

## IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

### Recognizing Child Abuse

Child abuse causes harm - physical, emotional or sexual - to a child. It can impact a child's safety, well-being, dignity and development. Child abuse can be committed by a trusted adult - like parents, legal guardians or teachers, or by a stranger that the child does not know. Recognizing some early signs of child abuse can help stop and prevent abuse.



**Physical abuse:** violent acts like hitting, shaking, burning, or any physical injury to the child.

*Look out for signs such as bruises, aches and swelling; the child may be reluctant to go to school; the child may feel scared around adults, or look alert, as if anticipating a beating for a mistake.\**



**Emotional abuse:** name calling, constant criticism, taunting, insulting, or saying negative things about the child's family or background. Punishments like locking the child in a room alone for long periods of time, or restricting contact friends or other family members. *Look out for angry outbursts; observe if the child is hyperactive and attention-seeking, or withdrawn and unusually quiet. Is there a drop in academic performance or complaints from teachers? Is the child hurting themselves - cutting their wrists, banging their head against the wall, scratching themselves, using sharp objects to injure themselves?\**



**Sexual abuse:** any contact or non-contact abuse with the intent of sexual gratification - like indecent touching, using sexually explicit language, showing children pornographic material, kissing, or rape.

*Look out for over-reactive or withdrawn behavior; talk to the child to understand if the child suddenly has unusual sexual knowledge for their age; observe if the child is engaging in sexual play with other children; look out for unexplained wounds on their bodies or near their genitals.\**



**Neglect:** failure to provide for the child's needs in areas like health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. *Is the child receiving nutritious food in a timely manner? Are the child's healthcare needs being met? Does the child have clean clothes, and safe living conditions?*

Difficult circumstances at your home such as divorce or separation, or a death in the family can also affect the child's wellbeing. The above mentioned signs are few examples; every child's experience may be different, and a child may be facing multiple forms of abuse. Early detection can help prevent further child abuse.

### Reporting child abuse

If you notice any of these signs, talk to the child. Ask them about whether they are being hurt at school, in their neighborhood, or at home. Try to establish the cause and prevent further abuse.

**Call the police or 1-0-0 immediately if a child is in immediate, life-threatening danger.**

- If a child reports sexual abuse (including rape, inappropriate touching or fondling the child, stalking of a child, being shown child pornography, or being asked to take inappropriate photographs of themselves), you are legally obligated to inform the police or call Childline on 1-0-9-8 immediately.
- If a child reports physical abuse go to the nearest police station and report the assault.
- If your child is facing emotional abuse of any kind, listen to them, and help them see a counsellor.
- If your child is facing physical and emotional abuse at school, inform the school as soon as possible. Corporal punishment, or physical punishment at school is against the law. You can also call Childline helpline on 1098.

## As a parent, what can you do to prevent child abuse?

Some practices and steps taken by you can go a long way to create a safe space for the child and prevent child abuse.

### “TALK – PRACTICE – AVOID”

#### TALK



1. **Teach children that their feelings matter and that they deserve respect**
2. **Talk to children about safe and unsafe touch**
3. **Teach them about personal safety**

#### PRACTICE



1. **Give children space to express themselves - share your own stories, and include as many feelings and sensations as you can so as to encourage children to do so**
2. **Ask for permission to touch the child - this will give them a sense of control over their bodies**
3. **Empower kids to say “no” and respect their decision**
4. **Consult a counselor in case you notice a change in the behaviour of the child**

#### AVOID



1. **Strictly avoid using physical punishments to discipline the child, instead try innovative disciplining strategies like positive reinforcement - rewarding or praising the child for a good deed or behaviour**
2. **Avoid comparing the child with their sibling or other children**

#### What to do when a child reports abuse?

*It is never easy to know what to say or do when a child reports abuse. Here are a few tips on how to approach the situation once the child confides in you.*

1. Listen carefully to the child
2. Avoid expressing your own views on the matter
3. Do not judge the child, express shock or disbelief or blame them for the situation
4. Avoid confronting the abuser on your own. This might put the child at further risk
5. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Punishing the abuser is not entirely in your hands
6. Ensure that the abuser has no access to the child.

#### What to say to the child?

1. Tell them, you believe them - “I am sorry you had experienced this. Thank you for trusting me and talking to me about this.”
2. Tell them it is not their fault - “When an adult or older person troubles or hurts a child, it is never the child’s fault. The adult or older person is responsible for what they did.”
3. Acknowledge the child’s feelings - “You must be feeling upset/angry”
4. Explain the next steps to them - “I am glad you came and told me about this. It is important that we talk to the police. Don't worry, I will be with you. Is that ok with you?”