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# Help Prevent Child Abuse

NY State Office of Children & Family Services

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# HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE...

## WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND MALTREATMENT?

*Child abuse and maltreatment* is when a parent or other person legally responsible for a child's care causes harm or creates a risk of harm to a child. The child must be under the age of 18. Child abuse involves serious physical harm or sexual abuse. Maltreatment (neglect) involves physical, mental or emotional harm.

## MORE INFORMATION ON CHILD ABUSE AND MALTREATMENT

*Physical abuse* is when a parent/caretaker hurts or lets someone else hurt a child physically, or creates a substantial risk that a child will be hurt. There must be a serious injury or a risk of serious injury such as a severe burn, a broken bone, the loss of a body part, an internal injury or death. The injury or risk of injury must not be due to an accident.

*Sexual abuse* is when a parent or caretaker commits a sexual offense against a child or allows someone else to do this. Sexual abuse includes both touching and non-touching sexual offenses.

■ Examples of *touching offenses* include: fondling, intercourse, and sodomy (oral or anal sex acts).

■ Examples of *non-touching offenses* include: using a child in a pornographic or sexually explicit video or picture, distributing such a video or picture, or using a child as a prostitute.

*Maltreatment (neglect)* is when a parent or caretaker does not provide for a child's basic needs, where the parent or caretaker has the means or is offered a reasonable way to do so. It also includes a parent or caretaker failing to properly supervise a child or hitting a child too hard. Examples of maltreatment may include: not getting, or waiting too long to get, health care for a child; not giving a child adequate food, shelter, or clothing; not properly looking after a child; beating a child; or not sending a child to school when the child is able to attend school. The parent or caretaker's actions must cause physical, mental or emotional harm, or a risk that the child will soon be harmed.

## WHAT ARE SOME SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE OR MALTREATMENT?

You may see signs of child abuse or maltreatment in the way a child looks or in the way a child acts.

*Physical signs* can include: a child whose hair, clothing or body is often very dirty; a child whose clothing is too hot or too cold for the season; a child who is not being watched properly; a child who is ill or hurt but is not seeing a doctor; or a child with bruises, burns, cuts, vaginal or rectal bleeding, or with soreness or itching in the genital area.



*Behavioral signs* can include: a child who is afraid to go home; a child who does not think well of him- or herself, avoids people, or is very sad; a child who misuses drugs or alcohol, has an eating disorder or hurts him- or herself; a child whose mood or behavior changes a lot without a reason; a child who acts in a sexual manner that is unusual for the child's age; or a child who often misses school without a good reason.

## **WHOM DO I CALL IF I THINK A CHILD MAY BE ABUSED OR MALTREATED?**

If a child is in immediate danger, call 911 or your **local police department**.

If you suspect a child is being abused or maltreated in New York State, call the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment at 1-800-342-3720. This **Child Abuse Hotline** is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. You do not need proof of child abuse or maltreatment to make a report; you only need to think that it has happened or that a child is at risk of being abused or maltreated. Your call to the Child Abuse Hotline is confidential. This means that only certain persons may learn about the information you report. The family you reported will not be told you made the report unless you say it is okay for them to know.

## **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I CALL THE CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE?**

A hotline employee will answer your call and ask you for information about why you called. Based on the information you provide, the hotline employee will decide whether to take a report of child abuse or maltreatment. It is helpful if you can give information about who the child is and where he or she can be found; the person who you think abused or maltreated the child; and the child's parent, guardian or other person legally responsible for the child.

If a report is not taken, the hotline employee will tell you why it could not be taken. If you disagree, you can ask to speak with a supervisor.

If a report is taken, it will be sent right away to the local Child Protective Service (CPS), which is part of the county Department of Social Services. In New York City, the report will be sent to the Administration for Children's Services. A local CPS caseworker will start an investigation within 24 hours.

The CPS caseworker must work with the family on any issues that make the child unsafe. If the family does not want to make the changes needed for a child to be safe, CPS may go to court to ask a judge to require the family to make the changes or to remove the child from the home. However, in most cases, CPS can work with the family to protect the child in his or her home. This is done by making a plan with the child's parent or caretaker to change any unsafe actions, or to get services so that the child will be safe.



## **REMEMBER...**

**YOU HAVE THE POWER TO HELP PREVENT CHILD ABUSE.  
YOUR CALL MAY SAVE THE LIFE OF A CHILD.**

**1-800-342-3720**