

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL CENTER - FACT SHEET

CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE

It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of children are physically abused each year by a parent or close relative. This type of abuse can also occur outside of the home. Thousands of these physical abuse cases result in the death of a child. For those children who do survive, the emotional trauma remains long after the external bruises and trauma have healed.

It is extremely important that parents, social workers, and others allow children to feel comfortable enough to disclose abuse. Children will benefit from repeated assurance that they are believed and will be kept safe.

Indicators of Physical Abuse May Include:

- Physical injuries including bruises, burns, broken bones, and internal injuries
- A poor self-image
- Self-destructive or self-abusive behavior
- Anger and rage
- Aggressive, disruptive, and sometimes illegal behavior
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sleep problems, nightmares, or flashbacks
- Depression or withdrawal from friends/family
- Inability to trust or love others
- Suicidal behavior
- Other severe behavior changes

Possible Effects of Physical Abuse on Children:

- Severe emotional damage
- Difficulty establishing personal relationships with others
- Trouble with physical closeness, intimacy, and trust as adults
- Higher risk for anxiety and other mental health problems
- Problems at school/work

Disclosure of abuse may be a process that occurs over time. Be conscious not to “shut the door” when a child begins to disclose abuse. Instead, ask questions such as, “Can you tell me more about that?” Stress to the child that the abuse is not his/her fault. Report child abuse to the appropriate Children’s Protective Services agency and seek a medical examination for the child right away.

Physically abused children and their families may need a professional evaluation and treatment. Such interventions can help reduce the risk of low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, and emotional trauma in the child.

Preventative Measures:

- Assist families in learning problem-solving skills to minimize stress
- Teach families how to improve communication between parents and children
- Work with parents on understanding the developmental needs of and tasks of children

Call Children’s Hospital Social Services Department with Questions or Concerns

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*Information for this fact sheet obtained from CHMC Social Services Dept. and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.
Child Physical Abuse Fact Sheet
CHMC Social Services Department*