

Child Abuse: Learn the Signs and How to Help

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect and encourage support for children and families. The lasting effects of abuse on a child, as well as a family, can be devastating. Individuals can help by taking the time to learn what child abuse is and what the signs are and by reporting abuse. The following can help arm you with the information you need to take part in the fight against child abuse.



THE FACTS

In the United States...

- A report of child abuse is made every 10 seconds.
- Almost five children die every day as a result of child abuse. Most are under the age of 4.
- Child abuse occurs at every income level, across ethnic and cultural lines, within all religions, and at all levels of education.
- Ninety percent of child sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator in some way; 68 percent are abused by family members.
- Before the age of 18, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused.
- About 30 percent of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children, continuing the horrible cycle of abuse.
- Abused children are at increased risk for ongoing health and behavior problems, such as depression, substance abuse and teen pregnancy, and are more likely to become victims of or commit violent crimes.

Discipline tips for parents

Parenting is one of the toughest jobs in life. By using the following tips, you can create a safe environment and foster the healthy development of your child.

- Never discipline your child when you are upset – give yourself time to calm down.
- Never, EVER shake your baby. Shaking can cause severe bruising of the brain, permanent brain injury, blindness and even death.
- Award privileges to reinforce good behaviors and use “time outs” to help younger children regain control.
- Remember that disciplining is an opportunity to teach. Don’t teach children to solve conflicts by hitting and yelling.

- Ask for help. If you are stressed, or feel out of control with your child, it is okay to ask for help. Call a friend or a family member or one of the resources listed below. You are not alone!

Signs of child abuse

The following signs may indicate abuse. It is important to know, however, that a suffering child may not show any signs of being abused.

- Unexplained bruises, cuts, burns or other injuries
- Withdrawn behavior
- Problems in school
- Fear of adults
- Mood/behavior changes
- Inappropriate interest in or knowledge of sexual acts
- Not wanting to go home

If you think a child is being abused...

- LISTEN. If a child discloses that he or she has been abused by someone, the most important thing you can do is listen carefully.
- Provide a safe environment.
- Tell the child it was not his or her fault.
- DO NOT investigate, make promises, or notify the parents or the caregiver. Report suspected abuse by calling your local law enforcement agency or child protective services agency. You can also call the Virginia Child Protective Services 24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-552-7096.

- Shannon Flaherty, Nurse Practitioner, Department of Emergency Medicine, Child Protection Team

The Child Protection Team at CHOOR consists of dedicated physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and social workers experienced in the field of child abuse and neglect. The team's purpose is to evaluate, diagnose and treat children who have been sexually or physically abused or neglected. Team members work in cooperation with Child Protective Services and law enforcement to ensure the safety and well-being of children.