

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD ABUSE REPORTING SUSPECTED CASES OF ABUSE**

The following information is offered for your consideration since item number nine of the *Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Volunteers* indicates we must be aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse and the requirements for reporting suspected cases of abuse.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF CHILD ABUSE**

The following information is taken from the resource titled, Montana School Guidelines for the Identification and Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect, pages 12-15.

#### **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Physical abuse of children includes any non-accidental physical injury caused by the child's caretaker. By definition the injury is not an accident, yet it may not have been the intent of the child's caretaker to injure the child. For example, physical abuse may result from over-discipline or from punishment that is inappropriate considering the child's age or offense.

##### **Physical Indicators of Physical Abuse**

Unexplained bruises and welts:

- on the face, lips, or mouth;
- on large areas of the torso, back, buttocks, or thighs; on several different surface areas (may indicate the child has been hit from different directions);
- in various stages of healing (e.g. bruises of different colors, or old and new scars together).

##### **Behavioral Indicators of Physical Abuse**

A child's behavior may also be a clue to the presence of child maltreatment. It may be the only clue, especially in adolescents. These behavioral indicators may exist independently of, or in conjunction with physical ones and include the child who:

- is wary of physical contact with adults. In the classroom, most children accept physical closeness to a teacher. The abused child often avoids it, sometimes even shrinking at the touch or approach of an adult.
- becomes apprehensive when other children cry.
- demonstrates extremes in behavior (e.g. aggressiveness or withdrawal) or behavior which lies outside the range expected for the child's age group.
- seems frightened of the parents (e.g. states he/she is afraid to go home, cries when it is time to leave, or is frightened when parents are mentioned).
- reports injury by a parent.

## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

The statutory definitions of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation involving children are as follows:

“Sexual abuse” means the commission of sexual assault, sexual intercourse without consent, indecent exposure, deviate sexual conduct, or incest, as described in Title 45, chapter 5, part 5. (Section 41-3-102 (15), MCA.)

“Sexual exploitation” means allowing, permitting or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution offense, as described in 45-5-601 through 45-5-603, or allowing, permitting or encouraging sexual abuse of children as described in 45-5-625. (Section 41-3-102(16), MCA.)

The Division of Child and Family Services is responsible for the investigation of abuse or neglect caused by a parent or legal guardian responsible for the child’s welfare. Law enforcement is responsible for the investigation of all other abuse and neglect cases.

**Child sexual abuse must be reported immediately to the Division of Child and Family Services.**

Practically, sexual abuse includes any contacts or interactions between a child and an adult where the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person. Sexual abuse may also involve a perpetrator under the age of 18 when that person is either significantly older than the victim or when that person is in a position of power or control over the victim.

Sexual abuse by family members or acquaintances is most likely to occur in the home of the victim or the perpetrator and is usually repeated over a period of time.

While there are cases of sexual abuse by adult women, the majority of perpetrators are men. Girls are reported abused at a much higher rate than boys. Victims have been found to be as young as four months old with the average age between 7 and 14 years old.

### **Physical Indicators of Sexual Abuse**

At school sexual abuse may be discovered when a child confides in a trusted teacher, counselor or nurse.

### **Physical Indicators of Sexual Abuse**

- difficulty in walking or sitting.
- torn, stained, or bloody underclothing.
- complaints of pain or itching in the genital area.
- bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal area.
- Venereal disease, particularly in a child under 13.
- Pregnancy, especially in early adolescence.

### **Behavioral Indicators of Sexual Abuse**

- appear withdrawn; engage in fantasy or infantile behavior; even appear developmentally or mentally retarded.
- have poor peer relationships (e.g., fighting, no friends).
- be unwilling to change for gym or to participate in physical activities.
- engaged in delinquent acts, or run away.
- display bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior.
- state he/she has been sexually assaulted by a caretaker.

### **REPORTING SUSPECTED CASES OF ABUSE**

It is extremely important that if you see any signs and symptoms of child abuse you call the toll free number listed below to report directly to the professionals who are trained to support the child and investigate so no one will be falsely accused and the child will not be left in an abusive situation.

**1-866-820-5437** - Statewide number to report suspected child abuse.