

IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

Recognizing Child Abuse

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



Physical abuse: violent acts like hitting, shaking, burning, or any physical injury to the child. *Watch out for warning signs such as bruises, burns, aches and swelling; injuries for which the explanation given is inadequate, the child looks scared or hyperalert; if physical abuse is happening at home, the child may try to run away from home, or may avoid going home**



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 *Look out for over-reactive or withdrawn behavior; if the child suddenly has unusual sexual knowledge for their age; is engaging in sexual play with other children; reports trouble sleeping or nightmares; feelings of little self-worth or talk of being damaged; you notice unexplained wounds on the child's body**



Emotional abuse: name calling, constant criticism, taunting, criticizing the way a child looks, dresses, behaves or saying negative things about the child's family or background. *Look out for angry outbursts; if the child is hyperactive and attention-seeking; or withdrawn and unusually quieter; has a drop in*



*academic performance; trouble making friends; constant complaints from other teachers; breaking things, stealing, cheating; frequent headaches or stomach aches or unexplained weight loss or gain; is the child hurting themselves cutting their wrists, banging their head against the wall, scratching themselves or using sharp objects to injure themselves?**

Corporal punishment is a term used to define any form of physical punishment or non-physical forms of punishment that includes belittling, humiliating, threatening, scaring or ridiculing the child. *The child might exhibit signs similar to the ones listed under physical and emotional abuse.*



Neglect: failure to provide for the child's needs in areas like health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions. *Look out for signs such as loss in weight of the child; lack of attention from parents like child wearing unclean clothes, not bathed in days or not getting lunch box to school; child craves attention – even if it means getting negative responses from others - breaking things, disrupting class; misses school often; parents not responding to your notes or calls for urgent matters related to child's physical or medical problems.*

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. The child might also be a victim of bullying at school and display concerning signs. Early detection can help prevent further child abuse.

How do you know when you need to report abuse?

It is not unusual for children to scrape knees, bruise arms, bump heads, burn fingers, or break bones. Do not conclude a child is being abused simply because a child has an injury. However, look out for instances when a child doesn't have explanation that seems to fit the injury, or if they are being very secretive about it.

A child may voluntarily tell you that they have been abused, other times you might have to look out for signs. You must speak with the child to determine if there is reason to believe that the child may have been abused. You can follow the guide given above when talking to the children.

Reporting child abuse

If you notice any of the signs of abuse, 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 you are legally obligated to inform the police or call Childline on 1-0-9-8 immediately.
- If a fellow teacher or employee in the school is physically or emotionally abusing a child, report the abuse to the school management immediately. Provide assistance to the child, and inform the parents immediately.

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 the child is away from the abuser
7. Don't delay reporting the abuse.
8. Do not disclose any information to the media like name of the child, or any other identifying information

What to say to the child?

1. Tell them, you believe them - "I am sorry you had to face this"
2. Tell them - "Thank you for trusting me and talking to me about it"
3. Tell them they've done the right thing by telling you about the abuse
4. 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."
5. Acknowledge the child's feelings - "You must be feeling upset/angry"
6. Explain the next steps to them - "I am glad you came and told me about this. It is important that I talk to your parents about it. Is that ok with you?"

As a teacher, 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. *Be a good listener, empower kids to say "no" and talk openly*
2. *Discuss concerns regarding a child with their parents*
3. *Check your emotions when interacting with a child - are you feeling angry and might hit the child? Pause!*
4. *Consult a counsellor 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 behavior*
2. *Avoid comparing the child's performance or behavior with other children*
3. *Avoid making comments on child appearance, family background, gender or disability*