



## Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence

### **April is Child Abuse Awareness Month**

***What you need to know if a child is being abused or neglected...***

**Child abuse** refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or a child's welfare.

#### **Four Basic Types of Child Abuse:**

**Physical abuse** - non-accidental harm of a child, including excessive corporal punishment, assault · shaking · slapping · burning or scalding · kicking · strangling

**Neglect** - maltreatment or negligence that harms a child's health, welfare or safety physical, emotional, or educational neglect through such actions as: abandonment refusal to seek treatment for illness · inadequate supervision · health hazards in the home · ignoring child's need for contact, affirmation and stimulation · providing inadequate emotional nurturance · knowingly permitting chronic truancy · keeping a child home from school repeatedly without cause (depriving a child of education).

**Emotional abuse** - verbal assault or emotional cruelty, as well as: close confinement, such as being shut in a closet · inadequate nurturance · extreme discipline.

**Sexual abuse** - sexual contact between a child or teenager and an adult or significantly older, more powerful person. In addition to sexual contact, abuse can include: inappropriate verbal stimulation of a child or teenager · taking or showing sexually explicit photographs of or to a child or teenager · exposing a child or teenager to pornography or adult sexual activity.

#### **Scope of the Problem**

There are more than two million reported cases of physical abuse or neglect in the United States each year (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect). The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse in the United States indicates that approximately 2,000 children per year die of child abuse and/or neglect. Canadian authorities estimate that the incidence of child abuse and neglect in Canada parallels that of the United States. At least one in three girls (Russell, 1984) and one in seven boys (Finkelhor, 1985) are sexually abused by the time they reach the age of 18. In the vast majority of cases, sexual abusers are known to their victims. More than half of all sexual abuse occurs within the family. Offenders come from all economic, ethnic, racial, and educational backgrounds and religious traditions. They may be respected members of the community, church or synagogue.

#### **What should you do if you suspect child abuse?**

The goals of any effective response to suspected abuse are to: protect the child from further abuse · stop the offender's abuse · heal the victim's brokenness and, if possible · restore the family or, if not possible, to mourn the loss of family relationships.

***If you suspect abuse, call the children's protective services agency in your state or province to discuss your concerns or to make a formal report regarding your fear about the welfare of a child or teenager.***

Anyone may report suspected child abuse and will not be liable for an unfounded report if it is made in good faith. In every state and province, most persons in helping professions -- teachers, doctors, counselors, police officers, social workers, health professionals -- are legally mandated to report a suspicion of child abuse or neglect to child abuse authorities.

***"I have set before you life and death,  
blessing and curse;  
therefore choose life, that you and  
your descendants may live."***

Deuteronomy 30:19; RSV

#### **What clergy and religious leaders can do to make religious institutions safe places for members to seek and find help?**

- ▶ Break the silence by speaking openly about the existence of abuse and preaching about exploitation and violence.
- ▶ Ask a community-based child abuse specialist to speak to the congregation.
- ▶ Offer prevention programs for children in religious education.
- ▶ Develop a foster home recruitment program sponsored by the church or synagogue.
- ▶ Provide parenting classes, support groups and respite care for parents under pressure.
- ▶ Organize support groups for survivors of abuse.
- ▶ Operate "latch-key" programs for children.
- ▶ Designate a day or month for educating and activating the congregation (April is National Child Abuse Prevention month in the United States).

#### **Where can I find more information?**

*For services for victims in the US:*

#### **National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information**

330 "C" Street SW  
Washington, DC 20447  
(800) 394-3366  
[www.calib.com/nccanch](http://www.calib.com/nccanch)

*In Canada:*

#### **Toronto Child Abuse Center**

890 Yonge Street, 11th floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M4W 3P4  
(416) 515-1100  
[www.tcac.on.ca](http://www.tcac.on.ca)

Information on religious issues and child abuse:

#### **Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence - WWW.CPSDV.ORG**

2400 N 45<sup>th</sup> Street #10, Seattle, WA 98103, 206-634-1903

#### **Resources available through the Center:**

*Hear Their Cries: Religious Responses to Child Abuse (video)*

*Bless Our Children: Preventing Sexual Abuse (video)*

*Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Curricula*

*The Mother's Book: How to Survive the Molestation of Your Child*

A catalog of all Center resources is available. Call 206-634-1903, or email [cpsdv@cpsdv.org](mailto:cpsdv@cpsdv.org).

Adapted from the pamphlet, *What you need to know if a child is being abused or neglected...* ©1992, CPSDV. For one time use only.