



Zena Carmel~Jessup, LCSW-C

Being educated and bringing abuse out of the shadows are the most powerful tools we have to help protect children. This material may be difficult or even bring up current concerns or past issues. Please use the contact information given on the handout to identify someone to talk with.

### What Is Child Abuse?

**Physical abuse** is generally defined as “any non-accidental physical injury to the child”

**Neglect** is frequently defined as the failure of a parent or other person with responsibility for the child to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child’s health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm.

**Emotional maltreatment** Typical language used in these definitions is “injury to the psychological capacity or emotional stability of the child as evidenced by an observable or substantial change in behavior, emotional response, or cognition” and injury as evidenced by “anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or aggressive behavior.”

**Sexual abuse and exploitation** is defined, in most states, as an act of a person – adult or child – who forces, coerces or threatens a child to have any form of sexual contact or to engage in any type of sexual activity at the perpetrator’s direction.

### Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse

- Experts estimate that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 8 boys are sexually abused before age 18.
- Most child victims never report the abuse. 90% of children who are sexually abused know their abuser. They are people the family knows well, older youths, relatives, family friends etc.
- Sexually abused children who keep it a secret or who "tell" and are not believed are at greater risk than the general population for psychological, emotional, social, and physical problems, often lasting into adulthood.
- People who abuse children look and act just like every one else. In fact, they often go out of their way to appear trustworthy to gain access to children.

### How to Help Protect Children

- Set and respect physical boundaries
- Discourage secret keeping
- Demonstrate to children that it is all right to say “no” and accept “no” from others.
- Stay aware of how children are interacting with one another.



### Possible Signs Of Childhood Sexual Abuse

- Showing unusually aggressive behavior toward family members, friends, toys, and pets
- Displays knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to his or her age, or exhibiting

seductive behavior.

- Engaging in persistent sexual play with friends, toys or pets
- Has new words for private parts
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Refusing to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Indicating a sudden reluctance to be alone with a certain person

### **How To Respond And Who To Call**

When a child discloses sexual abuse, it is best to respond calmly and listen to what the child has to say. If you react with anger, disbelief or shame, the child may shut down and feel even worse. Listen, encouraging the child to talk without asking leading questions, and thank the child for telling you as it must have taken courage to speak on such a matter. **It is critical to seek the help of a professional who is trained to interview the child about abuse. By getting support early you can help stop the abuse and the ongoing emotional trauma related to secrecy and shame.**

### **If You Suspect That A Child Is Being Or Has Been Abused**

- You and your work place are **obligated by law** make a report to Child Protective Services. Take action in all cases of suspected child sexual abuse.
  - Report all information to your supervisor.
  - To report child abuse and neglect in Montgomery county, call the 24-Hour Report Line at [240-777-4417](tel:240-777-4417)
- Child Protective Services - [240-777-3500](tel:240-777-3500), Main, TTY [240-777-3556](tel:240-777-3556) You do not need to have proof of abuse in order to make a call to Child Protective services.
- The case workers will decide whether to file an official report.
- If you are still unsure if a report should be made or need consultation on managing the consequences of a report please call Safe Boundaries, Safe Children **301-906-9791**.

Child Welfare League <http://www.cwla.org/programs/childprotection/childprotectionfaq.htm>

Safe Shores <http://www.safeshores.org/>