

# Child Maltreatment: What You Should Know

## What are the types of child maltreatment?

Definitions of maltreatment include physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect (includes emotional abuse.)

## Harm to children can result from:

- Physical injuries such as beatings, burns, and bites.
- Constant criticism, insults, and the withholding of love.
- Rape, fondling of the genitals, and incest.
- The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.

## Who maltreats children and where?

Most child maltreatment occurs in the family home. Parents, siblings, and visitors can all inflict abuse. Young children (ages 0 – 3) are at the greatest risk for maltreatment.

## How can you tell if a child is being maltreated?

### Children who are physically abused may:

- Be nervous around adults.
- Be watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen.
- Have difficulty playing.
- Act aggressively toward adults and other children.
- Be unable to concentrate at school.
- Suddenly underachieve – or overachieve – at school.
- Find it difficult to trust other people and make friends.
- Arrive at school too early or leave after the other children.

### Children who are sexually abused may:

- Behave differently when the abuse starts.
- Care less about their appearance or their health.
- Talk or act sexually at too early an age.
- Be secretive and stop talking about home life.
- Start soiling themselves.
- Be unable to sleep.
- Suddenly find physical contact frightening.

### Children who are neglected or emotionally abused may:

- Have difficulty learning to talk.
- Find it hard to develop close relationships.
- Be overly friendly with strangers.
- Be unable to play imaginatively.
- Think badly of themselves.
- Underachieve at school.

Remember: None of these signs proves that child maltreatment is present, since any of them may be noticeable at one time or another. But when they occur repeatedly or in combination with one another, the child may be suffering abuse.

## What can you do to help?

If you suspect a child is being maltreated, the child must be protected. Call your local division of social services. You will find the number in the front of your phone book. You can also call 911.

For more information about how to recognize and report child maltreatment in North Carolina, please call 1-800-CHILDREN or visit [www.preventchildabusenc.org](http://www.preventchildabusenc.org).

## To help prevent child abuse, you can:

- **Be a nurturing parent!**
- **Help a friend, neighbor, or relative if they are having difficulty with their family.**
- **Educate parents you know about healthy child development and healthy parenting.**
- **Get involved – advocate for services that help families.**
- **Volunteer at a local child maltreatment prevention program.**
- **Help to develop parenting resources at your local library or community center.**
- **Ask for help for yourself.**
- **Support all of the parents in your community!**