

Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse in Texas

This training is for all child-serving organizations, staff and volunteers who work with children in a school, day care, place of worship, medical, camp or extracurricular environment.

dcac.org/training



Dallas Children's
Advocacy Center



Any person who reasonably suspects that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect is mandated by law to report their suspicion to the police or the Texas Child Abuse Hotline.

Texas Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-252-5400

www.txabusehotline.org

If you believe a child is in immediate danger,
please call local law enforcement or dial 911.

Immediate danger includes:

- A threat of imminent harm/violence to a child
- The perpetrator of abuse lives in the same home as the child
- A child has an injury requiring immediate medical attention
- A child is contemplating self-harm, suicide, or harming another person

“If a professional has reasonable cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person, the professional shall make a report not later than 24 hours after the hour they first suspect that the child has been or may be abused or neglected. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report.”
— Texas Family Code: Section 261.101

Table of Contents

- You Can Make a Difference4
- Grooming6
- Sexual Abuse8
- Human Trafficking9
- Physical Abuse11
- Neglect12
- Emotional Abuse13
- Family Violence14
- Perpetrators and Victims15
- Tips for Caregivers16
- Tips for Professional.....17
- The Need for Intervention20
- Why Report?23
- Best Practices for Organizations.....25
- Policies in Child Serving Organizations26
- Certificate of Completion26
- Abuse at Texas Youth Camps27
- Children’s Advocacy Centers29

You Can Make A Difference



We must learn how to identify abusive situations. Children often cannot be their own voice. They need someone – they need you – to step in and be an advocate.

Here are some of the reasons why children do not tell about abuse:

- Children often believe the abuse is their fault and that they will get into trouble if they tell a parent or adult.
- Children do not want anyone to get hurt but simply want the abuse to end.
- Perpetrators often threaten or manipulate children to keep them from telling anyone. They often tell children that no one would believe them or threaten them with consequences if they do share this “secret.”
- Children do not realize that it is wrong. Young children may not have been taught that sexual behaviors between adults and children are wrong.

Learning how to recognize and report child abuse is our first step in being a voice for the many child victims who silently suffer abuse. These children are in our places of worship, neighborhoods, and even our own homes.

If we don't protect them, who will?

73% of child abuse victims do not tell anyone about their abuse for at least 1 year.

45% of victims do not tell anyone for at least 5 years.

SOME NEVER DISCLOSE.

What is Grooming?

Sexual abuse is a unique form of child victimization. It is almost always perpetrated by someone who is in a position of trust – the last person we would expect. So, how does a perpetrator gain access to children and the trust of a family and/or community?

More than 95% of the time, children are abused by someone they know and trust.

Grooming involves building a relationship with the child and building trust. It may include the following:

- Treating the child as more special than others
- Buying the child gifts or giving money
- Making excuses to be alone with the child
- Tickling and wrestling
- Private messages via social media, email, or text
- Touching – appropriate or inappropriate
- Viewing the child when nude or exposing the child to nudity
- Telling the child about his/her sexual activity with others
- Showing pornography

Perpetrators not only groom children for abuse; they also groom parents, families and communities.

We must be aware.

Types of Child Abuse



Sexual Abuse

Sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of indecency with a child, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, or conduct that constitutes an improper relationship between an educator and a student; failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child; compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct; and causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming or depicting of the child if the person knew that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene or pornographic.

The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Major change in normal mood or behavior
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Pain, swelling or itching in genital area
- Excessive seductiveness, inappropriate sex play or premature understanding of sex
- Suicide attempts (especially adolescents)
- Extreme fear of being alone with certain individuals
- Sexual victimization of other children
- A sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Pregnancy

Human Trafficking

Two types of Human Trafficking are Child Sex Trafficking and Child Labor Trafficking.

Child Sex Trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act. A child under the age of 18 can be trafficked for sex by any means, regardless of whether the trafficker has to use force, fraud or coercion. Child Sex Trafficking is a form of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children/ Youth (CSEC/Y) a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person.

Child Labor Trafficking involves the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtainment of a person through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Trafficking occurs when a person or persons knowingly cause, permit, encourage, engage in, or allow a child to be trafficked or fail to make a reasonable effort to prevent a child from being trafficked.

It may not always be obvious that a child is a trafficking victim.

- It does not always include movement or transport of minors across states.
- Victims rarely identify themselves as victims.
- Victims often do not disclose or understand that this is a form of abuse.

Here are some signs and symptoms to be aware of:

- Abrupt changes in friends, behavior, attitude, and grades
- Increased absences from school
- Often tired and lethargic and may have unexplained bruises or injuries
- Isolated from family, friends, community and typical interests or hobbies
- Involved in a romantic relationship that is controlling/manipulative or has a significantly older partner
- Friendships with older males and/or females (Females are often used to recruit new victims as part of their duties.)
- Multiple phones or social media accounts
- Tattoos bearing significant other's name or symbols
- Provocative pictures posted online or on an electronic device
- Sudden appearance of luxury items (jewelry, clothes, accessories) or money

Physical Abuse

Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent or guardian that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm. Physical abuse also includes failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in substantial harm to the child.

The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Major change in normal mood or behavior
- Frequent injuries that are unexplained and/or when the child or parent cannot adequately explain the causes such as: bruises, cuts, black eyes, fractures, burns
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate the use of an instrument
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Evidence of delayed or inappropriate treatment for injuries
- Injuries that involve the face, backs of hands, buttocks, genital area, abdomen, back, or sides of the body
- Aggressive, disruptive, destructive or self-destructive behavior
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Fear of going home or seeing parents/caregivers

Neglect

Failure to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision that it results in harm or creates an immediate danger to the child's health, safety and well being. The leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to immediate danger of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and the demonstration of an intent not to return by a parent or guardian of the child.

The following are signs commonly associated with neglect, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify neglect when it is present.

- Major change in normal mood or behavior
- Obvious malnourishment or inadequate nutrition
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Consistently torn and/or dirty clothes
- Consistent hunger, stealing or begging for food
- Distended stomach, emaciated
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school
- Reports that no caretaker is at home
- Self-destructive behavior
- Extreme loneliness and need for affection
- Unmet needs (such as need of glasses, dental care, medical attention, etc.)

Emotional Abuse

Inflicting mental or emotional injury to a child, and/or causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

The following are signs commonly associated with abuse, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify abuse when it is present.

- Major change in normal mood or behavior
- Developmental delays
- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical development
- Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies
- Antisocial, destructive behavior
- Delinquent behavior (especially adolescents)
- Substance abuse

Family Violence

An act by a member of a family or household against another member of the household that is intended to result in physical harm, bodily injury, assault or sexual assault or that is a threat that reasonably places the member in fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, assault or sexual assault, but does not include defensive measures to protect oneself.

An act that would result in degrading the victim, ignoring/isolation, following or stalking, threats of taking away children, threats of physical violence, choking/strangulation, throwing or breaking objects, or forcing unwanted sexual acts would all constitute Family Violence.

The following are signs commonly associated with Family Violence, but they are not absolutes. This list is not a checklist but a guide to help us identify violence when it is present.

- Rigid defenses — defensive, aloof, sarcastic, blaming
- Chaotic — hard to set limits with them
- Confusion — love/hate towards the abuser
- Burdened — role reversal as the caretaker
- Nervous, anxious, short attention span
- Difficulty trusting others
- May be excessively social (to stay away from home)

Perpetrators of Child Abuse

There is no one type of person who harms children. Perpetrators of abuse may be:

- In positions of authority
- Have easy access to children through a professional or volunteer role
- Often have the trust of the child, family and/or community
- May be another child
- Most often it is a person we would least expect

Risk Factors for Victimization

- Child is disabled, chronically ill, or perceived as different
- Family dysfunction or family member(s) experiencing a life crisis
- Substance abuse by family members
- Parent has a physical or mental health problem
- Young or single parent
- Domestic violence
- Lack of Communication

Regular, open and supportive communication with a trusted adult is the best protection for children. If a child knows you are a safe adult who cares for him/her, the child is more likely to come to you if something is wrong or someone is making him/her uncomfortable.

Take the Time to Talk

Good communication decreases a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse.

- Your tone should be neutral, and empowering.
- Teach your child that the parts of their body that a bathing suit covers are private parts and NO one is allowed to touch or look at their private parts.
- Make talking with your child about personal safety an ongoing dialogue rather than one single conversation.

Familiarize yourself with the organizations that serve your child.

- Confirm background checks are conducted on all employees and volunteers.
- Ensure policies are in place that prohibit situations where an adult can be alone with your child. Talk to your child to find out if the policies are being followed when you are not there.
- Require all staff and volunteers to be trained annually on child safety and on how to make a report.

If you personally have experienced abuse and never sought help, the best thing you can do for your child is heal yourself.

Internet Safety

- Know how to set parental controls and check browser history files of devices your child uses.
- Remind your child that images sent on the Internet or via text messaging can easily be shared with other people without your child's permission.
- Talk to your child about the apps, games, and social media they frequent most. Find out why they like it and how it is used.

Questions to Ask

Children who are victims of abuse have often been sworn to secrecy and are afraid and ashamed to talk to anyone about it. If you suspect a child is being abused, do not be surprised if they do not disclose. However, if you are a safe person who they can trust, you may create the opportunity for them to finally tell. It is important that we do not interrogate children when we have suspicions of abuse. It is best to ask children simple, open-ended questions. Open-ended questions avoid one-word answers and are non-specific. Here are some examples that may help you when talking to a child:

- Tell me about your family. What do you like or not like?
- Has anyone told you to keep a secret?
- Do you feel safe at home?

Physical Abuse

- When you get in trouble at home or school, what happens?
- Do they ever leave any marks or bruises?
- Do they ever say anything to you about not telling or what will happen if you do?

Sexual Abuse

- Has anyone done something that makes you feel uncomfortable?
- Are there places on your body where it's not ok for someone to touch?
- Where are those places?
- Has anyone ever touched or hurt those places?

Be sure not to take these questions too far!

Please do not interview children. A children's advocacy center exists to provide a coordinated investigation and a child-friendly environment for victims to tell their stories. Report any suspicions you have, and let the appropriate authorities investigate.



Handling Disclosures

If a child has made an outcry of abuse to you, your next steps are critical to that child's safety. By believing the child and reporting the abuse, you affirm the trust this child has in you to protect him/her.

- **ALWAYS BELIEVE THE CHILD.** Children rarely lie about such an intense and painful topic.
- **Remain Calm.** Don't overreact! A child will interpret that your, anger disgust, or sadness is directed at him/her. If the child feels that he/she is responsible for your emotions, he/she may not talk further.
- **Ask** a few open-ended questions to gather minimal facts about the situation:
 - **WHO** did this?
 - **WHAT** happened?
 - **WHEN** will he/she see this person again?
- **Reassure** the child that he/she has done the right thing by telling you and that what happened is absolutely not their fault.
- **Don't Criticize** the child or the abuser
- **Don't make promises you can't keep!** Don't promise a child that you will make things better. Sometimes, even if justice is served, things may not feel "better" to that child. It is also important to let a child know that you can't keep this a secret. Tell the child it is your job to keep him/her safe.
- Child protection agencies ask you **NOT** to tell a child's parents when making a report to authorities. When parents have notification that a report has been made, they have time to react by:
 - Coaching the child to say or not say something.
 - Inflicting further abuse on the child.
 - Trying to evade authorities by leaving town or moving.
 - Destroying evidence of the abuse.

The Need for Intervention



The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study

The ACE Study attempts to pinpoint the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on a person's overall health. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) include:

- **Abuse:** Physical, Emotional, Sexual and Family Violence
- **Neglect:** Physical and Emotional
- **Household Dysfunction:** Mental Illness or Substance Abuse in the Home, Incarcerated Relative and Divorce

The study found that ACEs are common and as the number of ACEs increase, so does the risk for negative health outcomes.

What can we do about it?

Strong and healthy individuals make for strong and healthy communities. The moment we suspect that a child is being abused or neglected, we all have a responsibility to seek help for that child and their family.

Making a report of child maltreatment is the first step in the healing process for a child abuse victim.

If you identify with one of the categories mentioned above and have never received any professional intervention, it's not too late.

Visit www.dcac.org/survivors for more information.

Be an Advocate & Report Abuse



Why Report?

Many professionals have genuine concerns about reporting abuse. Here are some of the most common:

- What if I'm wrong?
- My organization's policy requires me to report to another member of my staff, not the local child protection or law enforcement agencies.
- What if the parents know that I made the report?

All of these concerns are legitimate and understandable. While easy answers are hard to come by, what you have to remember is that reporting is the first step in the healing process for a child abuse victim. When you hesitate to make a report or avoid the responsibility altogether, you may be causing additional harm to the child.

A person who reports abuse in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability. Anyone who does not report suspected abuse can be held liable for a misdemeanor or felony.

You do not have to be certain that abuse or neglect has occurred. Make the report and allow the authorities to determine whether or not to investigate. The authorities will assess the child's safety and family's needs.

Oftentimes a report of suspected child maltreatment results in interventions to support the whole family and promote a safe, nurturing environment for the children. These interventions may include safety planning, substance abuse treatment, batterers intervention programs, parenting classes, counseling, child care and job support. Always err on the side of protecting children and strengthening families by making a report.

"A person commits an offense if the person is required to make a report under Section 261.101(a) and, knowingly fails to make a report as provided in this chapter." — Texas Family Code: Section 261.109

Making the Report

Any person who reasonably suspects that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect is mandated by law to report their suspicion to the police or the Texas Child Abuse Hotline.

Texas Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-252-5400
www.txabusehotline.org

If you believe a child is in immediate danger,
please call local law enforcement or dial 911.

“If a professional has reasonable cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person, the professional shall make a report not later than 24 hours after the hour they first suspect that the child has been or may be abused or neglected. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report.”
— Texas Family Code: Section 261.101

Best Practices for Responding to Child Abuse in Your Organization

Recognize and Report Suspected Abuse Immediately

- Should I? or Shouldn't I? Once it crosses your mind, the answer is always YES.
- You need a suspicion to report, not evidence.

Exercise Caution When Speaking to a Child

- Find out WHO, WHAT and WHEN the child will see this person again.
- Then STOP asking questions.

Protection of the Child is the Most Important Thing

- Do NOT call parent/guardian.
- Do NOT conduct an internal investigation.

Outcry Witness

- Staying in your lane and making a report may protect you from testifying later on.

Recordkeeping

- Keep a record that you made a report. Include CPS report number and/or conversation with local police.

Tampering – Even When it is Not Intentional – Harms the Case

- Advocate for the child by making a report.
- Let investigators and child protection professionals take it from there.

Policies in Child Serving Organizations

Every child-serving organization should have written policies that specifically address issues related to child abuse. Organizations should especially consider the following points when developing or renewing these policies:

- Perform background checks, screenings, personal interviews, and professional references for all staff and volunteers working with children...however this is NOT foolproof. Research reveals that most child perpetrators do not have a criminal history.
- Require staff and volunteers who work with children to be trained regularly in recognizing and reporting child abuse.
- Sexual abuse often occurs in one-adult/one-child situations. Policies should minimize these situations as much as possible.
- Establish policies about reporting abuse when suspicions or disclosures come up. If policies within an organization require staff to report internally first (or only), these policies should be changed immediately and made consistent with the mandated reporting laws within your state. Organizations should regularly communicate these policies to staff and families.

Certificate of Completion

If you attended a face-to-face training and need to take a test to earn your certificate of completion, please contact your training facilitator.

For more information about this professional curriculum and other child protection resources, please visit www.dcac.org/training.

Abuse at Texas Youth Camps

If a person, including any member of camp staff, a camp counselor, or camp director has a reasonable cause to believe that a minor has been or may have been abused or neglected at a youth camp, then that person shall immediately make a report to one of the following agencies:

- Any local or state law enforcement agency
- The Department of Family and Protective Services Abuse Hotline, which may be contacted at (800) 252-5400 or through the secure website <http://www.txabusehotline.org/>
- Department of State Health Services' Policy, Standards and Quality Assurance Unit by phone at (512) 834-6788, by fax at (512) 834-6707, or by email at PHSCPS@dshs.texas.gov

Notification Requirement

A person making a report, to local law enforcement or the Department of Family and Protective Services, of alleged abuse or neglect at a youth camp, must also notify the Department of State Health Services' Policy, Standards and Quality Assurance Unit by phone at (512) 834-6788, by fax at (512) 834-6707, or by email at PHSCPS@dshs.texas.gov.



Relationships at Texas Youth Camps

It is natural for youth to create friends and relationships at camp.

Supervision, monitoring and communication by adult leaders are key elements in preventing:

- Youth engaging in any form of sexual activity.
 - Sexual activity and public displays of affection (holding hands, frontal embraces, kissing) are prohibited.
- Youth engaging in abusive non-consensual sexual activity or relationships.
- Youth attempting to meet up.

Supervision is Critical to Keeping Youth Safe at Camp

Camps should especially consider policy around the following points when developing or renewing protocols:

- Supervision during tenting and nighttime activities.
- Monitoring of high-risk areas (ex. restrooms, changing areas, swimming areas, wooded areas).
- No alcohol and/or drug policies.
- Not assigning youth members more than two years apart to sleep in the same tent.

Children's Advocacy Centers



What is a Children's Advocacy Center?

Before the Children's Advocacy Center movement, child abuse victims and their families were bounced from one agency to another – from the child welfare office to the police department, to the hospital, to the prosecutor's office – repeatedly telling their stories of abuse. The criminal justice system, one primarily designed for adult perpetrators, not child victims, lacked coordination between police, child protection agencies, prosecution, mental health, and medical agencies. Duplication of efforts, along with multiple unnecessary and traumatic interviews for the children, had become the norm in child abuse cases.

Transforming the system, Children's Advocacy Centers provide a child-friendly setting where a skilled team of professionals come together to investigate serious child abuse allegations and conduct forensic interviews, aiding in the prosecution of offenders - always keeping the best interest of the child in mind.

Local centers provide an array of child-focused services, including the following core components:

- Child-friendly environment
- Specialized forensic interviews
- Medical and mental health assessments and treatment
- Multidisciplinary team case reviews
- Trauma-focused therapy services

For more information about Children's Advocacy Centers, or to locate the one closest to your community, visit the National Children's Alliance website at [nationalchildrensalliance.org](https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org).



Copyright © 2025 by Dallas Children's Advocacy Center. No part of this educational training or booklet may be altered, reproduced, or distributed by any means without prior permission from Dallas Children's Advocacy Center.

dcac.org/training



Dallas Children's
Advocacy Center

5351 Samuell Blvd. | Dallas, TX 75228