



Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Information

Child Abuse is any mistreatment of a child that results in harm or injury. Under Virginia law, an abused or neglected child is any child under 18 whose parent, or any other person responsible for the care of the child, does any or all of the following:

Cause or threatens to cause a non-accidental physical or mental injury, including, but not limited to a child who is with his parent during the manufacture or sale of certain drugs. **Physical abuse** includes actions such as beating, burning or punching a child. **Emotional abuse** may involve criticizing, blaming, insulting, rejecting or withholding love from a child

Sexual abuse commits or allows to be committed an illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, touching/fondling, indecent exposure, prostitution, or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material, or knowingly leaves a child alone in the same dwelling with a person who is not related to the child by blood or marriage and who is required to register as a violent sexual offender.

Neglect includes abandoning a child or failure to provide for a child's basic physical, medical, emotional or educational needs. Failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and level of development or failing to provide needed medical care may also be considered neglect.

Know the signs of abuse – These signs do not prove that a child is being abused, but they could be a signal that the child and his or her family need help.

Some signs of physical abuse – unexplained burns, bruises, black eyes or other injuries, apparent fear of a parent or caretaker. Faded bruises or healing in injuries after missing school.

Some signs of sexual abuse – difficulty walking or sitting, or other indications of injury in the genital area, sexual knowledge or behavior beyond what is normal for the child's age, running away from home.

Some signs of emotional abuse – acting overly mature or immature for the child's age, extreme changes in behavior, delays in physical or emotional development, attempted suicide, lack of emotional attachment to parent.

Some signs of neglect – missing school a lot, begging for or stealing money or food, lacking needed medical or dental care, being frequently dirty, using alcohol or other drugs, saying there is no one at home to take care of him or her.

Victims of abuse suffer –sometimes for life – Abuse can cause low self-esteem, problems with relationships, physical and mental health problems such as depression. Children who are abused may learn that violence is the way to “solve” problems.

How can you help?

Everyone benefits when we work together to prevent child abuse. The children in our communities become happier and healthier. Families grow stronger and communities become more engaged places when members come together with a strengthened sense of belonging.

Be a nurturing parent – learn positive parenting skills. Discipline appropriately – and with love. Ask for help when you need it. Teach your children that they can come to you for help whenever they need it.

Protect your child from abuse – teach your child how to protect him or herself from harm. Make sure your child knows how to stay safe in public places. Tell our child to say no, get away, and tell you right away if anyone tries to touch or hurt him or her. Abusers often tell their victims to keep it a “secret.” Make sure your child understands that it’s OK to tell these kinds of “secrets.”

Be a kind neighbor, friend and relative – reach out to families under stress. Offer to baby-sit when parents need a break. Help families connect with community resources.

Volunteer – be a mentor to a child. Get involved with the local family resource center or parent support group.

If you suspect abuse, report it!

Reporting child abuse could save a life. Children die every day from injuries caused by child abuse. We each have the ability to help prevent this. Abusive families need help, so reported abuse can help connect families with counseling and services. This may help relieve a family’s stress and prevent future abuse.

If you are concerned about a child's well-being; want to report or discuss a possible abuse or neglect situation; or want advice, counseling, resources or help, please call Fairfax County's Child Protective Services Hotline **703-324-7400**, TTY 703-222-9452. Your call is confidential.