

# What Every Teacher Needs to Know about CHILD ABUSE

*A resource guide for educators  
and school personnel*



*Brought to you by:*

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**[www.familynuture.org](http://www.familynuture.org)**

Dear Educator:

We are pleased to provide you with this resource packet to help you address the difficult issue of child abuse and neglect.

Millions of children are reported each year as victims of physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect and sexual abuse. As a teacher or other professional involved in the education of our children, you have a special opportunity and a special responsibility to protect the children in your care.

No one likes to think about the horrors of child abuse, but the fact is, child abuse is wide spread in our community. Each year, thousands of children are reported as abused or neglected in Northern Kentucky. Physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect are the reality that many children live with day in and day out, waiting for a caring adult to notice and assist. That caring adult could be you!

Child abuse affects more than three million children in our country each year. An average of more than 6,000 children are reported as abused or neglected in the Northern Kentucky region each year. Working together, we can both prevent and confront the abuse and neglect that robs so many children of their childhood, their sense of security, and well-being and their future. You can help by scheduling a Kids on the Block Performance at your school or community group to give children the skills they need to recognize, resist and report child abuse.

This teacher's guide was designed to equip you with the information you need to be a resource to children and families. It provides statistics, mandatory reporting requirements, signs of abuse, answers to common questions and community resources.

Family Nurturing Center's mission is to end the cycle of child abuse by promoting individual well-being and healthy family relationships. For more than 30 years, we have been at the forefront of providing quality, innovative and effective programs to help children and parents build strong and healthy families. The Kids on the Block Program is one of many vital resources we offer to the community.

Thank you for your commitment to children and families! You can make a difference in the life of a child!

## *Family Nurturing Center*

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# KIDS ON THE BLOCK

## Who are the KIDS ON THE BLOCK?

Stephen, Nam and Joanne are three life-sized puppets that help children learn the basics about physical and sexual abuse. The program helps children (grades 1-5) to recognize abuse and learn prevention strategies. The puppets educate children in a safe and fun environment about a very serious issue. A story telling program is available for preschool and Kindergarten age children.

## What do the KIDS ON THE BLOCK teach?

These non-threatening skits educate children on physical abuse and sexual abuse, and differentiates abusive versus non-abusive punishments. The performance helps children to identify with the puppets and relate to their experiences. Children can ask questions and the puppets answer in a way that helps them gain a better understanding about their specific concerns of abuse.

## Why is this education important?

Education is important because research indicates that only 1/3 of the adults who are aware of abuse do anything to help the victim. Additionally, many adults have difficulty discussing issues of abuse with their children. Schools, day-care centers, and community-based programs can provide this vital educational link to children.

## Benefits of the KIDS ON THE BLOCK programs are:

School age children increase their knowledge of ways to recognize, resist and report child abuse. More than 85% of children tested in the primary grades show a significant increase in preventive abilities from pre to post presentation tests.

## Where can you see the KIDS ON THE BLOCK?

Performances are available to day-care centers, schools and other children's groups from preschool age through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Performances are **free of charge** to groups in Boone, Campbell, Kenton, and Grant counties. There is a travel fee assessed outside the Northern Kentucky area.

## What else does the program offer?

Adult viewers receive a child abuse information packet containing ways to identify physical and behavioral signs of abuse. The packet also explains reporting procedures and regulations, and provides other important information. Children in grades 1-3 receive an activity book. Children in grades 4-5 receive a child abuse awareness bracelet.



Approved by the Diocese of Covington  
as a Safe Environment Program

# It's the Law

Child abuse is a crime. Teachers, social workers, child care professionals and anyone else who has reason to suspect a child is being abused or neglected is required to report.

KRS 620.030 (1) states: Any person who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is dependent, neglected or abused shall immediately cause an oral or written report to be made to a local law enforcement agency or the Kentucky State Police; the Cabinet for Families and Children or its designated representative; the Commonwealth's attorney or the county attorney; by telephone or otherwise.

- ♦ **Physical Abuse** of children includes any non-accidental physical injury caused by a child's caretaker. It may include burning, beating, punching, etc. By definition injury is not an accident. But neither is it necessarily the intent of the adult to injure a child. Physical abuse may result from over discipline or from punishment which is inappropriate for the child's age or condition.
- ♦ **Neglect** is inattention to the basic needs of a child, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care and supervision. It is a chronic failure to provide adequately for the child. Neglected children may also be abandoned, homeless or living in an environment that may be injurious to their physical and emotional welfare.
- ♦ **Emotional Abuse** includes blaming, belittling or rejecting a child; constantly treating siblings unequally and persistent lack of concern by an adult for a child's welfare which is rarely manifested in physical signs and most often observed through behavior indicators. While emotional abuse can occur by itself, it often accompanies physical abuse and sometimes sexual abuse. Physically abused children are almost always emotionally maltreated as well.
- ♦ **Sexual Abuse** includes any contacts or interactions between a child and an adult in which the child is used for sexual gratification of the adult or other perpetrator. The child may be a willing or unwilling partner to the interaction. Sexual abuse may also be committed by another child if the child is significantly older than the victim or when the abuser is in a position of power or control over the victim.

## Reporting Abuse

**911** (Immediate danger)

**To report suspected child abuse or neglect in Kentucky:**

**859-292-6550**

*(Centralized Intake—weekdays)*

**877-597-2331**

*(Statewide Hotline—nights/weekends)*

# Questions and Answers

## **Almost all of the kids in my classroom show some of these signs! Should I be making dozens of reports?**

Probably not! It's true that the physical and behavioral indicators described in the previous pages can affect lots of different children for lots of different reasons. We all know the strong-willed child who is asserting his independence by insisting on wearing his favorite turtleneck in June! And some kids really are accident prone! But what we're really talking about here are patterns. When you see a pattern of symptoms and see them regularly, it's time to report! And if you have a suspicion of child abuse, you are **legally required** to report it!

## **How can I be sure that the child is being abused?**

You can't be! And you don't have to be. The law doesn't require you to be sure, it states that you must report if you have **reason to suspect** abuse or neglect. The Cabinet for Families and Children is charged with investigating your report. Your job is to help protect children by reporting any suspicions you have to the proper authorities.

## **I don't want to meddle. It's really none of my business.**

Helping a child is not meddling. And keeping children safe is **everyone's** business!

## **Abuse doesn't happen to the types of kids in my class, does it?**

Child abuse can affect all types of kids and all types of families. It crosses socio-economic, gender, age, religious and racial boundaries. **Anyone** can be affected by abuse and neglect, but anyone can be helped as well!

## **Can I report anonymously?**

Yes, but it is helpful if you provide information so the social worker can contact you if he/she has further questions.

## **What happens after I make the report?**

The social worker will assess your report to determine whether or not it meets the requirements for further investigation. If it does meet the statutory definition of abuse/neglect, a second assessment will be made to determine the level of risk. Lower risk situations will receive an assessment, and families will have the opportunity to participate in services. High risk situations will receive an investigation, and services may be mandated.

## **I have made reports, and I never hear back!**

The disposition of a case is confidential, so it's likely that a worker will not call you and tell you the outcome of a case. Often times they will involve you or other school personnel if the family has signed a release of information so that all involved parties can work together to help the child and family.

## **How can I address the parents after a report has been made?**

It could be awkward if the parents are aware that you made a report. You can help minimize this by being non-judgmental and supportive in your interactions. Remind parents of your duty to report and of your concern for their child/children.

## **Who do I call to make a report?**

Contact your local office of the State Child Protective System. In Kentucky, this is the Cabinet for Families and Children. In Northern Kentucky, you can reach the intake department by calling 859-292-6550.

# Handling Disclosures

It has been our experience that the Kids On The Block Program may provide the needed impetus for a child to disclose an abusive situation. This may occur immediately after taking the pre-test, during or after the performance, or even in the days or weeks to follow the program. Disclosures may also occur via written communication by the child to the puppets.

As mandated by law, KRS 620.030 states that it is the duty of anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a child is dependent, neglected or abused to report this information.

## **Failure to report child abuse and neglect can result in criminal charges.**

The following may be helpful in handling disclosures of abuse or neglect:

- ☑ **Believe the child.**
- ☑ Take all reports of child abuse/neglect seriously.
- ☑ Immediately thank the child for trusting you and reassure him/her that steps will be taken to help him/her.
- ☑ If the child discloses publicly, take him/her to a more private area to discuss.
- ☑ Link the child to the school social worker, counselor or Family Resource Center if available.
- ☑ Gather pertinent information including the child's name, address, age and specifics of offense and provide this information to the Cabinet for Families and Children, local law enforcement, or Commonwealth or County Attorney.
- ☑ Family Nurturing Center staff are available to assist you with questions or concerns you might have.
- ☑ Report the disclosure to FNC. In order to protect confidentiality, we do not ask for identifying information. However, to know that our program is effective, our funders have asked us to track the number of times that a disclosure occurs. This helps our funders, donors and the community at large to understand the impact of our program.

# What Should I Know About Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect?

## **Taking the first step**

Deciding whether to report suspected child abuse can be a difficult and confusing process, yet it is the important first step toward protecting a child who might be in danger. Professionals who work with children are required by law to report suspected neglect or abuse. About 20 states require that every citizen who suspects a child is being abused or neglected must report. However, regardless of whether you are among those mandated to report, accurate reporting of the suspected maltreatment of any child is a moral obligation. "Reasonable suspicion" based on objective evidence is all that is needed to report. That evidence might be your firsthand observation or statements made by a parent or a child.

Unfamiliarity with state reporting laws and ignorance of the dynamics of abuse and neglect are two of the most frequent reasons people give for non-reporting. Frustration with lack of response by child welfare professionals to a complaint and an unwillingness to "get involved" are other reasons given for failure to report. Others include not wanting to "make things worse for the child," an unwillingness to provide the time-consuming court testimony that might be necessary, or a reluctance to risk angering the family. All of these reasons are understandable yet any one of them could lead to the death of a child that might otherwise have been prevented if the person with the information had only reported it.

## **What happens after I make the decision to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect?**

Several events might take place before and after the initial complaint is filed. First, depending on where you live, you might report suspected abuse and/or neglect to your local child protective agency. These agencies are sometimes called Social Services, Human Rehabilitative Services, Human Welfare, or Children and Family Services. If you feel that a child is in an emergency situation, you should call your local law enforcement agency immediately.

The person responding to your call may ask you several questions about what you are reporting. This is done to ensure that enough information is available for the investigative team to make decisions concerning whether abuse and/or neglect has occurred. You might be asked to give names of the family and child; your reasons for suspecting abuse; the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of other witnesses; your relationship to the alleged victim; previous suspicious injury to the child; or your name, address, and telephone number. Anonymous reports can be made in every state, however, child welfare agencies generally try to discourage anonymity for many reasons. Not knowing the identity of the reporter denies the child welfare worker the opportunity to get more information during the investigative process or to call the reporter as a crucial evidentiary witness if the case goes to trial.

Unfortunately, over the last several years, many child welfare agencies have been severely underfunded and understaffed. Sometimes the investigation of abuse and neglect complaints will be prioritized according to the immediate risk to the child. Be patient. You may have to call more than once.

## **Who investigates complaints of child abuse and neglect?**

The state or county agency that provides child protective services has the legal authority to provide services when needed and "to explore, study and evaluate" the facts. Child welfare workers base their decision on whether to remove a child from the family on two issues:

1. What is the immediate danger or risk to child?
2. What is the motivation, capacity, and intent of the alleged perpetrator?

During the investigative process, the child welfare worker may call on a variety of supportive assistance from individuals and organizations in the community. It then becomes the responsibility of the child welfare worker to organize or provide any needed services for the child and the family.

## **What happens to the child and family?**

With the enactment of PL 96-272, it is legally mandated that child welfare workers make all "reasonable efforts" to reunite the family whenever possible. If, after a thorough investigation, it is determined that the child is in need of substitute care, the child is placed in temporary foster care or in another safe alternative until the immediate danger has passed and services can be provided for the child and family. Sometimes criminal child abuse charges have to be filed depending on the nature and severity of the abuse or neglect. There is a range of legal penalties for child maltreatment from mandatory therapy to incarceration.

## **Will I be able to find out what happens to the child?**

Individuals who report suspected child maltreatment should be allowed to know whether their suspicions were founded and what steps the investigation agency took to protect the child. However, there is a great deal of confusion about whether information from child welfare cases should be shared.

Legally, there is no impediment to providing general feedback to the child abuse or neglect reporter. Some states even require that child welfare agencies report back to reporters. Many times, child welfare agencies, overburdened with high caseloads and time demands, will not report back, and other agencies will wrongly claim that they cannot release the results of their investigations because the information is confidential. If the agency does not voluntarily provide such information to you, you will have to request it. Mandated reporters of child abuse need to know the circumstances of an investigation so that they can keep track of any conditions that might further endanger the child. Professionals who work with child victims may have to know information to treat the victims in their care.

The most difficult confidentiality issue to resolve concerns the reporting individual's need to know versus the family's right to privacy. So, the distinction is usually made to provide less specific information to individuals outside the child welfare professional community. This means that if the reporter is a family friend, neighbor, or relative, the information won't be provided in detail. The child welfare agency may give feedback that indicates that the reporter was right in making a referral and that the agency will be working with the family.

## **What happens if I report abuse and the case is unsubstantiated?**

All states have laws that protect the reporter of suspected abuse or neglect from legal liability as long as the report was made "in good faith" and not maliciously. Only a small percentage of reports are deliberately false. Another percentage of reports may be classified as "unsubstantiated." This means that there might not have been sufficient information regarding the allegation or the identity of the family, or that the state law contained narrow criteria for substantiating a case. All reports regardless of whether they are substantiated are kept on file at the agency. Criteria for substantiation varies from state to state because definitions of child abuse and neglect vary from state to state.

If you are unsure of the legal definitions of abuse or neglect in your community, contact your local CPS agency for information. In addition, you can [contact us](#) for more information on what you can do -- and what we are doing -- to assure that children's interests and well-being are fully, effectively, and humanely guaranteed. Knowing how, when, and what to report about child abuse and neglect may make a life or death difference for a child.

*The problem of child maltreatment will not go away on its own. If you suspect child abuse is occurring, report the abuse to your local child protective agency or to the police if the child is in immediate danger.*

*Help is available for families at risk of abuse.*



# **Guidelines to Help Children Who Have Been Reported for Suspected Abuse and Neglect**

## **How important is my role?**

School personnel, teachers, counselors, child care workers, Boy and Girl Scout troop leaders, coaches -- all adults who interact with children on a regular basis -- have a tremendous influence on children. Although you may never know that a child in your care has been reported to your local department for community based services (DCBS) or law enforcement agency for child abuse or neglect, you may be aware of children in such a situation. Learning how to help these children is an important contribution that you can make to help children overcome such tragedies. A caring adult actually can offset or reverse the harm caused by an abusing parent.

## **What happens once a report is made?**

When a DCBS agency receives a report of child maltreatment, it may begin an investigation or, if the report is deemed inappropriate or incomplete, refer the case to another resource agency. Depending on the particular situation, as well as the requirements of the agency, those who reported the situation may have the opportunity to continue communicating with the agency regarding the child's progress. Educators, in particular, may be asked to share additional information to help determine the facts of the situation and develop a treatment plan. School personnel can be an excellent resource, but they must ensure confidentiality of information and that the information is shared only with people designated by law. Obviously, rumors may further isolate the family and negatively affect efforts to help them.

## **How should I address the parents?**

Oftentimes, you will continue to have regular contact with the family after a report has been made. Parents who are suspected of child maltreatment can benefit from, or be hurt by, your influence.

- Be objective and supportive of the family. Remember that most parents want to be good parents but may need additional help and encouragement to do so.
- Do not blame or make judgments about the family.
- Limit conversation to the activities in which you are involved; it is not your responsibility to investigate suspected maltreatment.
- When talking to parents, be professional and objective. Do not allow yourself to be placed in the role of the adversary if parents get defensive and upset.
- Schools may be an ideal provider of support for parents through parent education programs, early childhood programs emphasizing child development, counseling programs such as job skills counseling, alcohol/drug abuse programs, and adult education programs.

Families experiencing abuse or neglect often may be experiencing extreme stress from many factors. The program you are involved in may be a very important stress reducer to the child and parent.

## **How should I address the needs of the child?**

The following tips can help you develop nurturing relationships with all the children with whom you interact, including abused and neglected children who often suffer from poor self-concepts.

- Children need positive adult role models. Warmth, sympathy, and interest can allow children to see adults in a positive, supportive, and caring role.
- Be an approachable, patient listener. Listen without being critical or negative toward the child or the child's parents. Do not pressure children to self-disclose or reveal their experiences of maltreatment. Help them realize that reluctance to talk about feelings is normal.
- Help children improve self-esteem. Give a lot of positive reinforcement and send them new messages about who they are and what they have to offer.
- Teach creative problem solving to help children make more effective decisions and feel a sense of control over their lives.

- Be sensitive to their need for consistency, particularly regarding your behavior toward them.
- Design teaching segments on how to recognize feelings and properly express them. Use a "feeling barometer" that encourages children to move the indicator to show how they are feeling and discuss why.
- Victims of abuse and neglect may believe that it is their fault that they experienced maltreatment. They may feel that they were bad and if they were good, their parents would not hurt them again and again. Assure them that the abuse is not their fault.
- Children may try to protect themselves by pretending their feelings do not exist. Children who want very badly to be asked to play with others or join others may hide or avoid situations. It is easier to pretend they do not care than to show interest and take a chance that others will reject them.
- When children act in ways that seem strange, remember to look for the feelings behind the actions.
- Always remember that maltreated children may be very loyal to their parents and, underneath any other feelings they may have, they love their parents and want to be loved and wanted in return.
- Do not display pity.
- Do not over-focus attention on maltreated children. Children need to learn how to draw from their own resources and fit in with other children. However, do not ignore them because you are unsure or uncomfortable with the situation.
- Foster their relationships with peers by encouraging extracurricular and school-related activities.
- Allow children to have possessions of their own for which they are responsible (a desk or work space, books, backpack).

### **Specifically for educators**

Discover if your school system has a board policy or procedure for child abuse and neglect. To help maintain an open and professional relationship, the school should notify the parents as soon as a report is filed. Honestly inform them that a report has been filed and that there is legal authority for this action since, according to state law, teachers are mandated to report suspected child abuse and neglect. The parents should be assured that the school is supportive of them and interested in the well-being of the child.

- Maltreated children often have special educational, psychological, or medical needs. Help them access available resources for these needs.
- Devise individualized education plans tailored to the special educational needs of maltreated children, but be careful not to let them know that they are being singled out for special treatment.
- Utilize programs that are already in place. One example is providing free or reduced breakfast and lunch, field trips, and extracurricular activities. Economic stress is often a factor that makes parenting difficult and may increase the risk for maltreatment.

### **Sources**

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# INDICATORS of CHILD ABUSE and NEGLECT

Type of Abuse	Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
<b>Physical Abuse</b>	Unexplained bruises and welts Human bite marks Bald spots Unexplained burns: Rope burns on arms, legs, neck or torso Unexplained fractures Unexplained lacerations or abrasions	Wary of adult contact Apprehensive when other children cry Behavioral extremes: Aggressiveness or Withdrawal Overly compliant Afraid to go home Reports injury by parents Exhibits anxiety about normal behavior ( i.e., napping) Complains of soreness and moves awkwardly Destructive to self and others Early to school or stays late as if afraid to go home Accident prone Wears clothing that covers body when not appropriate Chronic runaway Cannot tolerate physical contact or touch.
<b>Physical Neglect</b>	Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress Consistent lack of supervision, especially in dangerous activities or long periods Unattended physical problems or medical needs Abandonment Chronic Lice Distended stomach, emaciated	Begging or stealing food Constant fatigue, listlessness or falling asleep in class States there is no caretaker at home Frequent school absences or tardiness Destructive School dropout Early emancipation from family
<b>Sexual Abuse</b>	Difficulty in walking or sitting Torn, stained or bloody underclothing Pain or itching in the genital area Bruises or bleeding in external genitals, vaginal or anal areas Frequent urinary or yeast infections Frequent unexplained sore throat Encopresis (involuntary soiling) Enuresis (inability to control urination)	Unwilling to participate in certain physical activities Sudden drop in school performance Crying with no provocation Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge Anorexia Sexually provocative Poor peer relationships Reports sexual abuse by caretaker Fear of or seductiveness toward males Suicide attempts Chronic runaway Early pregnancies
<b>Emotional Maltreatment</b>	Speech disorders Lags in physical development Failure to thrive Asthma, severe allergies or ulcers Substance abuse	Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking, etc.) Conduct disorders Neurotic traits Behavior extremes: Compliant, passive Aggressive, demanding Overly adaptive behavior Inappropriately adult Inappropriately infantile Delinquent behaviors

**Reporting suspicions of child abuse and neglect is mandatory in Kentucky and Ohio!**



*To report suspected child abuse or neglect:*  
**KY:** Call Centralized Intake 859-292-6550 (weekdays)  
 Call 877-597-2331 (statewide hotline—nights/weekends)  
**OH:** Call 513-241-KIDS

*For information on child abuse prevention, education or treatment services  
 contact Family Nurturing Center at 859-525-3200 or visit [www.familynuture.org](http://www.familynuture.org).*