

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 (12<sup>th</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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 (12<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit)**

334-347-3489