

Is My Baby Safe?

Straight Talk to Teen Parents
On Child Abuse and Neglect



2003

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Some Shocking Facts About Child Abuse

- ◆ Each year, child abuse and neglect kill approximately 2000 infants and children.
- ◆ 18,000 infants and children are permanently disabled from being abused or neglected each year.
- ◆ 550,000 children in the United States live in foster care because of abuse or neglect.

What can cause parents to hurt their children?

- ☞ Too much stress at home and/or school
- ☞ Uncontrolled anger or feelings of frustration
- ☞ Depression; feeling all alone
- ☞ Not enough money for living expenses
- ☞ Violence in the home or in relationships
- ☞ Drug or alcohol abuse: your own or by those close to you
- ☞ Feeling too sick or too tired to cope with a child's needs

Why Do I Need to Read A Brochure About Child Abuse?

You probably think you could never harm your child, but in a moment of exceptional stress it can happen. Just like most teen parents, you often have to cope with many responsibilities in your daily life. That's why you need to be aware of danger signs and of places where you can turn to for help. Even if you didn't mean to hurt your child, you could still be held responsible.

Other people, even those you feel you can trust, like a babysitter, a relative or neighbor, may hurt your child. If you do not try to prevent it, you can be held responsible for not protecting your child.

What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Child Abuse Includes:

- ☞ **Physical Abuse** – This occurs when someone such as a parent or day care provider hits or otherwise hurts a child. Bruises, burns or broken bones are some signs of physical abuse.
- ☞ **Sexual Abuse** – This happens when someone performs a sexual act on the child or forces a child to perform one on them. This includes touching a child in “private” areas such as the vagina, breast or penis.



- ☞ **Emotional Abuse** – This occurs when a parent treats a child in ways that make the child feel unwanted, or like a bad person – so much that the child’s normal development, learning or behavior suffers. This may include harshly criticizing or frequently blaming the child or making the child feel unwanted.

- ☞ **Shaken Baby Syndrome** – This type of abuse occurs when someone forcefully shakes a baby or is much too rough when handling a baby. This is the most common way that a young child becomes seriously brain injured or dies as a result of abuse.

Child Neglect Includes:

PHYSICAL NEGLECT – This occurs when a parent or caregiver does not always make sure the child has enough food, clothing or supervision.

MEDICAL NEGLECT – This results when a child does not get enough regular medical care to keep from becoming very sick or when a very sick child is not taken to the doctor.

ABANDONMENT – This usually happens when a parent leaves a child alone too long without supervision or leaves the child with someone for a long time without making contact or plans for care of the child.

PARENT’S DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE – A pregnant woman who uses drugs or alcohol can harm her unborn child, and parents who use drugs or alcohol may abuse or neglect their children. If a baby is born affected by drugs or alcohol and there are other factors that also put the baby at risk, the mother will be reported for abuse or neglect.

Who Must Report Child Abuse?

There are people called **MANDATED REPORTERS** who must report child abuse if they suspect it. Other people may report child abuse if they suspect it, but are not required by law to report it. Teen parents can report someone such as a babysitter, teacher or relative who has hurt them or their child.

Mandated Reporters Include:

- ☞ Doctors and Nurses
- ☞ Mental Health Professionals
- ☞ Teachers
- ☞ School Employees
- ☞ Day Care Workers
- ☞ Foster Parents
- ☞ Counselors and Social Workers
- ☞ Film Developers



What Happens When A Child Abuse Report is Made in Los Angeles County?

A call is made to the County Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-540-4000. This hotline is run by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

DCFS asks for information, including the child's name, where the child lives and the type of abuse or neglect being reported. If they think the child is in danger, they send an emergency response worker to interview the child as well as any adults who may know whether the child was abused. This happens within a few hours to five days depending on how young the child is and the type of abuse or neglect.

When a child is not in immediate danger, in-home services may be offered to help keep the family together. If DCFS thinks the child would be in danger, even with these services, DCFS may remove the child immediately and place him or her with relatives or in foster care.

If your child is removed from your custody, you will most likely be allowed to have visits. You will also be offered help to solve the problems that led to the abuse or neglect. If you do not get help and do whatever else the court asked you to do, your child may be taken away permanently and placed for adoption or guardianship.



For more information on what happens when a child is taken from a parent and placed into foster care by DCFS, read Public Counsel's brochure "Teens in Foster Care and their Babies."

How Does Abuse Affect My Child? What are Some Signs of Abuse?

Child abuse and neglect hurt children in very serious ways and each child will show the results of abuse differently. Here are some common signs that a child may have been abused:

- ⇒ Some children who have been physically abused may show changes in their normal behavior, like becoming very quiet and sad, or very angry, or may seem afraid of their parents or other adults.
- ⇒ Sexually abused children show many of the same signs as physically abused children. There is often little physical evidence of sexual abuse. They may go back to younger behaviors like soiling their pants or wetting the bed, have eating problems, or have problems at school.
- ⇒ Neglected children may also look depressed, may refuse to open up to talk, be “clingy” or overly friendly with strangers or with people they have just met. They may say things like, “Mommy always say’s I am bad,” and truly believe it.

I am Afraid I Might Hurt My Baby. What Can I Do? Where Can I Go For Help?

Almost all parents sometimes feel they are not doing a good job and maybe they were not yet ready to be a parent. These are normal feelings that can come and go. But if you often feel angry, afraid, out of control, or you often wish you didn’t have a child, you need to get help right away.

You also may not be sure if the way you discipline your child would be considered abuse. Seeking help may be the best thing you can ever give your child, and yourself. If you know someone you can trust, talk with them about your feelings. It can help just to talk to someone who will listen without judging you – a friend, family member, or counselor. This is a good way to begin coping with the stress and fear. Also, there are programs that can help you make sure you know all your options. Here are a few to them:

HOTLINES

- Youth Crisis Line..... 800/343-5200
(24 hours)

- Domestic Violence 800/978-3600

- Teen Line 800/TLC-TEEN
(800/852-8336)

Adolescent Family Life Programs

AltaMed Health Services

Cal Learn and Family Life Program..... 323/980-3060
Serves East Los Angeles
Pregnancy & Parenting Services, health care.

El Nido Parenting Programs

Antelope Valley 661/274-4192
Pacoima 818/896-7776
San Fernando Valley 818/896-7776
South Central Los Angeles (Normandie) 323/757-0101
Parenting, support groups, counseling.

Foothill Family Service-Teen Family Program
 Pasadena/San Gabriel Valley Area..... 626/795-6907
 West Covina 626/338-9200

Project NATEEN at Children’s Hospital .. 323/669-5982
 Serves Hollywood Area
 Case Management for pregnant & parenting teens 17 and
 under; support groups.

Youth and Family Center 310/671-1222
 Case management for pregnant & parenting teens in the
 Inglewood, South Bay and Long Beach area.
 Westchester, Wilmington, San Pedro 562/989-4300

OTHER RESOURCES

Big Sisters 323/933-5749,
 Mentors for teen parents. ext. 237

Children’s Home Society..... 562/901-3145
 Serves Long Beach, Norwalk, Bellflower,
 Cerritos, Lakewood, San Pedro
 Resources/referrals.

Connections for Children..... 310/452-3202
 West Los Angeles, South Bay
 Resources/referrals.

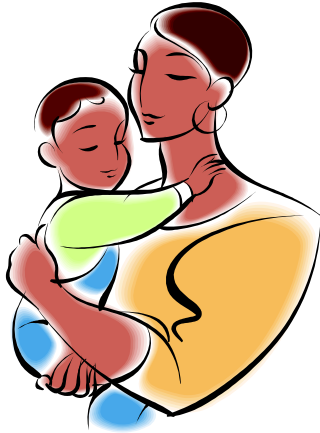
Equipose Resource & Referral..... 310/537-9016
 Serves 10 communities from Palos Verdes to
 Downey, North of Long Beach
 Information on free health, dental, pre-natal, shelters, food
 assistance, child care, WIC.

Home Safe..... 323/934-7979
 Serves Hollywood, Mid-Wilshire area
 Child care, counseling, support services.

- International Institute of L.A.**
Child Development 323/264-6210
Serves Central Los Angeles, East Los Angeles,
San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley
Child care and child development services.
- Parents Anonymous**..... 909/621-6184
Pregnant and Parenting Teen support groups.
- Public Counsel**..... 213/385-2977
Legal services for pregnant & parenting teens
who live in Los Angeles County.



Notes



Special thanks to the teen parents of the Teen Parenting Program at Los Angeles Technology Center for their help in editing this brochure.

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