

Pike Regional Child Advocacy Center
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The Mandatory Reporter

A resource manual for individuals required by Alabama law
to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

CHILD ABUSE...THE BIG SECRET

*“Just because you never see it...
Just because you don’t talk about it...
Just because you can’t believe it...
Doesn’t mean it’s not happening.
Sexual abuse occurs with alarming frequency...
In all kinds of families...
To all kinds of kids.”*

CHILD ABUSE...THE SILENT CRY

*“Within my chest beats an innocent heart.
Born into the world that was falling apart,
Was my mother just passion, my father mere lust?
I’m learning in life there is no one to trust.
I’ve been burned, hit, beaten in the course of my life.
The victim of stress, anger, and strike.
Someone please help me before warm blood turns cold.
I can’t run away-I’m just two years old.”*
-L.Collins

WHAT IS PIKE REGIONAL CHILD ADVOCACY/FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

Pike Regional Child Advocacy/Family Resource Center (PRCA/FRC) is the Troy area's only Children's Advocacy Center. PRCA/FRC serves Pike, Coffee, Bullock, and Barbour counties by providing a non-threatening site where a Multidisciplinary Team helps to minimize trauma to child victims of abuse and neglect. Referrals are received from the Department of Human Resources and law enforcement agencies. Services are provided at no charge to families in our area. PRCA/FRC is designed to meet the child's needs for warmth, support, and protection by providing a warm, friendly, home-like environment where children are interviewed about the abuse. After a report of abuse is made to the Department of Human Resources or law enforcement, the child is brought to PRCA/FRC by a family member, friend, DHR worker, or law enforcement to be interviewed. The forensic interviewer, a person with specialized training in investigative interviewing process, talks with the child. A videotape of the interview is made to reduce the number of times a child has to tell what happened.

PRCA/FRC provides other services as well. In addition to the interview services, the center provides counseling, parenting classes, mentors for children, school-based prevention program, community awareness programs and free in-service training for professionals and volunteers about the signs of child abuse.

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare which can occur through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation.

Typically when you think of child abuse, we most often relate it to physical abuse, but there are actually four major types of child abuse. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect are all forms of child abuse.

WHAT IS CHILD NEGLECT?

Neglect is the negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, clothing or shelter.

However, these situations do not always mean a child is neglected. Sometimes, cultural values, the standards of care in the community and poverty may be contributing factors, indicating the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family is in need of information and resources, and the child's health or safety is at risk, then intervention may be required.

Exception: A parent or guardian legitimately practicing his religious beliefs and does not provide medical treatment for a child. This does not preclude a court from ordering the medical services to be provided where the child's health requires it. (Alabama Code 26-14-7.2)

WHO ARE MANDATORY REPORTERS?

Doctors
Surgeons
Medical Examiners
Coroners
Dentists
Osteopaths
Optometrists
Chiropractors
Podiatrists
Nurses
Pharmacists
Teachers and other school personnel
Law enforcement officers and officials
Social Workers
Day care workers and employees
Mental health professionals
Clergy

WHAT IS MY LIABILITY?

All persons reporting suspected child abuse or neglect (whether required by law or not) are presumed to be acting in good faith. Alabama law provides immunity from liability for actions by mandatory reporters. (Alabama Code 26-14-9)

WHEN DO I REPORT?

Make a report when you suspect that a child is being abused or neglected. Use your professional training and expertise to make this decision.

It is not necessary to prove that the abuse or neglect happened; you just need to have reasonable suspicion. It is better to err on the side of false reporting than to risk further injury or even the death of a child.

Do not delay if you do not have all of the needed information. Additional information can be added later.

How do I report abuse?

Reports are made by telephone or in person to the Alabama Department of Human Resources. The report should go to the Department of Human Resources in the county in which the child currently lives.

If you do not know where the abuse occurred, you may report the incident to the Alabama Department of Human Resources Family Services Division. Information about the reporting procedures, including phone numbers, can be obtained through the Family Services Division.

Additionally, information about reporting procedures in other states is available through the ChildHelp USA National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

If it is an emergency and a life threatening situation exists please call 911.

WHAT DO I INCLUDE IN MY REPORT?

The child's name and location

The names and addresses of the parents, guardians, or caretakers

The type and extent of the child's injuries

Any information about previous injuries that might be related

Your name and the name of your organization, school, or agency

SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse is physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning, or otherwise harming a child.

Unexplained Bruises

Appearing on the soft tissue of the face (black eyes), on the genitals, back, buttocks, or upper thigh

Reflecting the shape of a belt buckle, extension cord, handprints, etc.

Child is embarrassed when bruises are discussed

Child has many “accidents” at home and seems secretive about what happened

Child complains of beatings

Unexplained Lacerations

To the face, mouth, eyes, gums, etc.

To the external genitals

To the legs, arms, torso that mimic the imprint of a belt, extension cord, coat hanger, etc.

Unexplained Burns

Cigarette burns on the body

Scald burns that look like immersion burns

Rope burns or abrasions

Burns in the shape of electrical appliances

Other Physical Indicators

Unexplained human bite marks

Unexplained bald spots

Swollen areas

Unexplained and/or multiple fractures

Behavioral Indicators

Self destructive
Withdrawn and/or aggressive-behavioral extremes
Bizarre explanation of injuries
Shows fear of parents or caretaker
Reluctant to go home
Has difficulty walking - limping, sore joints
Listless, withdrawn, preoccupied, extremely aggressive
Deterioration in school performance
Wears inappropriate clothing (i.e. long sleeves in summer)

Parental Behaviors

Shows little feelings or compassion for the child
Belittles the child or describes him/her disparagingly
Has unrealistic or bizarre expectations
Expects the child to conform to rigid standards or behavior
Gives vague or inconsistent explanations of injuries
Are secretive or hostile when asked about child's injury

SIGNS OF NEGLECT

Neglect is failure to meet a child's minimum need for food, clothing, shelter, supervision, education, medical care, etc.

Physical Indicators

Abandonment

Underweight, often hungry, pale

Eyes are listless, sunken with dark circles

Poor hygiene, dirty bodies, dirty or ill-fitting clothing, offensive body odor

Lice, distended stomachs, emaciated

Consistent hunger

Unattended medical needs

Behavioral Indicators

Begs, steals, or hides food

Reports that he is left at home alone for extended periods

Fatigued and preoccupied

Seeks affection or attention inappropriately

Parental Behaviors

Consistent lack of supervision

Seems unconcerned for the child's physical needs

Chronically does not provide food or money to purchase food at school

Refuses to obtain needed medical and/or dental treatment for the child

SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse may be touching (fondling, molesting, sodomy, oral sex, intercourse) or non-touching (obscene language, pornography, indecent exposure, and sexting).

Physical Indicators

Difficulty walking or sitting
Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
Lack of bowel control
Bruises or bleeding in genital area
Frequent urinary tract or yeast infections
Venereal disease
Complains of pain, itching, or swelling in the genital area

Behavioral Indicators

Child discloses he has been sexually abused
Bizarre or unusual sexual behaviors
Knowledge of sexual behaviors inappropriate for child's age
Threatened by physical contact, closeness
Withdrawal, chronic depression
Child talks of secrets that cannot be told

Parental Behaviors

Perceives child as "different" or "bad"
Belittles and/or humiliates the child
Expresses or shows no affection towards the child

SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and, therefore, the Department of Human Resources may not be able to intervene without evidence of harm to the child. Emotional abuse is almost always present when other forms of abuse are identified. Emotional abuse may be name-calling, insults, put-downs, etc. It may be terrorization, isolation, humiliation, rejection, corruption, or ignoring.

Physical Indicators

Speech disorders
Delayed physical development
Substance abuse
Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies

Behavioral Indicators

Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, biting)
Antisocial behavior
Destructive behavior
Neurotic traits (sleep disorders, inhibition of play)
Passive and aggressive behavioral extremes
Delinquent behavior (especially adolescents)
Developmentally delayed

TALKING WITH A CHILD IN DISTRESS

Show your concern

Establish a trusting relationship

Maintain openness and composure

Let the child talk at his own pace

Talk with the child in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed

Allow the child to use his own words but check to ensure you both understand their meaning

Remember the child feels anxiety and fear

Believe the child throughout the process

Do not express disbelief or outrage

Do not express negative or discrediting attitudes towards the parents/caretaker

Do not convey anger or impatience if the child does not fully disclose

Do not ask "why" questions, ask "how," "what," "when," and "where" questions

TALKING WITH A PARENT IN DISTRESS

Establish rapport

Be non-judgmental and uncritical

Demonstrate genuine concern and understanding

Try to determine what issues concern the parent

Use a lot of reflective statements and use your listening skills. "It sounds like you feel frustrated now."

Do not agree with or condone, just listen

Understand the parent may be feeling very stressed and may not know how to deal with the situation

Be supportive but do not pity

Empathize anything positive

Gives a lot of praise for seeking help

Help parents draw on their own strengths

Work to make parents feel valued as individuals

Help them verbalize how they feel

Help them find places for support such as social agencies, churches, family, etc.

WHY DO CHILDREN KEEP SEXUAL ABUSE A SECRET?

Children are trusting and dependent. Sexual abuse is overwhelming to children, especially, when an adult is involved. Most children are taught to trust adults and to not question authority. Abusers know this and take advantage of these vulnerabilities in children.

"We need to break the secret. We need to talk about what sexual abuse is, to name the problem. How offenders do what they do, the tricks, the manipulation of love. People have a much clearer sense of force. What's harder to grasp is when someone misuses love." **Cordelia Anderson, M.A., Consultant & Lecturer of Preventing Sex Abuse, Sensibilites, Inc.**

Abusers may blame the child. Abusers try to make the children feel responsible so the child will keep the secret. Abusers may use statements like, “If you tell, people will think you are bad” or “If you tell our special secret, I will go to jail.”

Abusers may threaten the child. The abuser may threaten the child or threaten bodily harm to the parent or caregiver, or say that the child will be taken from the home if they tell about the abuse.

Some children may be too young to put what has happened into words.

Children may fear that no one will believe them. In most instances, children do not lie about sexual abuse. Even though a child cannot always avoid sexual abuse, children who are taught personal safety information are more likely to tell a parent or a teacher if abuse has occurred.

Children may feel too ashamed or embarrassed to tell. Children may feel ashamed about being involved in the experience, or about their bodies’ response to the abuse.

Children may worry about getting into trouble or getting a loved one in trouble. The abuser may convince the child that she/he consented to the abuse. There may be confusion in the child’s mind because they still love the abuser.

Children often think they have told about the abuse, but their vocabulary, communication, or judgment skills are different from adults, and an adult ‘may not get it.’ For example, rather than telling exactly what happened, a child may instead say, “I don’t like him (or her)” or “He (or she) makes me feel sad”—and by saying this to an adult, a child may truly believe she/he has told.

Children may experience feelings of guilt for willingly participating in what they may later realize was inappropriate conduct.

“I would just urge parents to be there for kids. When you see adults who are overly friendly to children, be leery of that...Let them know if somebody touches them they can come to you. I think it’s more watching the kids, not the sex offenders. You don’t know who the sex offenders are, but you can watch your children.”

Advice of a convicted sex offender

Silence allows sexual abuse to continue.

Silence protects sex offenders.

WHAT IF A CHILD HAS TO GO TO COURT?

Going to court as an adult victim of crime is difficult. Going to court as a child victim can be utterly confusing and frightening. The child may fear seeing the abuser again, may be traumatized by the courtroom or by the questions the attorney or the judge may ask, or the child may not want to go to court at all.

Children need help getting ready for a courtroom experience. The child should be given an early look at the empty courtroom, to see where he/she will be sitting, where the judge, family members or support people will be sitting. The child should be given a chance to walk through the physical procedures of the court process. The Victim Witness Coordinator in the Office of the District Attorney typically arranges for this visit and helps the child and family.

The Victim Witness Coordinator may also have information about a court preparation group for Criminal Court. This group includes children, and other non-offending parents who are preparing to go to trial. If a court preparation group is available, it is of the utmost importance that you attend. Preparation for court is important for both victims and non-offending parents. It may be very upsetting to see the defendant and to hear graphic testimony.

In Criminal Court, keep in mind that the defense team is acting on behalf of the defendant and will do everything they can under the law to defend their client. BE PREPARED. Be mindful also that the victim does not have to talk with the defense attorney or any representative of the defense attorney except in the courtroom or when the District Attorney is present. The child's responsibility is to testify truthfully in court.

If parent or other close, trusted adult will be a witness in the case, they will not be allowed in the courtroom when the child is testifying. A child should always have a trusting, friendly face in the courtroom, so make sure the Victim Witness Coordinator, a best friend, or relative stays with your child at all times. A child should never feel he/she is alone while going through the courtroom experience.

When the case is completed, it is common to feel a sense of letdown. Celebrate when the courtroom procedure is over-whatever the outcome. The legal system has been with us for a long time, and will continue long after your experience with it has come to an end. It is only one step in the process, and although a conviction can be helpful, it is not essential to your child's recovery. Regardless of outcome, your child will know you do not tolerate abuse, you believe your child, and you will protect your child.

The most important thing is to let the child know you are proud of him/her for being brave and telling the truth. You and your child did you best, worked hard, and did the right thing. You did your best to prevent further abuse and to hold the offender responsible for his actions.

In the event you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the case, be cautious about expressing any disappointment in front of the child, as the child may feel responsible and feel you are displeased with him or her. If you feel let down with the outcome, find a supportive friend to share your feelings with.

Some things you can say to your child:

“It does not matter what the court did. What matters is that you did the right thing. You told the truth.”

“You have been very brave, and I am so proud of you.”

“Just because the court said “not guilty”, does not mean they do not believe you. It’s just they have to follow the court’s rules.”

Resources

Pike County:

Pike Regional Child Advocacy Center (PRCAC)

334-670-0487

To provide a child-friendly place where child victims and their families can receive crisis intervention, counseling and family support groups.

Abstinence in Motion (AIM)

334-670-5261

Pike County Department of Human Resources (DHR)

334-807-6120

East Central Mental Health

334-566-6022

Pike County Board of Education

334-566-1850

Troy City Schools

334-566-3741

Troy Police Department

334-566-0500

Pike County Sheriff's Department

334-566-4347

Office of the District Attorney (12th Judicial Circuit)

334-566-6896

Pike County Juvenile Court (JPO)

334-566-5548

Troy Regional Medical Center

334-670-5000

Pike County Health Department

334-566-2860

Charles Henderson Child Health Care Center

334-566-7600

Barbour County:

Barbour County Department of Human Resources (DHR)

334-775-2000

Eufaula Police Department

334-687-1200

Barbour County Sheriff's Office

334-775-1103

Office of the District Attorney (3rd Judicial Circuit)

334-687-7638

Bullock County:

Bullock County Department of Human Resources (DHR)

334-738-2740

Bullock County Sheriff's Department

334-738-2670

Union Springs Police Department

334-738-3131

Office of the District Attorney (3rd Judicial Circuit)

334-687-7638

Coffee County:

Coffee County Department of Human Resources (DHR)

334-348-2000

Coffee County Sheriff's Office

334-894-5535

Elba Police Department

334-897-2555

Enterprise Police Department

334-347-1211

Kinston Police Department

334-565-3114

New Brockton Police Department

334-894-5559

Office of the District Attorney (12th Judicial Circuit)

334-347-3489