

Violence Prevention

Child Maltreatment - Abuse and Neglect

Part 1



The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children.

~ Nelson Mandela

The 2020 Child Maltreatment Report

Child maltreatment crosses all socioeconomic and educational levels, religions, ethnic and cultural groups. Abuse and neglect negatively impact every aspect and stage of a child’s life, from their ability to succeed in school to their ability to forge healthy relationships with loved ones and peers.

On January 21, 2022, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) released the 31st Child Maltreatment Report. This report presents national data about child abuse and neglect that are known to child protective services agencies in the United States. In 2020, of the 3,145,000 children who were the subject of a child welfare agency response, 618,000 children were determined to be victims of maltreatment and an estimated 1,750 children died from abuse and neglect. It noted that the rate of child abuse and neglect are 5 times higher for children in families with low socioeconomic status.

This purpose of this newsletter is to inform parents about what constitutes child maltreatment (abuse and neglect), and both the risk factors and the protective factors for it, how to recognize signs of child maltreatment, and what impact child abuse and neglect have on a child and society as a whole.



PREVENTION SERVICES

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At least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year.

Neglect is the most common form of child abuse.

What Is Child Maltreatment?

Child maltreatment is any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child under the age of 18.

Acts of commission include:

- **Physical abuse** is the intentional use of physical force that can result in physical injury to a child. Examples include hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or other shows of force
- **Sexual abuse** involves pressuring or forcing a child to engage in sexual acts. It includes behaviors such as fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities
- **Emotional abuse** refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or psychological well-being or self-worth. Examples include name-calling, shaming, threatening, rejecting, and withholding love

Acts of omission refer to:

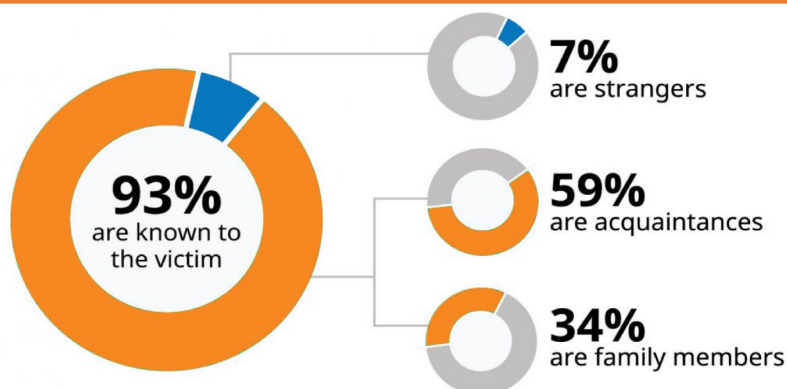
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a child's physical, emotional, medical or dental, and educational needs, as well as exposing the child to violent environments and the failure to provide adequate supervision

Child maltreatment is often hidden. Unfortunately, only a fraction of child victims of maltreatment ever gets support from health professionals.

Perpetrator Relationship to Child

Among cases of child sexual abuse reported to law enforcement, victims between the ages of 0-17 years often know their abuser.

[Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics](#)



AAP Discipline Recommendation

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends parents refrain from using any type of physical (corporal) punishment. Corporal punishment includes spanking, slapping, pinching, pulling, twisting, and hitting with an object. It also may include forcing a child to consume unpleasant substances such as soap, hot sauce, or hot pepper.

Instead of physical or verbal punishments, the AAP encourages parents to use discipline strategies to stop unwanted behaviors in children and teens. The AAP notes that, "Teaching children to recognize and control their behavior is an important job for the adults in their lives. How adults respond to a child's behaviors has lasting effects on her development. It shapes how the child thinks, behaves, feels and interacts with others. It also teaches the child how to behave as an adult."

For more information on this topic, please go to: [Discipline Versus Abuse](#)

Risk Factors

Risk factors are characteristics that may increase the likelihood of experiencing or perpetrating child abuse and neglect, but are not direct causes. For example, children younger than one year old are at the highest risk for maltreatment.

Some other risk factors for child maltreatment are:

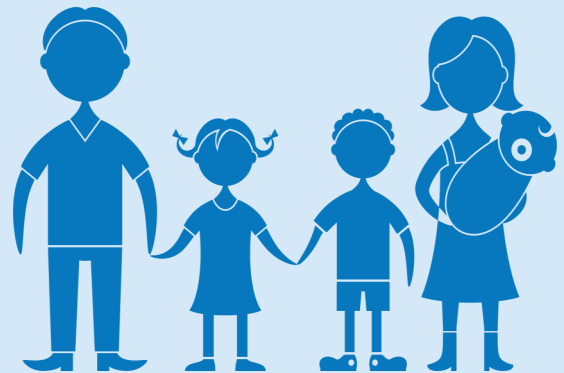
- Children with special needs
- Children younger than 4 years of age
- Parents' lack of understanding of children's needs, child development, and parenting skills
- Parental history of child abuse and or neglect
- Substance abuse and/or mental health issues including depression in the family
- Parental characteristics such as young age, low education, single parenthood, large number of dependent children, and low income
- Nonbiological, transient caregivers in the home (e.g., a parent's partner)

Although children are not responsible for the harm inflicted upon them, these and other factors have been found to increase their risk of being abused and or neglected.

Protective Factors

The following are protective factors that may lessen the likelihood of children being abused or neglected.

- Supportive family environment and social networks
- Concrete support for basic needs
- Nurturing parenting skills
- Stable family relationships
- Household rules and child monitoring
- Parental employment
- Adequate housing
- Access to health care and social services
- Caring adults outside the family who can serve as role models or mentors



For more information about protective factors, go to: [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)



SDLC Mental Health and Wellness Portal

For information on child abuse, childhood trauma, and mental health

Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect

Abuse can be hard to recognize. Here are some signs that could indicate possible abuse or neglect.

- Has unexplained injuries, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Shows sudden change in behavior
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is frequently absent from school
- Lacks needed medical care
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather

For more information go to: [What Is Child Abuse and Neglect? Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms](#)

Children's Advocacy Center of Southwest Florida (CAC) provides abuse determination, therapeutic counseling, parenting education, and prevention programs to children and families in Lee, Hendry, Glades, and Charlotte Counties.

For more information, go to:

[Children's Advocacy Center](#)



April

is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Click on link to see the Prevention Resource Guide from [Childwelfare.gov](#)

How To Report

In Florida, everyone is a mandatory reporter of child abuse. Therefore, ANY person in Florida who knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver or other person responsible for the child's welfare MUST immediately report that knowledge or suspicion to the Florida Abuse Hotline of the Department of Children and Families.

Telephone: 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week

TDD: 1-800-453-5145

Fax: 1-800-914-0004

[Online Report Form](#)

Take Action

The eradication of child abuse begins with building informed, empowered communities that have the courage to talk openly about this difficult issue.

Parents: Educate your children about child abuse in an age-appropriate way. If you're uncertain how to approach it, contact your child's physician, school counselor, or a local Children's Advocacy Center (CAC) to learn about ways to have this discussion.

Community: Start a conversation with responsible family members, co-workers, other parents, teachers, and coaches about what you have learned.