Maltreatment Definition

While child abuse or maltreatment is specifically defined in state statute, abuse is generally defined as any willful act or threatened act that results in any physical, mental, or sexual injury or harm that causes or is likely to cause the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired. Abuse of a child includes acts or omissions. Corporal discipline of a child by a parent or legal custodian for disciplinary purposes does not in itself constitute abuse when it does not result in harm to the child. Neglect occurs when a child is deprived of, or is allowed to be deprived of, necessary food, clothing, shelter, or medical treatment or a child is permitted to live in an environment when such deprivation or environment causes the child's physical, mental, or emotional health to be significantly impaired or to be in danger of being significantly impaired.

Maltreatment Indicators

	Physical Indicators	Behavioral Indicators
Physical Abuse	» Multiple and/or unexplained bruises in different stages of healing » Welts, human bite marks, bald spots » Burns that cannot be explained » Unexplained fractures or other injuries » Untreated injuries & medical needs not treated » Wears clothes not suited to the weather	» Nervous, withdrawn, clingy, tries to please caregiver » Hostile, aggressive, violent, self-destructive » Complaints of soreness/physical or psychosomatic » Explanation of injuries does not make sense » Fearful of parent, going home, or adult contact » Shows little or no emotion when hurt » Excessive absences
Sexual Abuse	» Torn, stained or bloody undergarments » Genital pain, swelling or itching » Difficulty walking or sitting » Genital or anal bruising or bleeding » Sexually transmitted diseases » Frequent urinary tract or yeast infections » Pain when urinating or passing stool » Unexplained abdominal pain » Vaginal or penile discharge *Physical indicators present less than 5-10%	» Withdrawn, depressed, threatened by physical contact » Premature knowledge of sex, seductive behavior » Sexual acting out, excessive masturbation » Low self-esteem, lack of confidence » Sudden changes in weight » Change or decrease in school performance » Uncontrolled emotions, secrecy » Anxiety, sleep difficulties, nightmares, and/or other fears » Regressed behaviors (speech, bedwetting) » Adolescent: self-mutilation, eating disorders, promiscuity
Emotional Abuse	» Delayed physical or cognitive development » Speech difficulties or disorders » Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, biting) » Eating disorders, ulcers » Flat affect » Hair loss » Failure to thrive	» Demanding, needy, attention-seeking, overly compliant » Extreme temper tantrums, oppositional, destructive » Delinquent or criminal activity » Unfriendly, distant, poor peer-relations » Low self-esteem, depressed, suicidal » Anxiety, sleep disorders
Neglect	» Abandonment; No adult supervision » Untreated lice, or other medical, dental needs » Constantly hungry, underweight » Poor hygiene – constantly dirty » Failure to thrive	» Fatigue/listlessness, constantly tired, sleep disorders » Steals or begs for food » Excessive absenteeism/tardiness » Extremely needy, rejected, isolated » Poor social and/or communication skills; conduct disorders » Delayed growth and motor development; learning disabilities

A Note About Maltreatment Indicators

The warning signs of child abuse and neglect vary from child to child. Children have different ways of coping with abuse, and the signs often depend on each child's characteristics and environment. Parents, guardians, teachers, professionals, and bystanders all have the responsibility to keep children safe. One way to do that is by observing the behaviors and interactions of children at home, at school, and with their friends. Please keep in mind the warning signs and possible indicators of abuse in order to help keep children safe.

In reviewing the signs of abuse, it is important to keep in mind that signs are not limited to one type of child abuse or neglect, and sometimes, different types of abuse and/or neglect occur in combination. It is important to remember the presence of these indicators does not prove abuse is occurring, but rather MIGHT indicate abuse is occurring.

Child Maltreatment Statistics (United States)[1]

» 4.3 million referrals (estimated) were received by U.S. CPS agencies (Federal Fiscal Year 2018)

» Of these referrals, 78.6 percent were accepted for a response by CPS agencies

Disposition

» More than 75 percent (78.3%) suffered neglect

» More than 15 percent (18.3%) suffered physical abuse

» Less than 10 percent (9.3%) suffered sexual abuse

» Less than 10 percent (8.5%) suffered from psychological maltreatment

» Neglect is the most common form of abuse in the U.S. followed by physical, and then sexual abuse

Age of Victims (rates per 1,000)

» 0 - 3 years = 59.8

» 4 - 7 years = 37.6

» 8 - 11 years = 32.3

» 12 - 15 years = 26.9

» 16 – 17 years = 9.3

(Note: MBF Prevention Education Programs target 5–18-year-old students or 64% of maltreatment victims by age.)

Perpetrator Relationship

» 91.7% of perpetrators were parents

» 13.4% were relatives other than parents

Of non-parent perpetrators:

» 2.8% were unmarried partners

» 2.8% were perpetrators of an "other" relationship (nonrelated adult, nonrelated child, foster sibling, babysitter, household staff, clergy, and school personnel)

» < 1% each were childcare provider, legal guardian, foster parent, friends and neighbors, other professional, other relative, group home staff

(Note: This analysis counts every combination of relationships for each victim in each report and, therefore, the percentages total more than 100.0 percent.)

[1]*Child Maltreatment 2018 presents national data about child abuse and neglect known to CPS agencies in the US during Federal fiscal year (FFY) 2018. The data were collected and analyzed through the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), which is supported by the Children's Bureau.*

Risk Factors for Abuse/Neglect

The warning signs of child abuse and neglect vary and will manifest differently in each child; however, risk factors also exist that indicate the potential of abuse and neglect. Parents, guardians, teachers, professionals, and bystanders all have the responsibility to keep children safe. Being aware of potential risk factors for abuse can help with both the identification and prevention of abuse/neglect.

Child	Parent or Caregiver/Family	Environment
» Special needs » Gifted » Infant with feeding difficulties » Colicky » Hyperactive » Unwanted or wrong gender » Difficult conception or birth » Premature » Medically fragile » Demanding/needy/clingy » Previous victim of abuse or other trauma/maltreatment	» Substance abuse/mental illness/depression » Family disorganization or chaos » Domestic violence » Family social isolation » Poor parenting skills » Adolescent or single parent » Parental low self-esteem » Parental expectations are inappropriate for child » Increased stressors (poverty, job/housing issues) » Low income » Family history of abuse » Provides inadequate supervision/abandons child » Belittles child » Uses harsh or corporal punishment	» Corporal punishment » Lack of support » Lack of resources » Denial of abuse » Legislative policies not supportive of families » Poor response by criminal justice system

Disclosure of Abuse/Neglect

If a child discloses abuse or neglect, please act responsibly.

DO	DON'T
» Recognize that hints may be the start of a disclosure (children often test you before disclosing abuse) » Tell the child you believe them » Remain calm and supportive » Listen and allow the child to tell you what happened in their own words » Tell the child that you are glad that they told you » Tell the child that it was not their fault » Use the child's vocabulary when addressing them and when reporting » Document direct quotes	» Show shock or disgust » Make promises (ex. "I won't tell" or "abuse will stop") » Ask WHY! Use open-ended, reflective questions – who, what, where, when, how » Be critical or judgmental of the offender; children are protective of people they care about, even if they are abusive » Try and "rescue" or "cure" the family on your own, especially in lieu of reporting » Rely on any other person or agency to report

Witnessing Abuse/Neglect

If you witness abuse or neglect, there are effective ways to respond.

DO	DON'T
» Remain calm and supportive	» Show shock or disgust
» Try to distract the child	» Stare at the parent or give dirty looks
» Empathize with the parent and/or offer help	» Belittle the parent
» Notify a manager or staff member if you are in public	» Assume it's "none of your business"
» Make a report to your child protection agency if you have a license plate number or any other identifying information	» Rely on someone else to intervene
» If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 & report the location	» Intervene in a hostile situation which may be dangerous to you

Mandatory Reporting

Many states have statutes that mandate reporting, not only for professionals, but for citizens as well. If you suspect abuse, please visit www.childwelfare.gov/organizations to find the Child Abuse Reporting Number for your state.

We know most abuse is not reported. People are often afraid to get involved in others' business and often ask themselves, "What if I am wrong?", "What if it is not abuse?" and are often afraid of the consequences of reporting. There may also be denial involved, a lack of education about what abuse is, fear, or there may be an economic reason for a family member not reporting.

Emotional abuse is almost never reported, because people are not sure emotional abuse is technically abuse. In general people are not certain what constitutes abuse. It is important to note all forms of abuse are underreported. Sexual abuse is also frequently underreported because of the shame and feelings of guilt and secrecy associated with it. Male victims especially may not want to report the crime and older victims may not want to report a crime that happened years or decades ago. Also, some individuals or families do not report due to privacy and/or cultural issues.

Consequences of Abuse/Neglect and Other Victimization[2]

Children who suffer from physical abuse and/or neglect are more likely to suffer from physical injuries and or behavioral and emotional consequences, cognitive delays, impaired development, and consequently poor academic achievement.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study found that early exposure to adverse childhood experiences, which include physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, as well as violence; household dysfunction; parental substance abuse or mental illness, and an absent parent are strong predictors of later health problems and early mortality. These studies found that the more adverse experiences in childhood, the greater the likelihood of health and social problems as an adult, including risk-taking behaviors and a shortened life span. Additionally, Finkelor (2014) found that "children who were exposed to one type of violence, both within the past year and over their lifetimes, were at a far greater risk for experiencing other types of violence."

Societal Impact of Abuse/Neglect

In addition to the consequences to children, there are also long-term impacts to society. Direct costs to communities include the financial costs of responding to reports of abuse and neglect, caring for children who have been removed from their homes, court and legal costs, and the costs of providing services to families involved in the child welfare system. Indirect costs to the community include increased expenditures to the educational system for special education services, increased use of health care, costs associated with providing mental health and substance abuse treatment services to adults and juveniles, and responding to increased juvenile and adult crime.

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[2] *Adverse Childhood Experiences – Centers for Disease Control: https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/*
Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2008) Long-term consequences of abuse and neglect. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/long-term-consequences/
Trickett, P. K., & McBride-Chang, C. (1995). The developmental impact of different forms of child abuse and neglect. Developmental Review 15, 311-337
Finkelhor, D, Turner, H., Hamby, S. & Ormrod, R. (2014). Polyvictimization: Children's exposure to multiple types of violence, crime, and abuse. Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention.

The total estimated economic burden of child maltreatment in the U.S. based on 2015 substantiated cases was $428 billion. Using estimated incidence of investigated annual incident cases, the estimated economic burden was $2 trillion.[3]

Yet, perhaps the most important impact of child abuse and neglect is the longer-term impact to families. When children grow up in homes where their needs are not met, and if they later become parents themselves, they often have not learned effective parenting skills. They may also lack the social skills to obtain help, and experience emotional problems that affect their ability to receive help that is offered. As adults, the victims of childhood abuse can feel hopeless, helpless, mistrustful, and often depressed. They are more likely to have substance abuse problems, experience domestic violence, and engage in criminal behaviors which complicate and compound their problems. Therefore, as adults, these individuals are more likely to fall into the vicious cycle of failing to meet the needs of their own children. This unfortunate repetition influences future generations, communities, and society as a whole.

Prevention of Abuse

The impact of child abuse and neglect over the life cycle points to the importance of primary prevention, and the critical role that schools can play as a vehicle for child abuse prevention education directed to children and families.

Abuse is preventable. Both reporting and education prevent abuse. Reporting abuse is preventing abuse; it stops abuse in two ways. It stops the child victim from being victimized again, and it prevents other children from being victimized by that same perpetrator in the future.

Educating and empowering children and adults also prevents abuse. A significant feature of MBF Prevention Education Programs is to educate youth before abuse occurs (primary prevention). But we have also learned that the program is an effective secondary prevention tool, as many children have disclosed abuse to a teacher, school counselor, or another adult after receiving the program.

MBF Prevention Education Programs

MBF Prevention Education Programs are comprehensive, evidence-based and evidence-informed primary prevention programs that educate and empower youth with Safety Rules and strategies to prevent, recognize, and respond appropriately to bullying, cyberbullying, the four types of child abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, neglect), exploitation, trafficking, and digital dangers. The programs:

» are based on research and best practices.

» are practical for schools and organizations.

» are supported by experts, schools, partner organizations, and parents.

» help schools and organizations meet statute and policy requirements.

To learn more about the programs, visit www.mbfpreventioneducation.org.

Conclusion

You cannot stop abuse if you refuse to see its existence, and you cannot prevent abuse by waiting until it occurs. We need to be proactive and turn "reaction" into "real action." We know the problem exists. Now we must resolve that children's lives, and our efforts, are valuable enough to combat it. Awareness + Action = Prevention!

Adults can visit our website and blog for tools and resources and ensure MBF Prevention Education Programs are in every elementary, middle and high school and youth-serving organization by asking, speaking up, and advocating. There has never been greater awareness. Now we need action equal to that awareness and we can prevent abuse and bullying and protect children…because Child Safety Matters to all of us!

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[3] *Source: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213418303867*