



**IF NOT YOU,
THEN WHO?**

**Your call can help a family
get the help they need.**

Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline

844-CO-4-Kids



COLORADO
Department of Human Services

co4kids.org

Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

The first step in helping to end child abuse and neglect is to recognize the signs. In the following pages, you will learn the types and signs of abuse and neglect and what to do when you have a concern. The presence of a single sign does not mean that abuse is occurring but when these signs appear repeatedly or in combination, a closer look may be warranted. Trust your gut instinct, and call if you are concerned for the safety and well-being of a child.



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What is Child Abuse and Neglect

Federal law defines child abuse and/or neglect through the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.”

Types of Child Abuse and Neglect

- Emotional Abuse
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Neglect
- Institutional Abuse
- Child Sex Trafficking
- Child Labor Trafficking

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse (or psychological abuse) is a pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats or rejection, as well as withholding love, support or guidance.

Consider the possibility of emotional abuse when the CHILD OR TEEN:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity or aggression
- Is either inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example) or inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head banging, for example)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Has attempted suicide
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent

Consider the possibility of emotional abuse when the PARENT OR OTHER CARETAKER:

- Constantly blames, belittles or berates the child
- Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- Overtly rejects the child

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as any non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap or other object), burning or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver or other person who has responsibility for the child.

Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child. Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the CHILD OR TEEN:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other marks noticeable after an absence from school
- Seems frightened of the parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks back at the approach of adults
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the PARENT OR OTHER CARETAKER:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing or no explanation for the child's injury, or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Describes the child as "evil" or in some other very negative way
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abuse as a child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets



Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse includes activities by a parent or caregiver such as fondling a child's genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure and child sex trafficking.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the CHILD OR TEEN:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Suddenly refuses to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the PARENT OR OTHER CARETAKER:

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

Neglect

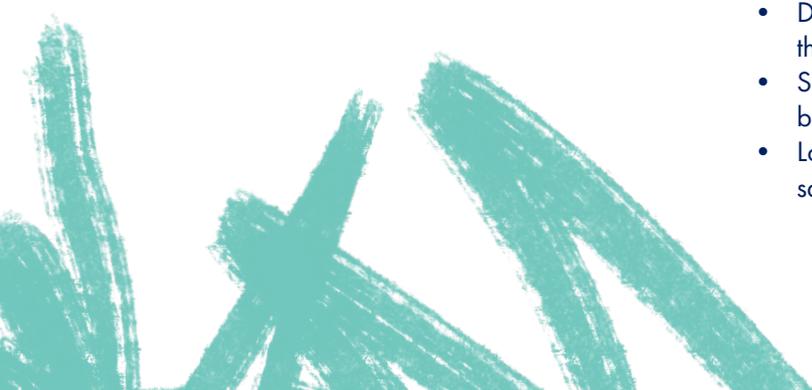
Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs. Neglect comes in many forms, including physical, medical, educational and emotional.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the CHILD OR TEEN:

- Wears soiled clothing or clothing that is significantly too small or large or is often in need of repair
- Seems inadequately dressed for the weather
- Always seems to be hungry; hoards, steals or begs for food or comes to school with little food
- Often appears listless and tired with little energy
- Frequently reports caring for younger siblings
- Demonstrates poor hygiene, smells of urine or feces or has dirty or decaying teeth
- Seems emaciated or has a distended stomach (indicative of malnutrition)
- Has unattended medical or dental problems, such as infected sores
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when the PARENT OR OTHER CARETAKER:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Abuses alcohol or drugs
- Denies the existence of or blames the child for the child's problems in school or at home
- Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless or burdensome
- Looks to the child primarily for care, attention or satisfaction of emotional needs



Institutional Abuse

It is possible that any form of abuse or neglect may occur while a child is in the care of an institution. If the maltreatment is caused by employees of the institution, it is classified as institutional abuse. Whenever anyone is aware of any form of child maltreatment occurring while the child is in the care of an institution, they should make a report.

Child Sex Trafficking

Child sex trafficking occurs when an individual younger than 18 engages in sex trading or commercial sex. A child may be forced, threatened or recruited into the sex trade or may be engaging in survival sex.

Child sex trafficking is child abuse and can happen in any community. It can affect children of every age, gender, race and socioeconomic background.

The majority of traffickers are known to the victim (parents, relatives, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends). Vulnerable young people are often identified, groomed and recruited by traffickers over time. Child sex trafficking is often a hidden crime and sometimes young people may not even understand that they are victims.

Consider the possibility of sex trafficking if a CHILD OR TEEN:

- Possesses money, cell phone or other material items that cannot be explained
- Self-reports participation in a sexual act in exchange for shelter, transportation, drugs, alcohol, money or other items of value
- Uses the Internet to post sexually explicit material (e.g. pictures, chats, advertisements, etc.)
- Is accompanied by an overly controlling "friend," "partner" or "boss"
- Demonstrates physical and emotional indicators such as:
 - Injuries, signs of physical or sexual abuse
 - Signs of drug and/or alcohol dependency
 - Difficulty sitting or standing, "stomach aches"
 - STIs, especially in a child or teen younger than 14
 - Tattoos, or scars that a child or teen is hesitant to explain
 - Increased anxiety
 - Fearful
 - Increased submissive behavior
 - Suicidal thoughts or actions



Child Labor Trafficking

Child labor trafficking can take many forms, the most common being debt bondage and forced labor. Debt bondage or bonded labor happens when a child incurs a debt – real or fabricated – that he or she is never able to pay off. Forced labor/ involuntary servitude occurs when an employer or individual obtains labor or services through force, threats of force, abuse of the legal process, fraud and/or blackmail.

Child labor trafficking is child abuse. Labor trafficking can be hidden – and occurs in diverse labor settings, both formal (large and small businesses, farms and factories) and informal (domestic labor, forced drug sales, door-to-door sales, panhandling), and can involve children of any age, race, gender or nationality.

Red flags and indicators of child sex trafficking and labor trafficking can overlap. Vulnerabilities that put a child or teen at greater risk for both kinds of trafficking include:

- A history of running away from home
- Homelessness with no consistent caregiver
- Identifies as LGBTQ+ (and has experienced family rejection, harassment, etc.)
- Prior victimization
- Prior child welfare or juvenile justice involvement
- Lack of local community support
- Economic instability
- Lack of educational and/or social-economic opportunities
- Substance abuse issues with self or at home with family members
- Physical/intellectual disabilities
- Immigration status
- The child is in custody of a non-family-member; relationship with an adult is unclear



**IF NOT YOU,
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Imagine if every Colorado family had access to the support they need.

Learn more at
co4kids.org

Colorado has one statewide number to report suspected child abuse and neglect:

844-CO-4-KIDS

(In an emergency, call 911.)

If you see or hear something that concerns you, don't hesitate to call.

When you call to report a concern or get help, your call is answered by a certified call taker who gathers additional information that will be reviewed by child welfare professionals. Based on the information you provide and other callers may also have provided, the family's local human services department may be engaged to support the children and family. Child welfare may also be involved if it is determined that the family needs the support of a caseworker to ensure the children are safe.

Your confidential, toll-free call can protect a child and help a family access the support they need.

Learn more at

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