

WHEN YOU SUSPECT

Child Abuse

A Guide for Mandated Reporters and
Other Concerned Adults



You've noticed Darren's bruises don't ever seem to go away. His explanations for the "accidents" don't match his injuries. You hope your instincts are wrong. How can you be sure? You remember learning about the signs but can't recall exactly what they are. What signs should you look for? Who do you call for help? When you suspect child abuse, the child's well-being and safety is your major concern. Children depend on you to keep them safe. You need to be aware of your responsibilities for children's safety and how you can effectively protect them.



What is child abuse?

The Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS Chapter 350) defines child abuse or neglect as "the acts or omissions of any person who, or legal entity which, is in any manner or degree related to the child, is residing with the child, or is otherwise responsible for the child's care, that have resulted in the physical or psychological health or welfare of the child, who is under the age of eighteen, to be harmed, or to be subject to any reasonably foreseeable, substantial risk of being harmed."

Child maltreatment includes emotional abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and non-accidental physical injury. The information below from the Minnesota Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse was adapted by the University of Hawaii's Center on the Family's *Kids: You Can't Beat 'Em* project,



- **Emotional Abuse** includes expectations which result in aggressive, excessive, or unreasonable demands upon children. These demands may be beyond children's capabilities and impair psychological, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional growth and development.

- **Physical Neglect** is the withholding of, or failure to provide a child with, the basic necessities of life: clothing, food, medical care, proper hygiene, or adequate supervision.

- **Sexual Abuse** is the inappropriate exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity, or behavior. It may range from exhibitionism and fondling to intercourse and the use of children in pornographic materials.

- **Non-Accidental Physical Injury** is inflicting physical injury on a child. This may include punching, kicking, burns, human bites, broken bones, strangulation, shaking, or serious internal injuries.

Child maltreatment may be found in a combination of two or more of the types listed above.



Who are the abusers and why does child abuse happen?

Child maltreatment affects all economic, racial, social, ethnic, and religious groups. Abusers can be your friends, co-workers, neighbors, or even family members. It is a myth that child abuse occurs only among uneducated, poor families.

Child abuse is most likely to occur:

- When there is a lack of appropriate parenting skills and an understanding of child development
- When a parent sees a child as abnormal or different from other children
- When parents are socially isolated with no emotional support
- If the child is emotionally, physically, or developmentally disabled
- In stressful situations, such as marital, financial, employment problems, or a major illness
- If the parents were abused as children
- If the child exhibits behaviors different from parents' expectations
- Where there is an alcohol or substance abuse problem in the home



What should I look for?

As explained by the Minnesota Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (and as adapted by the University of Hawaii's Center on the Family's *Kids: You Can't Beat 'Em* project), signs of child maltreatment may be recognized through careful observation of parent and child behaviors. One instance of one of these signs does not necessarily indicate child maltreatment. But when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, we should consider the possibility of child abuse.

The following lists were also adapted from the Minnesota Committee of Child Abuse.

The Child:

- Has abnormally high instances of bruises or injuries
- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Has a poor self-concept
- Demonstrates low school performance that cannot be attributed to physical or psychological causes
- Is wary of physical contact from anyone
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, an overachiever, or too responsible
- Arrives at school early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Is distrustful of others and always on guard for danger

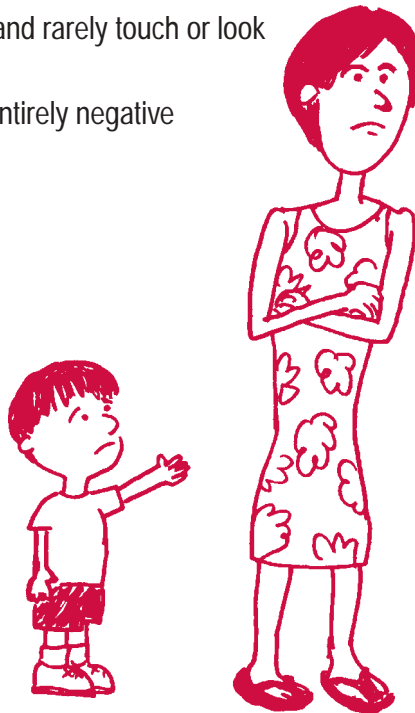


The Parent:

- Delays in seeking medical attention for the child and changes physician frequently
- Shows little concern or interest for the child, or avoids any communication or contact with school personnel
- Denies the existence of (or blames the child for) the child's problems in school or home
- Has poor self-esteem
- Sees the child as bad, worthless, or burdensome
- Demands perfection or a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
- Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs

The Parent and Child:

- Exhibit a reversal of roles (the child "mothers" the parent)
- Show little physical contact and rarely touch or look at each other
- Consider their relationship entirely negative



Who Should Report Abuse?

Anyone may report a suspected case of child abuse. By law, mandated reporters must report possible child abuse and neglect cases to Child Welfare Services (CWS) / Child Protective Services (CPS) or the Police Department **immediately**. The State of Hawai'i Child Welfare Service's "A Guideline for Mandated Reporters" identifies mandated reporters as:

- (1) Licensed or registered professionals of the **healing arts and any health-related occupation** who examine, attend, treat, or provide other professional or specialized services, including but not limited to physicians (including physicians in training), psychologists, dentists, nurses, osteopathic physicians and surgeons, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, pharmacists, and other health-related professionals
- (2) Employees or officers of any **public or private school**
- (3) Employees or officers of any public or private agency or institution, or other individuals, providing **social, medical, hospital, or mental health services**, including financial assistance
- (4) Employees or officers of any **law enforcement agency**, including but not limited to the courts, police departments, correctional institutions, and parole or probation officers
- (5) Individual **providers of child care**, or employees or officers of any licensed or registered child care facility, foster home, or similar institution
- (6) **Medical examiners or coroners**
- (7) Employees of any public or private agency providing **recreational or sports activities**.



Call Child Welfare Services (CWS) / Child Protective Services (CPS) to discuss the appropriateness of referrals if you're not sure.

The following suggestions have been adapted from *“Dos and Don’ts for*

What if a child tells me that maltreatment is happening?

- Practice a response before the real situation.
 - “You can trust me. I will try to help in anyway I can.”
 - “You are not at fault.”
 - “We need to let someone who can help know about this.”
- Pay close attention to your body language. Give the child signals that you are hearing what s/he says and that you can help.
- Know your organization’s policy for reporting and be familiar with each step.
- School policy usually designates one person as the reporting agent (such as the principal or counselor). As you tell the designee what has been said to you, invite the child to listen and to add to or correct anything you say which is not clear or is inaccurate. This can be empowering for the child, who then becomes the “expert” because s/he has the correct information. It is also a check on whether the story remains consistent.
- Act quickly so the child does not wait any longer than necessary to learn the consequences of telling about the abuse.
- When you disclose the information to the designated reporting agent, the setting of the disclosure should be a place the child considers his/ her own turf. Bringing the principal to the child’s classroom may be better than taking the child to the principal’s office (which the child may associate with being in trouble).
- Let the child know that s/he was brave to share something (no matter how minimal) about a difficult subject. Be openly admiring of this courage to reinforce the disclosure process.
- Tell the child that you will do everything you can to see that s/he is kept safe.



- Assure the child that you care about him/her and that your relationship has not been negatively altered. Some children feel ashamed and assume they are less lovable
- As soon as possible, write down the actual words used in the disclosure and in your interaction with the child. The child's first statement has forensic significance and the exact words can be important.



What should I be sure NOT to do when a child tells me that maltreatment is happening?

- Do NOT try to determine for yourself if the allegation is valid or invalid. This is the role of Child Protective Services and law enforcement.
- Do NOT use shocked or disbelieving body language while the child is talking. The child may interpret this to mean that you find the CHILD (rather than the MALTREATMENT) unacceptable.
- Do NOT gossip about these allegations to friends, relatives, or advocates. Follow confidentiality laws and policies.
- Do NOT ever try to talk a child out of what s/he is saying. If you are skeptical, do NOT express your doubts to the child. This is a task for investigators to sort through, and you can express your doubts to them.
- Do NOT stand over the child while s/he is talking about the abuse. This may make the child feel crowded or dominated.
- Do NOT attempt to find out the details while in the class group. Sexual abuse is not an appropriate subject for classmates to discuss.
- Do NOT suggest to a child that you think s/he may have been abused. This can be damaging and is problematic in cases in which abuse DID happen but the information was elicited through the use of leading questions.

How do I report child abuse and neglect?

To report child abuse and neglect, contact Child Welfare Services (CWS) / Child Protective Services (CPS) or the Police Department. Police will investigate the suspected crime. Social service agencies will assess the risk to the child. Both the police and child protection workers can help you assess the risk to the child. This may be done anonymously. Report the signs and symptoms of maltreatment that you observe. Provide the child's name and the name of the person believed to be responsible for the abuse (if you know it). It is very helpful to give your own name and phone number, if possible.

Emergencies: If you believe the child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Child Welfare Services (CWS) / Child Protective Services (CPS):



O'ahu (808) 832-5300

East Hawai'i (808) 933-0350

West Hawai'i (808) 327-4787

Maui (808) 243-5143

Moloka'i (808) 553-1703

Kaua'i (808) 274-3320

Lana'i (808) 565-7102

References:

Holmes, C.C. (1996). Dos and Don'ts for teachers first hearing a child's disclosure. *The Best of NRCCSA News: A Compilation of the Most Requested and Reprinted Articles from 1992-96*. Huntsville, Alabama: National Children's Advocacy Center.

Minnesota Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (publications of this organization are now archived by Family Support Network www.familysupport.org).

State of Hawai'i, Department of Human Services, Social Services Division, Child Welfare Services. *A Guideline for Mandated Reporters*. Honolulu, Author.

State of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, Chapter 350 (1993 replacement).



For more information, contact:



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Prevent Child Abuse Hawaii
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