



Tips for Families

Self Care for Parents/Caretakers

When parents take time to care for themselves, they are better able to manage the challenges of parenting. Learn to recognize signs of stress and take time out to replenish yourself. You may wish to:

- Find a sitter you can trust to give you time for adult interests and relationships
- Relieve stress by taking a walk, reading, or pursuing a hobby
- Visit or talk with friends or relatives
- Talk with other parents
- Join a community activity or group

Ways to Show Your Children That You Care

- Notice them
- Ask them about themselves
- Play with them
- Read aloud together
- Hug them
- Suggest better behaviors when they act out
- Praise more
- Criticize less



Recognizing, Reporting and Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia





Making a Difference in a Child's Life

Each year in Virginia, over 39,000 children are reported to local social services departments for suspected child abuse or neglect.

Abuse and neglect of children occurs within families and in other settings where children are provided care or services. These settings include schools, residential facilities, day care centers/homes, and recreational or sporting programs.

Recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect are first steps toward ensuring the safety and well-being of children.



What is Child Abuse and Neglect?

Section 63.2-100 of the *Code of Virginia* defines an abused and/or neglected child as any child under 18 whose parent or other person responsible for the child's care:

- Causes or threatens to cause a nonaccidental physical or mental injury
- Neglects or refuses provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, emotional nurturing, or health care
- Abandons the child
- Fails to provide adequate supervision in relation to the child's age and developmental level



- ▶ Commits or allows to be committed any illegal sexual act upon a child including incest, rape, fondling, indecent exposure, and prostitution or allows a child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

Infants who have a medical diagnosis or finding of exposure to non-prescription drugs or alcohol during pregnancy are also considered to be at risk of harm. Attending physicians are required to report these children to local social services departments.



Reporting

Anyone may report suspected abuse or neglect; however Section 63.2-1509 of the *Code of Virginia* requires that designated professionals who have contact with children immediately report their suspicions. It is not necessary to prove that abuse or neglect has occurred.

Reports can be made by calling your local social services department or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-552-7096.

Reports can be made anonymously. If you choose to provide your name, it will not be released to the family who was reported, except by Court order.

Persons reporting in good faith are immune from civil and criminal liability pursuant to Section 63.2-1512 of the Code.



Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect



Physical Indicators

Behavioral Indicators

Physical Abuse

- Unexplained bruises on face, torso, back, buttocks, thighs
- Multiple injuries in various stages of healing
- Bruises/welts resembling instrument used e.g belt, cord
- Human bite marks
- Injuries regularly appearing after absence, weekend, etc.
- Unexplained fractures, lacerations, abrasions

- **Reports injury by caretaker**
- Uncomfortable with physical contact
- Complains of soreness or moves uncomfortably
- Wears clothing inappropriate to weather (to cover body)
- Afraid to go home
- Chronic runaway (adolescents)
- Behavior extremes (withdrawn, aggressive)
- Apprehensive when other children cry

Physical Neglect

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs
- Consistent lack of supervision
- Abandonment

- **Reports no caretaker at home**
- Begs, steals food
- Frequently absent or tardy
- Constant fatigue, listlessness, or falling asleep in class
- Extended stays at school (early arrival and late departure)
- Shunned by peers

Sexual Abuse

- Sexually transmitted disease (pre-teens)
- Pregnancy
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pain or itching in genital area
- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Bruises/bleeding in external genitalia

- **Reports sexual abuse**
- Highly sexualized play
- Detailed, age inappropriate understanding of sexual behavior
- Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
- Chronic runaway
- Excessive seductiveness
- Suicide attempts (adolescents)
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Sudden, noticeable behavior changes

Emotional Maltreatment

- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical development
- Learning problems

- Habit disorders (sucking, biting, rocking in older child)
- Antisocial, destructive
- Passive and aggressive behavior extremes
- Appears to derive pleasure from hurting others or animals



A combination or pattern of indicators should alert you to the possibility of maltreatment. Indicators should be considered together with the explanation provided, the child's developmental and physical capabilities, and behavior changes.



Additional Information

For additional information, prevention materials, and/or in-service training, contact your local social services department or the Virginia Department of Social Services at www.dss.state.va.us.



Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-552-7096

(Language Line available)

Virginia Department of Social Services
730 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219



Local Department of Social Services Response

After a report is made, a child protective services (CPS) social worker will interview the child and siblings, the parents or caretakers, and the alleged perpetrator. The CPS social worker may also contact other persons having information about suspected abuse or neglect of the child(ren).

The CPS social worker will conduct a child safety assessment; determine if child abuse or neglect occurred or if there is risk or harm; and develop a safety and services plan with the family when indicated.

The primary goal of child protective services is to strengthen and support families in preventing the (re)occurrence of child maltreatment through community-based services.

