

**You are a  
MANDATORY  
REPORTER**



This mandatory reporter booklet is provided by the  
Pike Regional Child Advocacy Center for the benefit of all individuals  
who may be considered mandatory reporters.

This booklet is not intended to provide legal information.

For legal information regarding mandatory reporting,  
please contact a personal attorney or your local district attorney.

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## **Pike Regional Child Advocacy Center**

Pike Regional Child Advocacy Center (PRCAC) is the Troy area's only children's advocacy center. PRCAC 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. PRCAC 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 PRCAC 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.

PRCAC provides other services as well. In addition to the interview services, the center provides counseling, parenting classes, mentors for children, Kids Exchange, School-based Prevention Program, Community Awareness Program and free in-service training for professionals and volunteers about the signs of child abuse.

## **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 we 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.

## **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	Social Workers
Surgeons	Clergy
Nurses	Day Care Employees
Coroners	Mental Health Professionals
Dentists	Teachers/School Personnel
Osteopaths	Police Officers
Optometrists	Law Enforcement Officials
Chiropractors	Student Mentors
Medical Examiners	Cashiers
Podiatrists	Hotel Employees
Pharmacists	Civic Leaders

## **The Mandatory Reporters' 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 to Report**

Make a report when you know or 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 to Report Abuse**

Reports are made by telephone to the Alabama Department of Human Resources. The report should go to the Department of Human Resources in the county in which the abuse occurred.

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 to Include in a Report**

1. The child's name and location.
2. The names and addresses of the parents, guardians or caretakers.
3. The type and extent of the child's injuries.
4. Any information about previous injuries that might be related.
5. 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) because 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:

1. Bruises appearing on the soft tissue of the face, on the genitals, back, buttocks or upper thighs.
2. Bruises reflecting the shape of a belt buckle, extension cord, handprints, etc.
3. Child is embarrassed when bruises are discussed.
4. Child has many “accidents” at home and seems secretive about what happened.
5. Child complains of excessive physical punishment.

### Unexplained Lacerations:

1. Lacerations to the face, mouth, eyes, gums, etc.
2. Lacerations to the external genitals.
3. Lacerations to the legs, arms, torso that mimic the imprint of a belt, extension cord, coat hanger, etc.

### Unexplained Burns:

1. Cigarette burns on the body.
2. Scald burns that look like immersion burns.
3. Rope burns or abrasions.
4. Burns in the shape of electrical appliances.

### Other Physical Indicators:

1. Unexplained human bite marks.
2. Unexplained bald spots.
3. Swollen areas.
4. Unexplained and/or multiple fractures.

### Behavioral Indicators:

1. Self-destructive behavior.
2. Withdrawn and/or aggressive behavior (i.e. listless, withdrawn, preoccupied.)
3. Behavioral extremes (i.e. bizarre explanation of injuries.)
4. Shows fear of parents or caretaker.
5. Reluctant to go home.
6. Has difficulty walking (i.e. limping, sore joints.)
7. Deterioration in school performance.
8. Wears inappropriate clothing (i.e. long sleeves in summer.)

### Parental Behaviors

1. Parent shows little feelings or compassion for the child.
2. Parent belittles their child or describes him/her disparagingly.
3. The parent has unrealistic or bizarre expectations from their child.
4. The parent expects the child to conform to rigid standards or behavior.

5. The parent gives vague or inconsistent explanations of injuries.
6. The parent is secretive or hostile when asked about the child's injury.

## **Signs of Neglect**

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

### **Physical Indicators**

1. Child has been abandoned.
2. Child is underweight, often hungry or pale.
3. Child's eyes are listless or sunken with dark circles.
4. Child has poor hygiene, dirty bodies, dirty or ill-fitting clothing and/or offensive body odor.
5. Child has lice, distended stomach or emaciated.
6. Child is consistently hungry.
7. Child has unattended medical needs.

### **Behavioral Indicators**

1. Child begs, steals or hides food.
2. Child reports that they are left at home alone for extended periods of time.
3. Child is regularly fatigued or preoccupied.
4. Child regularly seeks affection or attention inappropriately.

### **Parental Behaviors**

1. Parent exemplifies consistent lack of supervision.
2. Parent seems unconcerned about the child's physical needs.
3. Parent chronically does not provide food or money for the child to purchase food at school.
4. Parent refuses to obtain needed medical and/or dental treatment for the child.

## **Signs of Sexual Abuse**

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

### **Physical Indicators**

1. Child shows difficulties walking or sitting.
2. Child has torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
3. Child has a lack of bowel control.
4. Child has bruises or bleeding in genital area.
5. Child has frequent urinary tract or yeast infections.
6. Child has venereal disease.
7. Child complains of pain, itching or swelling in the genital area.

### **Behavioral Indicators**

1. Child discloses they have been sexually abused.
2. Child displays bizarre or unusual sexual behaviors.

3. Child's knowledge of sexual behavior is inappropriate for their age.
4. Child is threatened by physical contact or closeness.
5. Child shows a lack of emotional control.
6. Child is withdrawn or shows symptoms of chronic depression.
7. Child talks of secrets that cannot be told.

### **Parental Behaviors**

1. Parent perceives child as different or bad.
2. Parent belittles or humiliates the child.
3. Parent expresses or shows no affection toward 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 usually present when other forms of abuse are identified. Emotional abuse may be name-calling, insults, putdowns, etc. It may be terrorization, isolation, humiliation, rejection, corruption or ignoring.

### **Physical Indicators**

1. Child displays speech disorders.
2. Child has delayed physical development.
3. Child has substance abuse problem.
4. Child has ulcers, asthma or severe allergies

### **Behavioral Indicator**

1. Child has habit disorders (i.e. sucking, rocking, biting.)
2. Child is antisocial.
3. Child's behavior is destructive.
4. Child shows neurotic traits (i.e. sleep disorders, inhibition of play.)
5. Child has passive and aggressive behavioral extremes.
6. Child has delinquent behavior.
7. Child is developmentally delayed.

## **Communicating 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 end the conversation when the child exhibits distress.
- Be aware of the child's readiness to resume the discussion at a later time.
- 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.

## Communicating 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 reflective statements and use your listening skills. Example: "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.
- Emphasize anything positive.
- Give lots 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 Children Keep Sexual Abuse 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 on Preventing Sex Abuse, Sensibilities, 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 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 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 they 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.” A child may believe they have told an adult about the abuse, but the adult may have misinterpreted the child’s complaints.

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

*“I would just urge parents to be there for the 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.**

## When Children 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 a 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 a 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 your 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 letdown with the outcome, find a supportive friend to share your feelings with.

Never show your dissatisfaction to your child. Tell your child:  
"You have been very brave, and I am so proud of you."

## **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 strife.  
Someone please help me before warm blood turns cold.  
I can’t run away – I’m just two years old.”  
-L. Collins*



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