



53907

NEW
OLD
PROBLEM

Technical Assistance
Program

This publication is a joint project of Head Start
and the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD PROBLEM

9 Questions and Answers
about Child Abuse and Neglect.

NCJRS

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ACQUISITION

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Administration for Children, Youth and Families
Office of Human Development Services
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FOREWORD

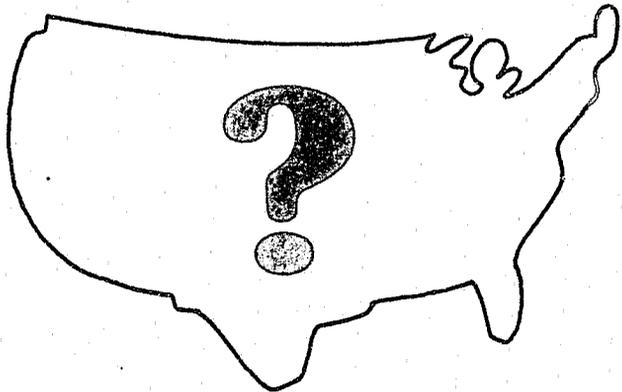
This booklet is about child abuse and neglect. Its purpose is to furnish basic information on the subject. It is important for every citizen—young and old—to know how serious and widespread a problem it is. It is also important to realize that there are many kinds of help available—for the child and the parent(s).

We hope that after you have read this, you will have a better understanding of the problem, its causes and what you can do about it in your own community.

Child abuse and neglect doesn't have to occur. A great deal can be done to prevent it. Abusing parents can be helped. This is a social problem in which there is a lot of hope. Each of us, in our own place, in our own way, can do something about it.

The first thing to do is look at some facts.

**How much
child abuse and
neglect is there
in the U.S.?**



Nobody knows for sure. Until very recently, so little attention has been paid to the subject that we don't even have reliable statistics.

One estimate widely accepted is that there are about 1,000,000 cases per year. Of these, about 2,000 children die. 2,000 per year...that's six a day—or one child every four hours.

We know too, that child abuse and neglect occurs in every segment of the society: poor, rich; uneducated, highly educated; in big cities, small towns, rural areas.

Some estimates hold that for every case reported, four others go unreported.

But regardless of the numbers, they tell only part of the story. Child abuse and neglect can cause death and permanent physical injury.

It can also cause serious damage to the child's personality. The effects of this may last for years, or even for a lifetime. Abuse or neglect can make it impossible for a child to develop into a healthy human being.

But that's not all: studies indicate that most people who mistreat children were themselves abused when they were children.

To put it another way, children who are abused may grow up to be child abusers themselves. There is no end to it, in short; it becomes a cycle...self-perpetuating... unless something is done about it.

And something can be done about it. More and more is being learned about both prevention and treatment (for both children and parents). Sources of help are available, as we shall see.

How many kinds of child abuse and neglect are there?

Basically, there are four:

<p>1 Physical abuse</p>	<p>2 Neglect (physical, emotional)</p>
<p>3 Emotional abuse (often verbal)</p>	<p>4 Sexual abuse</p>

Legally, a "child" usually means a person under 18, but child abuse and neglect occurs at all ages, including adolescence.

How can we recognize child abuse and neglect?

There are many signs. Any one of them may not mean anything or may have other explanations. If there are a number of them, however, and if they occur frequently, child abuse or neglect should be suspected.

Physical abuse

Child's appearance

- unusual bruises, welts, burns or fractures;
- bite marks;
- frequent injuries, always explained as "accidental"

Child's behavior

- reports injury by parents;
- unpleasant, hard to get along with, demanding, often doesn't obey. Frequently causes trouble or interferes with others. Frequently breaks or damages things;
or is unusually shy, avoids other people including children, seems too anxious to please, seems too ready to let other people say and do things to him/her without protest;
- frequently late or absent or often comes to school much too early; hangs around after school is dismissed;
- avoids physical contact with adults;
- wears long sleeves or other concealing clothing to hide injuries;
- child's story of how a physical injury occurred is not believable; doesn't seem to fit the type or seriousness of the injury observed;
- seems frightened of parents;
- shows little or no distress at being separated from parents;
- apt to seek affection from any adult.

Parent or caretaker's behavior

- has history of abuse as a child;
- uses harsh discipline which doesn't seem right for the age, condition, or what he/she did wrong;
- offers an explanation of child's injury that doesn't seem to make sense, doesn't fit the injury—or offers no explanation at all;
- seems unconcerned about child;
- sees child as bad, evil, a monster, etc.
- misuses alcohol or other drugs;
- attempts to conceal child's injury or to protect identity of person responsible.

Neglect

Child's appearance

- often not clean, tired, no energy;
- comes to school without breakfast, often does not have lunch or lunch money;
- clothes dirty or wrong for the weather;
- seems to be alone often, for long periods of time;
- needs glasses, dental care or other medical attention.

Child's behavior

- frequently absent;
- begs or steals food;
- causes trouble in school: often hasn't done homework, uses alcohol or drugs, engages in vandalism, sexual misconduct.

Parent or caretaker's behavior

- misuses alcohol or other drugs;
- has disorganized, upset home life;
- seems not to care much about what happens; gives impression of feeling that nothing is going to make much difference anyway;
- lives very much isolated from friends, relatives, neighbors; doesn't seem to know how to get along well with others;
- has long-term chronic illnesses;
- has history of neglect as a child.

Emotional abuse

Child's appearance

Signs less obvious than in other forms of mistreatment. Behavior is best indication.

Child's behavior

- unpleasant, hard to get along with, demanding; frequently causes trouble, won't leave others alone;
 - unusually shy, avoids others, too anxious to please, too submissive...puts up with unpleasant acts or words from others without protest;
 - either unusually adult in actions or overly young for age (for example, sucks thumb, rocks constantly);
 - is behind for his/her age in physical, emotional or intellectual development.
-

Parent or caretaker's behavior

- blames or belittles child;
- is cold and rejecting;
- withholds love;
- treats children in the family unequally;
- doesn't seem to care much about child's problems.

Sexual abuse

Child's appearance

- has torn, stained, or bloody underclothing;
- experiences pain or itching in the genital area;
- has venereal disease.

Child's behavior

- appears withdrawn or engages in fantasy or baby-like behavior;
- has poor relationships with other children;
- is unwilling to participate in physical activities;
- is engaging in delinquent acts or runs away;
- states he/she has been sexually assaulted by parent/caretaker.

Parent or caretaker's behavior

- very protective or jealous of child;
- encourages child to engage in prostitution or sexual acts in the presence of caretaker;
- misuses alcohol or other drugs;
- is frequently absent from home.

What causes child abuse and neglect?

We don't know what causes child abuse and neglect any more than we know what causes depression or alcoholism or other physical, psychological or social ills. In short, there is no simple "cause." (So there can be no simple "cure.")

We do know that certain factors have a powerful effect on family life. These effects can be good, or bad. If they are bad, they can cause severe parental stress, lead to lack of control, and result in child abuse. These factors can be grouped into four main kinds:

1. Characteristics of society such as:

- encouragement of physical methods of disciplining children;
- violence in the society, in general;
- discrimination because of color or class;
- lack of willingness to become involved.

2. Social and institutional factors

- competition among agencies and professionals rather than cooperation;
- gaps in services for families in trouble;
- kinds and quality of services the society is willing to provide (health services and education: services for children and families are examples).

3. Factors related to immediate life circumstances

(negative examples would include: unemployment, poor housing, financial problems, marital problems).

4. Personal factors...

everything that has gone into the makeup of the individual (personality, intelligence, previous experience).

What are the effects of child abuse and neglect?

- a child can suffer short and long-term physical, mental and emotional damage;
- the effect on the parents is very bad; they feel guilty, lose respect for themselves;
- the family can be destroyed, especially if efforts to help the child and the family are not sensibly employed;
- the community suffers because the emotional harm that children suffer could lead to acts of crime and violence;
- the community also suffers because the families involved, including the children, when they grow older, are not likely to be productive members of society. Instead they are likely to become a burden on welfare, social service and criminal justice systems.

What are abusing parents like?

Whenever child abuse or neglect occurs, there are always two victims: the child, the parent. Both need help. (Being a parent under the best of circumstances is a tough job!)

$$P+S+B=CA/N$$

Translation: When a certain kind of Parent (most of us) is under enough Stress, certain Behavior on the part of a child can result in Child Abuse and/or Neglect. (Of course, some parents never do abuse children, no matter what the circumstances. And some children who do nothing to bring it on, still get abused.)

Parents who repeatedly abuse or neglect their children, however, are apt to have a number of the following characteristics:

- considered their childhood to be without much love or emotional support...had no adults they could really depend on;
- "loners"...apt to be somewhat isolated...have no other family...no real friends...don't have anything to do with their neighbors; don't know how to get along well with others;
- expect too much of their children for their age;
- apt to complain that child cries too much or is hard to manage..."causes trouble";
- have poor opinion of themselves...feel they have little to offer...feel a sense of failure;
- feel unloved, unappreciated, unwanted...great fear of rejection;

- often angry or defensive when asked about problems concerning child—or may be uninterested or unresponsive;
- cannot offer logical or convincing explanation of child's injury;
- are cold toward child...seem to have little interest in him/her...seem especially hard on one of children...continually blame or belittle child;
- have severe personal problems (ill health, alcoholism, drug addiction);
- believe in harsh, physical punishment as only real way to discipline (usually because, they, themselves, were brought up that way);
- often love the child they abuse...feel great remorse and guilt over what they have done...yet continue to lash out at their children in moments of extreme frustration or rage;
- undue fear of "spoiling" child...believe child should not be "given into," nor allowed to "get away with anything"... important to "keep them reminded of who's boss."

Why are some children more likely to be mistreated than others?

We don't really know. We do know, however, that the abused child is apt to have characteristics such as these:

- is different...smaller than average, sickly, retarded, has speech difficulty, is considered unusual or unattractive looking, was premature;
- is physically disabled or seen as inept, awkward or clumsy;
- does not eat well...has poor appetite;
- looks like someone the parent hates;
- is shy, timid, considered "weak";
- is considered too "smart," aggressive or disobedient;
- is unwanted.

Why should you get involved?

The best reason is to help someone...you help the child; you help the parent(s); you help the family as a whole.

If someone—like you—doesn't get involved, the abuse or neglect is very likely to continue. If it does, it may get worse. If it gets worse, a child could die or suffer permanent injury. If that happens, the abusing parent

may well go to jail and the family will be broken up. (Also, no parent is likely to get much help in jail.)

None of this needs to happen. It rarely does happen if someone gets involved because when you care enough to do something about it, the family can get help.

Some parents—or even older children—seek it on their own. Most do not. They need an outsider to get the help process started.

Most of us don't realize it, but there is a lot of help available for children and parents with child abuse or neglect problems.

There are, for example:

- hospitals (if injuries are severe enough);
- public and private organizations offering a wide range of services, like:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| — protective services | — homemaker service |
| — emergency shelter for children | — transportation |
| — day care | — financial help |
| — self-help groups | — employment help |
| — help or “hot” lines | — courses in education for parenthood |
| — counseling for parents, children, families | — mental health services |

You can put a stop to the abuse or neglect and get help for the family by getting involved!

How? If you are a friend or relative, talk to the parent(s); offer your friendship and help; offer to baby-sit or take care of the child for a few days if you can; tell them about the various kinds of help available; urge them to seek it; offer to make an appointment for them; offer to go with them on their first visit; offer, if you can, to take care of the child for a day or two till things calm down.

If efforts of this kind do not succeed...or if the child is hurt, you have no choice but to report it to the proper authority.

What can you do to improve services in your community?

The single most important thing you can do is to get involved. It is remarkable how much difference just one person can make in a community; just one person can bring about real change!

How do you get started? Here are some possible ways:

- Find out how and where to report child abuse and neglect in your community;
- Learn what services are available to help abused children and abusing parents;
- Find out what is being done to inform the public about child abuse and neglect and available sources of help;
- Form a group of two or more people who are interested in the subject;
- Decide which issues to work on; some examples of projects you and your group might consider (depending on the needs in your community) could include:
 - helping to provide day care or temporary care for parents with small children;
 - forming a parent self-help group;
 - helping to organize or carry out a public information program;
 - working to restore children now in foster homes to their natural families, when appropriate;
 - recruiting foster and adoptive homes;
- Encourage local governments and other organizations to play a more active role in the planning and delivery of Child Protective Services;

- Whether the agency is public or private, you, as a concerned person, can help to make its services better.
- Remember that additional information can be obtained by writing:

The National Center
on Child Abuse & Neglect
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, D.C. 20013

The National Center is a unit in the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. It serves as the focal point for Federal activities related to child abuse and neglect.

In helping a community to develop better child protection and family support services, best results will probably be obtained if the emphasis is on:

1. cooperation between the various groups and persons involved, not competition;
2. making best possible use of local resources;
3. taking full advantage of traditional life-styles (the extended family is a good example of this) and respecting cultural differences;
4. helping the community to work out its own answers in its own way, rather than trying to tell the community what to do and force programs on it;
5. encouraging widespread citizen participation.

Being a Parent is One of the Toughest Jobs in the World!

Regional Child Abuse and Neglect Resource Centers

Region I CA/N Resource Center
Judge Baker Guidance Center
295 Longwood Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115
617-232-8390
(CT, ME, MA, RI, VT, NH)

Region II CA/N Resource Center
College of Human Ecology
Cornell University
MVR Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853
607-256-7794
(NJ, NY, PR, VI)

Region III CA/N Resource Center
Howard University Institute for
Urban Affairs and Research
P.O. Box 191
Washington, D.C. 20059
202-686-6770
(DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV)

Region IV CA/N Resource Center
Regional Institute for Social
Welfare Research
P.O. Box 152
Athens, Georgia 30601
404-542-7614
(AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN)

Region V CA/N Resource Center
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201
414-963-4184
(IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI)

Region VI CA/N Resource Center
Graduate School of Social Work
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712
512-471-4067
(AR, LA, NM, OK, TX)

Region VII CA/N Resource Center
Institute of Child Behavior
and Development
University of Iowa — Oakdale Campus
Oakdale, Iowa 52319
319-353-4825
(IA, KS, MO, NE)

Region VIII CA/N Resource Center
National Center for the Prevention
and Treatment of CA/N
1205 Oneida Street
Denver, Colorado 80220
303-321-3963
(CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY)

Region IX CA/N Resource Center
Department of Special Education
California State University
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles, California 90032
213-224-3283
(AZ, CA, HI, NV, Guam, Trust, Terr.)

Region X CA/N Resource Center
Western Federation for Human Services
157 Yesler Way, # 208
Seattle, Washington 98104
206-624-5480
(AK, ID, OR, WA)

END