

## Be vigilant for children – Recognizing signs of abuse & neglect

Keeping children safe is a top priority for early childhood practitioners. Every day you work to create a safe space and a caring place for children at your program. As a child care provider, you also need to be aware of the child's safety outside of your program. It is difficult to believe that young children could be harmed, especially that someone

in their lives could harm them. However, over 3 million reports of child maltreatment are received each year by Child Protection Service agencies. To keep children safe, it is important to recognize signs of abuse and neglect and to know what steps to take to protect children.

### What is child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse is any act or lack of action that creates an imminent risk to children. There are four areas of risk that are considered:

- **Physical** – Serious, non-accidental bodily injury.
- **Neglect** – Failure to provide for basic needs or failure to act that presents imminent risk of serious harm.
- **Emotional** – Emotional trauma resulting from repeated behaviors over an extended period that impairs a child's emotional development. (Ex. belittling, demeaning, or threatening a child)
- **Sexual** – Engaging in sexual activities with a child or exploiting a child sexually.

### Signs of child abuse

Did you ever think a child in your care was being abused, but you weren't sure? Take time to consider the child's general behavior. If you are noticing any changes in behavior or seeing atypical behavior, it is important to talk with families and other staff to find out if there are any recent events (such as parental separations, illness, moving) that could trigger changes in behavior and to observe to see if there is pattern of behaviors.

### Some questions to consider if you feel concerned about a child:

- Is the child exhibiting a sudden change in behavior?
- Does the child not seem to want to go home?
- Does the child have unexplained bruises, bites, burns, or injuries?
- Does the child have fading bruises or marks after an absence from school?
- Does the child talk about beatings or harsh physical punishment?
- Is the child absent from your program a lot?
- Is the child unwashed or poorly clothed?
- Does the child talk about missing meals?
- Does the child pull away from contact with adults?
- Does the child have difficulty walking or sitting?
- Does the child display unusual sexual behavior or knowledge?
- Does the child talk about being touched inappropriately?
- Does the child show a lack of attachment to others?
- Is the child overly compliant or withdrawn?
- Does the child seem anxious that something bad will happen?
- Does the child try to hurt himself?

**These behaviors and signs can be triggered by a variety of events and by the child's state of health, but if behaviors continue or if several signs are seen, then it could signal the possibility of child abuse or neglect.**

## Reporting of suspected child abuse

Reporting of suspected child abuse is required under the Child Protective Services Law and the Pennsylvania Code for regulated child care programs. All staff who work in a child care program are considered to be “mandated reporters”.

For suspected abuse, you do not need to have conclusive proof or to have witness the abuse. You only need to suspect abuse based on your observations of the child, the child’s report of abuse, or information shared by others that have contact with the child.



CHILDLINE is a 24-hour toll-free telephone line. After calling CHILDLINE, you will need to complete a written report within 48 hours and submit it to your local Children and Youth Agency. Report of Suspected Child Abuse

## Be vigilant for children

Child abuse can happen in all types of families to all types of children. As a child care practitioner it is essential that you are aware of children’s health and well-being.

- Communicate regularly with families and other staff about any concerns or questions that you have about children and document your conversations.
- Learn about how to recognize child abuse, how to prevent child abuse, and how to help children who have been abused.
- Attend mandated report trainings and workshops on child abuse.
- Make sure that all staff know your program’s procedure for reporting child abuse.
- Identify resources for families at risk and refer families as needed.

### References:

PA Dept. of Public Welfare – CHILDLINE Information  
 ECELS – Healthy Childcare PA  
 Look Out for Child Abuse  
 Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania  
 Prevent Child Abuse America

U.S. Department of Health & Human Service Welfare  
 Information Gateway  
 Healthy Children  
 National Children’s Advocacy Center - Prevention  
 Services

**Child care  
 providers must call  
 CHILDLINE if they suspect a  
 child is being abused.**

**If you suspect a child is being abused,  
 call CHILDLINE at 1-800-932-0313**

## More information on child abuse and neglect

- PA Dept. of Public Welfare – CHILDLINE Information  
<http://www.dhs.pa.gov/provider/childwelfareservices/childlineandabuseregistry/index.htm>
- ECELS – Healthy Childcare PA  
[\(http://www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org/\)](http://www.ecels-healthychildcarepa.org/)
- Look Out for Child Abuse  
[\(http://lookoutforchildabuse.org/\)](http://lookoutforchildabuse.org/)
- Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania  
<http://www.preventchildabusepa.org>
- Prevent Child Abuse America <http://www.preventchildabuse.org>
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Service Welfare Information Gateway <http://www.childwelfare.gov/>
- Healthy Children <http://www.healthychildren.org>
- National Children’s Advocacy Center – Prevention Services <http://www.nationalcac.org/prevention/about-prevention-services.html>