
FACT SHEET

Child Abuse & Day Care

This year alone, over one million children will be victims of some form of child abuse and/or neglect in this country. Child maltreatment can be difficult to recognize, especially if the victim is too young to talk about the abuse or identify the perpetrator. Child care workers' frequent contacts with children puts them in a good position to recognize victimized children and because of this, child care workers are legally mandated reporters of child abuse/neglect. In order to be able to accurately detect and report child abuse, it is imperative that reaching a common understanding of definitions of child abuse be regular requirements of the training process for all child care workers. An abused child is generally considered to be:

" a child whose physical or mental health is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts of omission of his/her parent or other person responsible for his/her welfare."

A report of child abuse is not an accusation. It is a request by the reporter who has a reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect may be occurring. A report doesn't mean that the child care worker must determine that abuse/neglect has occurred; that is the job of Child Protective Services.

Even though a child care worker might fully understand the legal obligation to report, it may be very difficult to do so because it is easier not to get involved and to believe that someone else will eventually make the report. This "wait & see" approach can be very dangerous, even deadly, for a child who is being mistreated. According to the National Center on Child Abuse & Neglect publication, Caregivers of Young Children: Preventing & Responding to Child Maltreatment, "apart from the fact that the 'wait & see' approach is illegal, (the child) is vulnerable to continued incidents of maltreatment. this provider needs to realize that her involvement is both legally mandated, because as an early childhood education professional she is a mandated reporter, and ethically required because it is her job to protect children in her care."

For the past six years, figures on the reporting of child maltreatment involving day care centers have remained consistent. According to a national survey by Prevent Child Abuse America, reports of abuse in out-of-home settings represent less than 6% of all reports from the 17 states that provided this statistic for 1992. However, child care professionals still have certain roles and responsibilities not only in the reporting of child abuse but in the prevention of abuse as well.

Providing emotional and educational support to families in crisis is one way to prevent child abuse.

Other ways in which child care professionals can serve as extended support systems for families are:

- *Developing positive, non-judgmental relationships with parents*
- *Being alert to signs of stress in parents*
- *Providing opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's care*
- *Communicating regularly with parents concerning children's progress*
- *Providing parent education*
- *Modeling developmentally appropriate practices*
- *Providing information about community resources*

Most reported child abuse occurs within families, however, because there are also reported cases of child maltreatment in child care settings, it is important to have policies and practices that will protect young children while they are in child care. For example, hiring procedures should be thorough and comprehensive and based upon observations of the future employee's interaction with children. Child Care providers who grab or yell at children or who stand apart from children instead of interacting with them or who show no respect for a child's right to privacy are likely to be inappropriate caregivers. Each child care position should have a clearly written job description and require references and criminal checks. Part of the hiring focus should be to recognize and respond to signs that an individual might have the potential to be abusive.



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