

What to Do if You Suspect Child Abuse

Child abuse is a serious problem. Incidents of abuse may increase as students and their families bear the added stresses brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak such as being confined to the home, reduced social support, unemployment or working from home, housing or food instability, domestic abuse, substance use or abuse, relationship difficulties with caregivers or an increased childcare burden due to school closures.

[Oregon's Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting law](#) defines a mandatory reporter as any “*employee of a public or private organization providing child-related services or activities.*” That means that school staff and administrators are required to report suspected child abuse at any time.

What is child abuse?

There are many different types of [child abuse](#). More common forms of abuse include:

- **Domestic abuse:** any form of violent, threatening, controlling or bullying behavior *between people in a relationship*. Abuse can be emotional, physical, sexual or psychological such as:
 - Punching, hitting, kicking, cutting or burning.
 - Sexual assault, molestation, rape or incest.
 - Controlling behavior including not allowing someone to leave the house or contact others.
 - Threatening to kill or harm another person or pet.
 - Asking another to perform degrading or humiliating acts.
- **Physical or sexual abuse:** when someone harms or hurts a child on purpose. For example:
 - Hitting with hands, fists or objects.
 - Punching, slapping, shaking, throwing or kicking.
 - Biting, scratching, scalding or burning.
 - Sexual assault, molestation, rape or incest.
 - Breaking bones.
 - Drowning or poisoning.
- **Emotional or psychological abuse:** involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It can be more difficult to detect than domestic or physical abuse. With children, it can also be difficult to differentiate abusive behavior from a lack of parenting skill, however if in doubt, it is important to provide youths with the support that they need.

Types of emotional abuse include:

- Threatening, humiliating, shouting at or constantly criticizing.
- Calling a child names or consistently making them the subject of jokes.
- Blaming, scapegoating or using sarcasm with the intention of causing harm.
- Pushing a child too hard or not recognizing their limitations.
- Exposing a child to upsetting situations or events like drug taking, sexual activity or domestic abuse/violence.
- Making a child perform degrading behaviors.
- Ignoring, neglecting, or failing to support their physical, social and emotional development.
- Refusing to allow children to have friends or connect with family members or trusted adults.
- Not providing a child with any positive feedback, reassurance, nurturing or appropriate physical affection.
- Emotional bullying and cyberbullying.
- Encouraging a child to participate in illegal activities including the use of drugs or alcohol.

Other forms of abuse

In addition to the three primary forms of abuse, there are numerous other types of abuse including sexual exploitation, negligent treatment, maltreatment and neglect and buying or selling a person under 18 years of age.

What are common signs of child abuse?

The signs of abuse are varied, and not always visible. They can include:

- Physical injuries like bruises, cuts, or burns that are not accidental.
- Anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts, plans or actions.
- Academic difficulties, problems with concentration, inability to complete assignments.
- Antisocial behavior like tantrums, getting into fights, verbal aggression, vandalism, and theft.
- Swelling, bruising, broken or fractured bones, burns, scalds, bite marks or scarring.
- Frequent sickness like stomach upset, headaches and colds.
- Attention seeking.
- Bed-wetting, insomnia or nightmares.
- Extreme social withdrawal and/or an inability to speak.
- Lack of confidence or self-assurance.
- Difficulty handling or effectively managing emotion.
- Acting in age ways that are more common to younger-age children.
- Having difficulty initiating or maintaining relationships.
- Breathing problems, vomiting, lethargy or seizures.

- Drug, alcohol or marijuana use.

What to do if a child or adolescent reveals abuse

If a child or adolescent reveals that he, she or they are experiencing abuse it is important to:

- Be mindful of your words, actions and body language so as to not project judgment, invalidation, dismissal or extreme discomfort.
- Listen very carefully and attentively to what they are saying.
- Assure them that you are taking their story seriously.
- Let them know that telling you was the right thing to do.
- Tell them that it is not their fault.
- Explain what you will do next.
- Report what the child has told you as soon as possible.
- Do not confront the alleged abuser(s).
- Seek peer and social support if you need to confidentially discuss your experience.

Remember, you do not have to prove that abuse occurred.

Who to call

- If you think someone is being hurt, or is in danger call 9-1-1 immediately.
- Call the Oregon Department of Human Services toll free helpline 855-503-7233.
- Report child abuse to a local office of the Department of Human Services (DHS), or a local police department, Oregon State Police, county sheriff, or county juvenile department.

Resources

- [DHS Mandatory Reporting for Child Abuse video](#)
- [What can you do about child abuse?](#) - Guide from the Oregon Department of Health Services.
“What can you do about child abuse?”
- [FAQ on mandatory reporting in Oregon.](#)