



Child Abuse & Neglect



What Is Child Abuse & Neglect?

Children across the United States are suffering from child abuse and neglect, which is defined by the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation of a child.” Adults in a child’s life can be abusive by either directly inflicting harm (physically, sexually, or emotionally) or by neglecting a child’s needs. Children includes anyone under the age of 18 who is not emancipated. Child abuse crosses all boundaries of ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion. Abuse and neglect can be extremely detrimental to a child’s life, development, and understanding of the world. Child abuse and neglect can have a lifelong impact on one’s well-being, relationships, health, and mental health.

Effects of Child Abuse and Neglect

- **Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)**
 - Delayed physical, emotional, or brain development
 - At-risk for health concerns: Diabetes, Lung disease, High blood pressure, Early heart attacks, Vision problems, Functional limitations, Asthma, Cancer, Other chronic diseases
 - Toxic stress changes an individual’s brain architecture causing strong, frequent, or prolonged activation of a person’s stress response system.
- **Struggle with future intimate relationships**
- **Increased risk of being sexually assaulted as an adult**
- **Sexual risk-taking**
High number of partners; Unexpected pregnancy; Sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- **Substance abuse**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Mental health challenges**
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); Depression; Anxiety disorders; Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- **Educational difficulties**
- **Difficulties with obesity and self-image**

Caring for a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused

- Listen to them and believe their story. Give them space to retell it as many times as needed.
- Don’t judge them.
- Allow them to grieve and express anger.
- Have patience with them; healing takes time.
- Find local resources
- Refer them to a therapist.
- Consult colleagues in the wider community who have more expertise to assist you.
- Remind them they are worthy of love.



Signs That An Adult May Be Hurting a Child

"CHILD ABUSE," MAYO CLINIC, [MAYOCLINIC.ORG/DISEASES-CONDITIONS/CHILD-ABUSE/SYMPTOMS-CAUSES/SYC-20370864](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/child-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20370864)

Warning Signs in a Parent's or Caregiver's Behavior:

- Shows little concern for the child
- Appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the child
- Blames the child for problems
- Constantly belittles the child
- Demands inappropriate physical or academic performance
- Offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all
- Limits the child's contact with others
- Uses harsh physical discipline
- Does not respect boundaries or listen when a child tells them "no."
- Engages in touching that a child or child's parents/ caregivers have indicated is unwanted.
- Tries to be a child's friend rather than filling an adult role in the child's life.
- Does not seem to have age-appropriate relationships.
- Talks with children about their personal problems or relationships.
- Spends time alone with a child outside of their role in the child's life or creates reasons to be alone with the child.
- Expresses unusual interest in a child's sexual development, such as commenting on sexual characteristics or sexualizing normal behaviors.
- Gives a child gifts without occasion or reason.
- Spends a lot of time with your child or another child you know.
- Restricts a child's access to other adults.

Theology of Abuse

- Remind them God can redeem all life experiences for God's glory (Genesis 50:20).
- God is love (1 John 4:7-8) and God hates evil (Psalm 5:4-5). Scripture does not promise that humans will not experience suffering. However, God does promise to be present with those who are suffering (Deuteronomy 31:8; Psalm 22; 23:1-4; 55; 91:4; Matthew 5:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
- No one deserves to be abused, no matter what sins they have committed. A victim is never at fault for the abuse they endure. Nothing they did could cause abuse.
- Nothing can separate anyone from God, including abuse and the perpetrators of abuse (Romans 8:38-39).

Forms of Abuse

PHYSICAL

Punching, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, shocking, hitting (with a hand, stick, or other object), burning, and other actions that cause bodily harm

EMOTIONAL

Pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth, including constant criticism, threats, and parents or caregivers rejecting or withholding love, support, or guidance

NEGLECT

Failure to provide for a child's basic needs

- Physical—food, shelter, and supervision
- Medical—necessary medical or mental health treatment or withholding medication
- Educational—failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
- Emotional—inattention to a child's emotional needs and failure to provide psychological care
- Abandonment—Parent's or caregiver's identity or whereabouts are unknown. The child has been deserted with no regard for their health, safety, or well-being.

SEXUAL

Unwanted sexual activity or advances, which include physical contact or no contact abuse.

Sexual Abuse—Contact

- Intercourse
- Fondling the minor
- Forcing the minor to pleasure the perpetrator
- Masturbating in the presence of a minor
- Exposing oneself to a minor

Sexual Abuse—Non-Contact

- Forced to watch sexual acts
- Forced to listen to sexual talk, including comments, tapes, and obscene phone calls
- Forced to look at sexually explicit material such as videos either in person or through digital interactions
- Forced to look at sexual parts of the body

For more information...

**Love Mercy Do Justice:
A Mission Priority of the
Evangelical Covenant Church**

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[covchurch.org/abuse](https://www.covchurch.org/abuse)

**Advocacy for Victims of Abuse
online training**

<https://ava-online.org>

National Sexual Assault Hotline
1-800-656-4673

Child Welfare: Darkness to Light
1-866-367-5444