. They don't know how to keep kids healthy and safe. Some parents have problems that don't really have anything to do with the kids. They may be angry at someone else. They may be worried about money or about their job. But instead of acting angry at the person who is causing their problems, they take it out on the kids. Some parents who abuse their kids use drugs or drink too much. When they are high, they lose control and hurt their children. Most parents who abuse or neglect their children don't feel very good about themselves. Even though they are grown up, they still feel small and unlovable on the inside. Hurting someone smaller is a way for them to feel big and powerful.

But those reasons don't make it right!

It is never right for a child to be hurt. It is never right for a child not to be taken care of. Whatever the reason might be, parents who hurt their children need help. They need help to stop. And they need help solving their problems.

Are you being abused or neglected?

Are punishments leaving you bruised or injured?

Do you often get punished without understanding why?

Are you often made to feel about yourself?

Is somebody touching you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable?

Is somebody trying to trick you or force you to have sex?

Are you kicked out of the house or left alone for days at a time?

How does an abused or neglected child get help?

Telling someone what is happening is the first step toward making things better.

Think of an adult you trust. Maybe that is a teacher, school nurse, minister, rabbi, coach, doctor, or your other parent. Ask them to talk privately with you. Explain what has been happening. Ask them to help you and your parent get help. It is not easy to ask for help, but you can do it! It can be hard to tell other people about problems in your family. It can be embarrassing. It takes a lot of courage. But it is important to keep telling until somebody believes you and helps.

Anyone in the state of Pennsylvania can get help for an abused or neglected child by calling the Child Abuse Hotline. The phone number is **1-800-932-0313**. Anyone can call the hotline, including kids. Often an adult who knows a child is being mistreated will call the hotline. After that phone call, a Child Protective Services (CPS) worker may visit the family. The worker's job is to see that the children are protected. It is also the worker's job to see that parents get the help they need for their problems, so the children stay safe. That means that she or he needs to ask a lot of questions to understand what is going on.

There is help for abused and neglected children. Ask for it!