

## **CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – DEFINING, RECOGNIZING AND REPORTING IT AND THE INCREASED RISK FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE, COHABITATION, AND SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES**

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By Wayne D. Stocks

09/19/2011 through 10/17/2011 (Originally published in nine articles)

A recent report which enumerated the risks associated with kids whose parents are cohabiting rather than married showed that one of the significant risks for children in those living arrangement was an increased chance of suffering abuse or neglect. In reviewing the statistics set forth in that report, it became evident that the risk of abuse and neglect is a very real risk for children in cohabiting households, children from single parent families and children of divorce. In this article, we will define child abuse and neglect, examine some of the statistics regarding the level of abuse and neglect for children in different living situations, list potential warning signs of abuse and neglect and discuss what to do in the event that you suspect a child is being abused.



### **INTRODUCTION TO THE MAGNITUDE OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**



We will get to much more detailed statistics on the prevalence of abuse and types of living arrangement which are more prone to abuse and neglect later in this article. However, I think it is important to have some grasp of the magnitude of the problem and why it should be important to anyone who works with kids on a regular basis. According to the January 2010 report entitled “Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (referred to herein as NIS-4), over 1.2 million children suffer harm from child abuse or neglect per year. That equates to 17.1 children per 1,000 or approximately 1 in every 58 children. When children who are endangered by abuse or neglect are added to those figures, the numbers rise to over 2.9 million kids or 39.5 per thousand.

That equates to one in every 25 children. The reach and magnitude of abuse and neglect are as varied as the forms of abuse and the types of children who experience it.

In the article “[When The Bough Breaks](#),” Martin Johnson wrote:

*“Perhaps the most important part of understanding child abuse is realizing the depth of physical and emotional pain the child victim must feel. As adults in ministry to children, we can see the crisis intellectually, yet it’s extremely difficult for us to genuinely empathize with the hurt and isolation the child feels – unless we’ve felt it too. And sometimes we simply don’t recognize that*





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*real, serious, ongoing abuse is taking place in the homes of some of the children we minister to every week. Sometimes, we just don't realize the problem."*

So, why have we decided to devote time and resources to the issue of abuse here at Divorce Ministry 4 Kids? First, we are appalled at the general level of abuse and neglect of children in this country, and churches need to be equipped to recognize and report (where necessary) possible incidences of abuse and neglect. Secondly, the statistics we will be examining later show that abuse and neglect are very real risks to children of divorce, children in single-parent families, and children in cohabiting homes – the very children that we seek to minister to here at Divorce Ministry 4 Kids. In fact, statistics show that it is these children who are at the highest risk of abuse and neglect.

Consider the following chart. The following table summarizes the number of children per 1,000 who have suffered harm as a result of child abuse or neglect (this does not include children who had not been harmed but were judged to be in imminent danger because of abuse or neglect) as well as the relative risk of each group compared to children who live in homes with married biological parents:

Type of Living Arrangement	Instances of Maltreatment per 1,000 Children	Risk Relative to Married Biological Parents
Parent With Cohabiting Partner	57.2	841.18%
Neither Parent	33.2	488.24%
Single Parent, No Partner	28.4	417.65%
Other Married Parents	24.4	358.82%
Cohabiting Biological Parents	23.5	345.59%
Married Biological Parents	6.8	100.00%

Of these six types of livings arrangements included in the report, married biological parents have, by far, the lowest incidence of abuse and neglect at 6.8 children per thousand. This is consistent regardless of what type of abuse or neglect you are examining or that standard used in determining whether an action rises to the level of abuse or neglect. Cohabiting biological parents and step families have similar rates of abuse and neglect which are about 3.5 times higher than married biological parents. Single Parent families have a rate 4.1 times higher than married biological parents, and children living in single parent families with a cohabiting partner are abused and neglected 842% more frequently than kids living with married biological parents.

The children Divorce Ministry 4 Kids seeks to serve and minister to are the exact children who are most likely to suffer harm by abuse at the hands of, or neglect by, a caregiver.





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### WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

Abuse and neglect are difficult words to define as we will see later in this article when we start to examine the many different kinds of abuse. Let's look first at what abuse and neglect are according to federal law. In a pamphlet entitled, [What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?](#), the Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explains that:

“Federal legislation lays the groundwork for State by identifying a minimum set of acts or behaviors that define child abuse and neglect.”

Most laws at the federal and state level cover abuse and neglect inflicted by parents and other child caregivers and do not extend to harm caused by other people which are covered under other statutes. The minimum standards set by federal law define child abuse and neglect as:

- Any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; or
- An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

These laws are then further refined and explained at the state level. For a listing of abuse and neglect laws for your state, visit the [State Statutes Search](#) webpage at The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This page allows you to search for a variety of state statutes including the definitions of abuse and neglect.

### DEFINING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

#### *Categorizing Child Maltreatment*

Child maltreatment is the general term used to encompass both child abuse and child neglect. Child abuse can be generally described as acts of commission which harm a child, and child neglect can generally be described as acts of omission which allow harm to befall a child. The abuse and neglect of children can be further divided into subcategories as follows:

- CHILD ABUSE
  - Emotional Abuse
  - Physical Abuse
  - Sexual Abuse





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- CHILD NEGLECT
  - Educational Neglect
  - Emotional Neglect
  - Medical Neglect
  - Physical Neglect

Some states would also add abandonment and substance abuse by parents to this list of types of maltreatment. Others would also add failure to supervise (e.g., inadequate supervision or exposure to dangerous environments) to the list of types of neglect. Some sources/statutes would combine these categories. Let's examine each type of maltreatment listed above a little closer by defining the terms and looking at examples of each type of maltreatment starting with the different types of abuse and then moving on to the different types of neglect.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse, sometimes referred to as psychological abuse, is often difficult to prove and frequently accompanies other types of abuse. Emotional abuse can cause severe damage to a child's mental health and development, but for a third party, it is often difficult to see because the hurt occurs on the inside not the outside. The pamphlet called [Fact Sheet: Emotional Child Abuse](#), from the organization Prevent Child Abuse America, defines it this way:

*Emotional child abuse is maltreatment which results in impaired psychological growth and development. It involves words, actions, and indifference. Abusers constantly reject, ignore, belittle, dominate, and criticize the victims. This form of abuse may occur with or without physical abuse, but there is often an overlap.*

Examples of emotional abuse would include:

- ❖ Administering unprescribed substances
- ❖ Belittling
- ❖ Bullying
- ❖ Calling a child names
- ❖ Close confinement (tying, binding other physical restriction)
- ❖ Constant criticism
- ❖ Denigrating
- ❖ Excessive demands on a child's performance
- ❖ Excessive responsibilities
- ❖ Humiliating





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- ❖ Ignoring or Rejecting a child as punishment
- ❖ Limited physical contacts (e.g., withholding signs of affection)
- ❖ Making negative comparisons to others
- ❖ Penalizing a child for positive, normal behavior (e.g., smiling, mobility, exploration, etc.)
- ❖ Penalizing a child for demonstrating signs of positive self-esteem
- ❖ Rejection
- ❖ Scapegoating
- ❖ Shaming
- ❖ Terrorizing
- ❖ Threatening
- ❖ Threats of sexual or other types of abuse
- ❖ Withholding food, shelter, sleep or other necessities
- ❖ Withholding love, support and guidance
- ❖ Yelling

Many of the examples listed above require a sustained pattern before they rise to the level of emotional abuse.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse can take many forms, but it is essentially any physical activity which intentionally harms a child, or for which the harm should have been foreseeable. It is one of the more commonly recognized types of abuse because many times the results of the abuse are readily observable. The CDC's publication titled [Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0](#) defines physical abuse as:

*Physical abuse is defined as the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in, or has the potential to result in, physical injury.*

*Physical abuse includes physical acts ranging from those which do not leave a physical mark on the child to physical acts which cause permanent disability, disfigurement, or death. Physical abuse can result from discipline or physical punishment.*

Common examples of physical abuse include:

- ❖ Assault
- ❖ Beating





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- ❖ Biting
- ❖ Burning
- ❖ Dragging
- ❖ Dropping purposefully
- ❖ Grabbing
- ❖ Hitting with a hand, stick, strap or other object
- ❖ Kicking
- ❖ Pinching
- ❖ Poisoning
- ❖ Pulling
- ❖ Punching
- ❖ Pushing
- ❖ Scalding
- ❖ Shoving
- ❖ Slapping
- ❖ Smothering
- ❖ Shaking
- ❖ Stabbing
- ❖ Strangling or Choking
- ❖ Throwing

For those interested, the [What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?](#) pamphlet explicitly states that:

*Physical discipline, such as spanking or paddling, is not considered abuse as long as it is reasonable and causes no bodily injury to the child.*

### **Sexual Abuse**

Although all maltreatment of children is heartbreaking, it is sexual abuse which often makes the headlines and causes us to cringe the hardest. Federal law defines sexual abuse as,

*“...the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children.”*





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It can include:

- ❖ Attempted or threatened sexual abuse with physical contact
- ❖ Child pornography
- ❖ Child prostitution
- ❖ Exposure
- ❖ Failure to supervise child's voluntary sexual activities
- ❖ Genital molestation
- ❖ Incest
- ❖ Intrusion
- ❖ Providing sexually explicit materials
- ❖ Rape
- ❖ Sexual harassment of a child
- ❖ Voyeurism

### ***Educational Neglect***

Educational neglect is defined as the failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs. Generally it relates to a caregivers' failure to sufficiently provide for the educational needs of the child.

Examples of educational neglect might include:

- ❖ Chronic truancy
- ❖ Encouraging a child under age 16 to drop out of school
- ❖ Failure to allow or provide needed attention for a diagnosed educational need
- ❖ Failure to enroll a child in school
- ❖ Keeping child home without legitimate reason

### ***Emotional Neglect***

Emotional neglect is defined as inattention to a child's emotional needs.

Examples of emotional neglect might include:

- ❖ Failure to provide psychological care
- ❖ Inadequate nurture or affection
- ❖ Inadequate structure







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- ❖ Inappropriate advanced expectations
- ❖ Inattention to a child's developmental or emotional needs
- ❖ Overprotective treatment
- ❖ Permitting a child to use alcohol or other drugs

### **Medical Neglect**

Medical neglect is failure to provide a child with necessary medical or mental health treatment. Note: For purposes of NIS-4 (the source of the statistics throughout this article), medical neglect is classified as a form of physical neglect.

Examples of medical neglect include:

- ❖ Failure to administer prescribed medications
- ❖ Refusal to seek timely medical attention

### **Physical Neglect**

Physical neglect represents a failure to provide a child with necessary food or shelter. A failure to provide adequate supervision and abandonment are sometimes classified as physical neglect as well.

Examples of physical neglect might include:

- ❖ Abandonment
- ❖ Health hazards in the home
- ❖ Inadequate attention to needs for clothing
- ❖ Inadequate attention to needs for food
- ❖ Inadequate attention to needs for personal hygiene
- ❖ Inadequate attention to needs for shelter
- ❖ Inadequate supervision
- ❖ Other disregard for child's physical needs or physical safety
- ❖ Refusal of custody
- ❖ Unstable custody arrangements

Abuse and neglect can take many forms. The lists above are certainly not exhaustive, but they do serve as a starting point for recognizing potential forms of abuse and neglect.







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### **INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL INCIDENCE STUDY OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

Before we jump right in to the alarming statistics regarding child maltreatment, some background on the source of the information used for this article and a definition of terms would be helpful. For purposes of the statistics cited in this report, we have utilized the Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4).

#### ***What is the National Incidence Study of Child Abuse?***

In January 2010, a report entitled “Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) was released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That report is referred to herein as NIS-4. The National Incidence Study is a periodically mandated effort of the United States Department of Health and Human Services to report on the level of child abuse and neglect in the United States. NIS-4 was mandated by Congress in 2003. Data was collected during 2005 and 2006, and the report was issued in 2010. Prior NIS reports, also mandated by Law were done in 1979 & 1980 (NIS-1), 1986 (NIS-2) and 1993 (NIS-3).

NIS-4 explains the unique nature of the report:

*The NIS serves as the nation’s needs assessment on child abuse and neglect. It offers a unique perspective on the scope of the problem beyond the children that child protective service (CPS) agencies investigate. While the NIS includes children who were investigated by CPS agencies, it also obtains data on other children who were not reported to CPS or who were screened out by CPS without investigation. These additional children were recognized as maltreated by community professionals. Thus, the NIS estimates include both abused and neglected children who are in the official CPS statistics and those who are not.*

The NIS accumulates reports of abuse and neglect from CPS agencies as well as other professionals, eliminates duplicates and develops statistics related to the level of abuse and/or neglect in any given year. Throughout the report, children are classified in every category of abuse and neglect that applies to their individual situation. This generally results in components which can total more than 100%.

#### ***Two Different Standards of Maltreatment***

The NIS-4 report includes two “standards” of maltreatment for purposes of classification – the “harm standard” and the “endangerment standard.” Results for maltreatment under both standards are presented below, so some clarification is merited.





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The Harm Standard, as defined by NIS-4 is,

*...relatively stringent in that it generally requires that an act or omission result in demonstrable harm in order to be classified as abuse or neglect. It permits exceptions in only a few specific maltreatment categories, where the nature of the maltreatment itself is so egregious that one can infer that the child was harmed. The chief advantage of the Harm Standard is its strong objectivity. Its principal disadvantage is that it is so stringent that it provides a perspective that is too narrow for many purposes, excluding even many children whom CPS substantiates or indicates as abused or neglected.*

By contrast, the Endangerment Standard,

*...includes all children who meet the Harm Standard but adds others as well. The central feature of the Endangerment Standard is that it counts children who were not yet harmed by abuse or neglect if a sentinel thought that the maltreatment endangered the children or if a CPS investigation substantiated or indicated their maltreatment. In addition, the Endangerment Standard is slightly more lenient than the Harm Standard in allowing a broader array of perpetrators, including adult caretakers other than parents in certain maltreatment categories and teenage caretakers as perpetrators of sexual abuse.*

In summary, the harm standard generally requires the provable harm was suffered by the child as a result of the abuse or neglect. This is a much less subjective standard, but it also eliminates certain instances where CPS or another agency actually found that there was abuse or neglect. The endangerment standard is more subjecting, but it allows instances to be counted as abuse or neglect where the reporter felt the action caused the child to be in imminent danger.

### **Definitions of the Severity of Maltreatment Used in the NIS-4 Report**

The NIS-4 also classified abuse based on the severity of harm suffered by the child as a result of the abuse or neglect. Definitions of severity for purposes of the report were:

- Fatal:** These children died as a result of the abuse or neglect they sustained.
- Serious Harm:** Instances classified as serious harm had to include life-threatening condition, long-term impairment, or professional treatment aimed at preventing long-term impairment. This type of harm may include unconsciousness, cessation of breathing, broken bones, chronic drug abuse, burns and other conditions.





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**Moderate Harm:** These instances include injuries which persist in observable form for at least 48 hours. They may include bruises, depression or emotional distress which does not require professional treatment.

**Inferred Harm:** Under NIS standards, certain types of abuse were permitted to be associated with harm even where it was not readily observable. These would things like sexual abuse and abandonment where harm is fairly certain even where it is not observable.

### ***Definitions of Family Structure Utilized in the Report***

The NIS-4 report reports instances of child abuse by various categories. The ones we focused on for purposes of this article had to do with instance of abuse and neglect based on family structures and the living arrangements of children. For purposes of NIS-4, Children were classified as living with two parents, one parent or neither parent. The definition of parent used for the report was consistent with those used by the U.S. Census Bureau. By that definition “parent” included birth parents, adoptive parents and stepparents. For purposes of the NIS-4 report, instances of maltreatment were grouped by the child’s living arrangement into one of six categories.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Married Biological Parents:</b>     | Child living with both biological parents who are married.  |
| <b>Other Married Parents:</b>          | Child living with two married parents one or both of whom have some other legal parental relationship with the child (e.g., adoptive parents and stepparents) |
| <b>Cohabiting Biological Parents:</b>  | Child living with two unmarried cohabiting parents either biological or who have some other relationship with the child (e.g., adoptive parents).             |
| <b>Parent With Cohabiting Partner:</b> | Child living with a single parent (with any relationship to the child) with a cohabiting partner.   |
| <b>Single Parent, No Partner:</b>      | Child living with a single parent (with any relationship to the child) without a cohabiting partner.  |
| <b>Neither Parent:</b>                 | Child living with no parent.  |





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Based on U.S. Census Data, the NIS-4 report indicated the following numbers of estimated children living in each family structure:

Type of Living Arrangement	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
Married Biological Parents	44,799,000	60.84%
Other Married Parents	5,152,000	7.00%
Cohabiting Biological Parents	2,192,000	2.98%
Parent With Cohabiting Partner	2,081,000	2.83%
Single Parent, No Partner	16,962,000	23.04%
Neither Parent	2,449,000	3.33%
Total	73,635,000	100.00%

Accordingly, some 4 in 10 children live in some arrangement other than with married biological parents. All amounts reflected in the charts in this article represent the number of children who suffered a particular form of maltreatment per 1,000 children in the associated living arrangement. For example, in regards to married biological parents, there were 6.8 children who suffered maltreatment for every 1,000 children living with their married biological parents. In other words, these charts present the relative risk of abuse for a child living in each situation.





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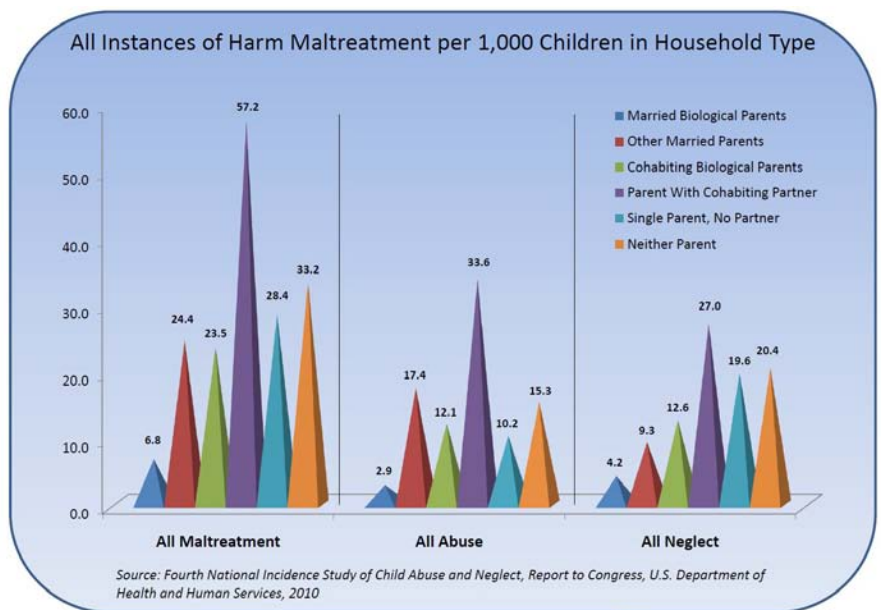
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### RISKS OF MALTREATMENT BASED ON LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

The portion of the NIS-4 report that struck us here at Divorce Ministry 4 Kids was the increased risk of abuse and neglect for children of divorce, children living in cohabiting relationships and children living in single parent families. Throughout this discussion of different charts and statistics below, you will note that one thing is absolutely consistent; the least risk of child maltreatment is for those children living with married biological parents. Let’s have a look.

This first chart looks at all instances of harm standard maltreatment as well as specific rates of abuse and neglect by family structure. By far, the largest risk of maltreatment to kids is when they are in a living situation with one parent and that parent’s cohabiting partner with 57.2 children per thousand in this living arrangement suffering maltreatment. That is 8.4 times higher than the rate for children living with married biological parents (6.8 per thousand). Cohabiting married parents and other married parents, such as step families, have the next lowest rates at 23.5 and 24.4 per thousand respectively. Children in single parent families are maltreated at a rate of 28.4 per thousand.



The rates for abuse follow a similar pattern with the exception of the fact that kids living in other married parents and cohabiting biological parent homes are more likely to be abused than those living in single parent families. Neglect follows the same pattern as all maltreatment except for the fact that kids in a home with cohabiting biological parents are slightly more likely to be neglected than those from homes classified as “other married parents.”





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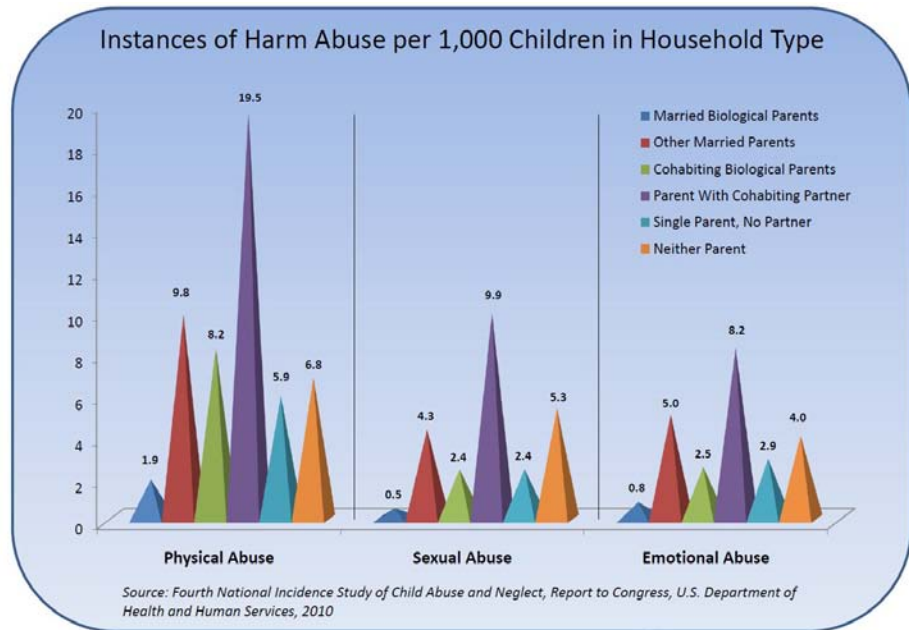
Sticking with the more stringent Harm Standard, let's have a look at the different types of abuse defined by the report. Again, for all three types of abuse defined in the study (those being physical, sexual and emotional), the lowest rates of abuse per thousand children are for those kids living with married biological parents.

In the instance of physical abuse, children living with a single parent are 3.1 times more likely to be abused at a rate of 5.9 per thousand compared to 1.9 per thousand for married biological parents. Children in "Other Married Parent" families are 5.2 times

more likely to be physically abused, and those kids living with a single parent and their cohabiting partner are an astounding 10.1 times more likely to be physically abused than children living with married biological parents.

Similarly, sexual abuse is much more likely in single parent (4.8 times), other married parents (10 times) and single parent with a cohabiting partner (19.8 times) households than in married biological parent homes. Indeed, "only" 1 child in every 2,000 living with married biological parents is sexually abused while nearly 20 in every 2,000 children living in a home with a single parent with a cohabiting partner is abused. There is no denying that this living demographic greatly increases the risk of sexual abuse (as well as all other forms of abuse). This living arrangement is all too common for children born to single mothers and those whose parents are divorced.

The rates for emotional abuse resulting in harm are similar to those for sexual abuse with 0.8 children per 1,000 suffering emotional abuse when living with married biological parents compared to 2.9 per thousand for those in single parents homes, 5.0 per thousand for those living in step families and with "other married parents," and 8.2 per thousand living with a single parent who has a cohabiting partner.



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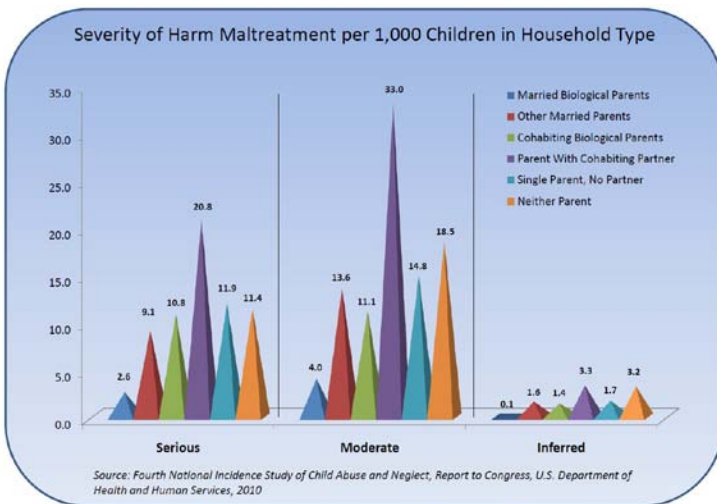
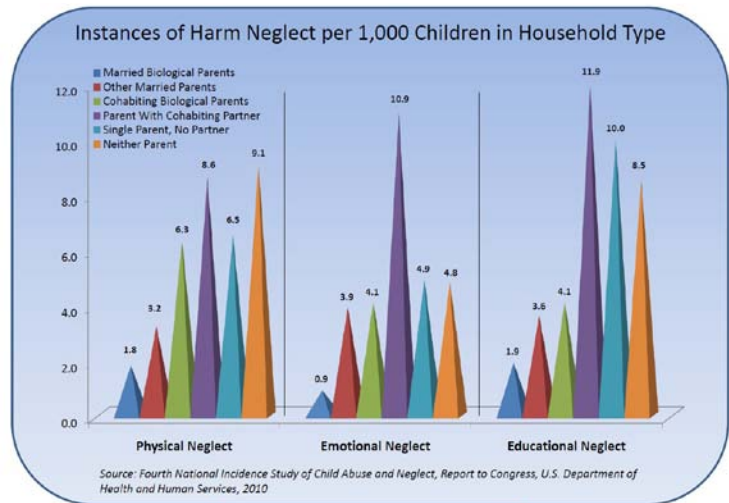
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This next chart looks at instances of harm standard neglect. Physical neglect is the only chart in this entire series where children living with a single parent in a cohabiting relationship are not the highest at risk group. For physical neglect, the risk to children living with neither parent is actually higher (albeit not much higher) than the rate for those living with a single parent with a cohabiting partner.

For physical, emotional and educational neglect, children living with biological parents were at the lowest risk of neglect with children living with other married parents slightly higher. The rates for single parents without partners were significantly higher and the rate for children with single parents living with a cohabiting partner were, once again, highest amount these groups.



partner. That is an increased risk of 825%. The rates for other married parents and single parent families were 13.6 and 14.8 per thousand children respectively.

This next chart looks at the severity of harm inflicted based on family type. We will ignore “inferred harm” as this is relatively small compared to the other groups. The risk of serious harm from all maltreatment was, once again, highest for children living with a single parent and their cohabiting partner. At 20.8 per thousand, this was 8 times higher than the rate for children living with married biological parents. The rates for step families (other married parents) and single parent families were 9.1 and 11.9 per thousand respectively.

The rate patterns for moderate harm were similar at 4.0 per thousand for children living with married biological parents and 33.0 for children living with a single parent and their cohabiting



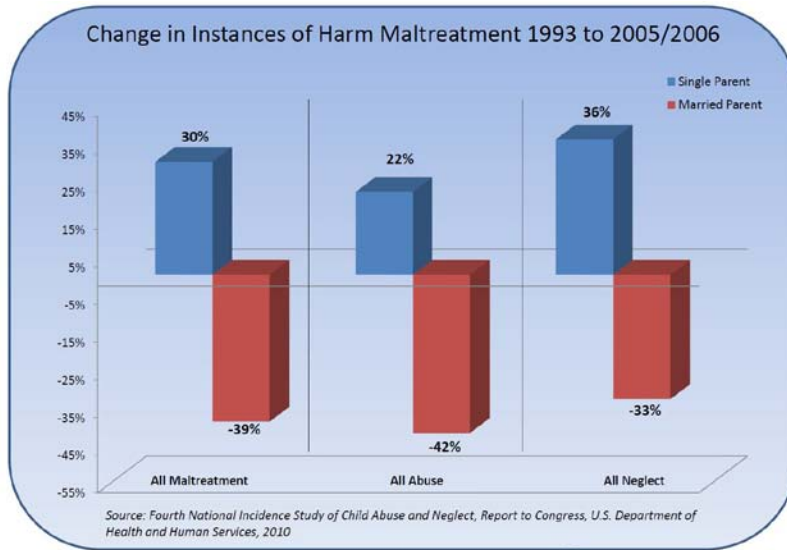




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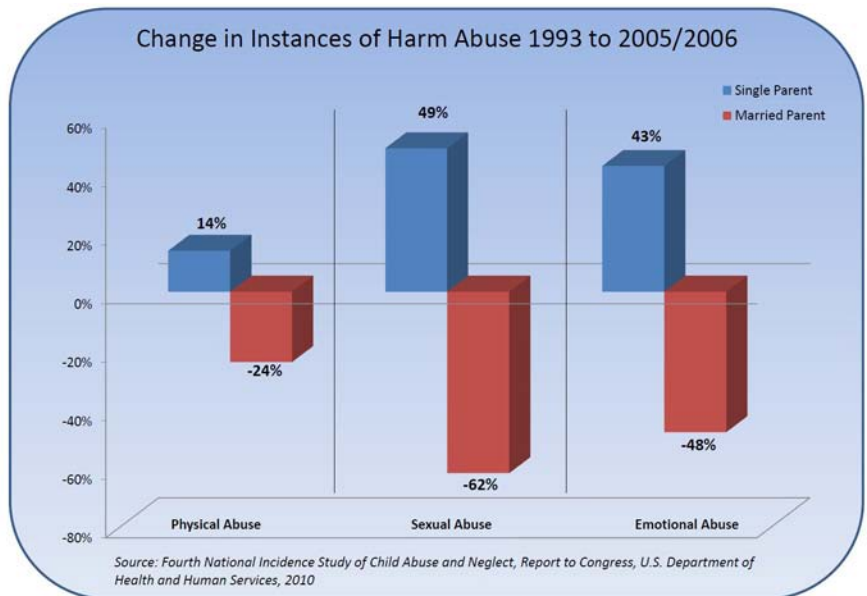
By Wayne D. Stocks

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These next three graphs compare the NIS-4 study (conducted in 2005/2006) to the NIS-3 study conducted during 1993 and reflect the change in instances of each type of maltreatment. Due to changes in the way the study was conducted between NIS-3 and NIS-4 (additional detail was collected in the later study), they were unable to compare each individual type of family. Instead, for purposes of comparison, family types were grouped into either Single Parents (which would include single-parent families and a single parent cohabiting relationship) or Married Parents (which would include both biological married parents and step-families or other married parents).

The results are striking. For every category and type of abuse and neglect, the study showed a marked increase in maltreatment in single parent families and a marked decrease in married parent families. For example, still using the harm standard, the rate of total maltreatment decreased 39% in married parent families while increasing 30% in single parent families. The rate of abuse increased 22% in single parent families while decreasing 42% in married parent families. And, the rate for neglect increased 36% in single parent families while at the same time decreasing 33% for married parent families. The implications are clear in these results.

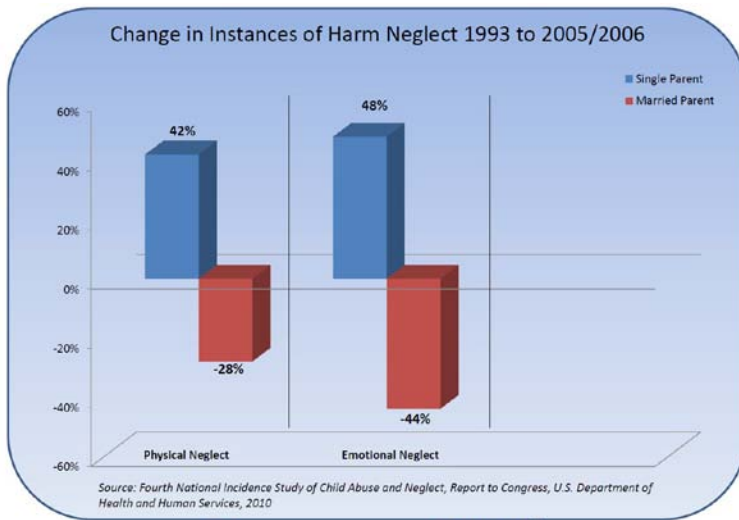




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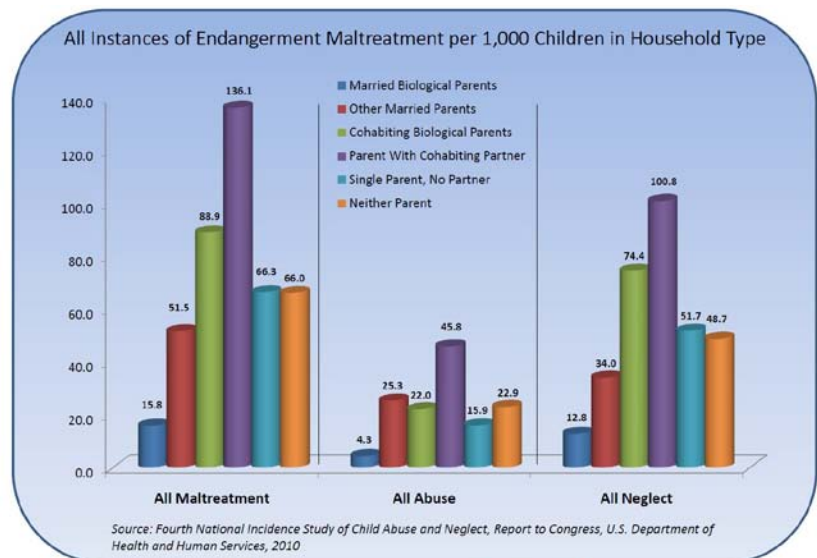
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When it comes to types of abuse, physical abuse increased “only” 14% in single parent families while decreasing 24% in married parent families. Sexual abuse and emotional abuse increased 49% and 43% in single parent families while decreasing 62% and 48% in married parent families. Physical neglect increased 42% in single parent families and decreased 28% in married parent families while emotional neglect increased 48% in single parent families while decreasing 44% in married parent families. The results are indisputable, abuse and neglect increased significantly during the time period in single parent families while decreasing significantly in married parent families.

Turning from the harm standard of abuse and neglect to the endangerment standard (which does not generally require proof of harm in order for the abuse to be included in the study); we see that the results are similar in many respects. Under this standard, 15.8 children per thousand living with married biological parents were subjected to maltreatment while over 8.6 times that many were abused in single parent homes where the single parent was cohabiting. An astounding 136.1 children per 1,000 living in “Parent with Cohabiting Partner” households suffered maltreatment that met the endangerment standard. The rates were also high for other categories like other married parents at 51.5 children per 1,000 and single parent families at 66.3 per one thousand children. Numbers for abuse and neglect showed similar patterns with the neglect figures generally being about double or more those of abuse in most categories.

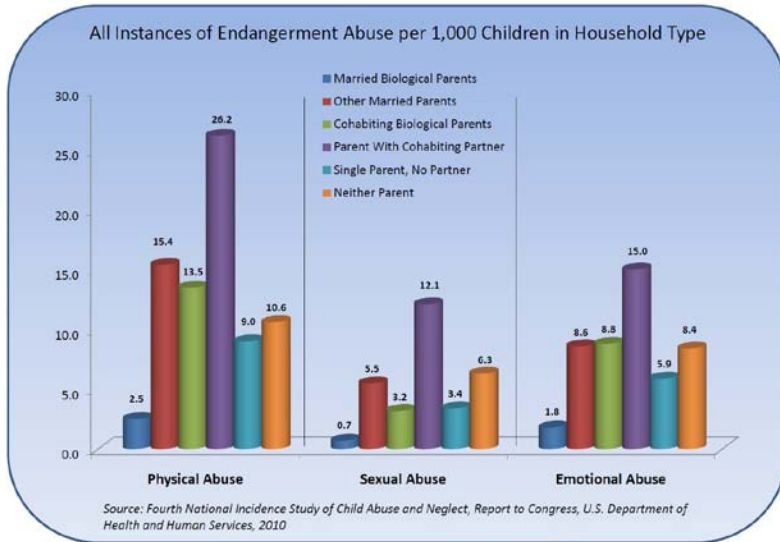




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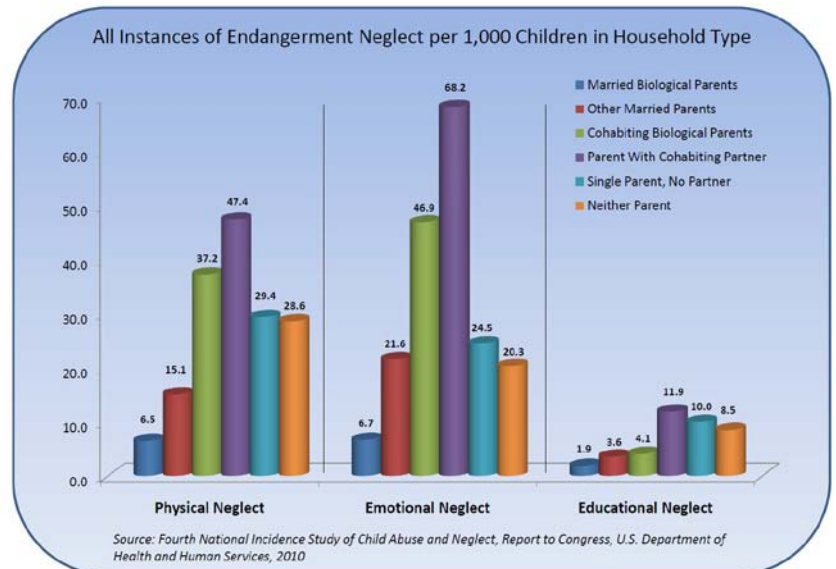
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1.8 per thousand rate for children living with married biological parents. The rate for single parent homes was 5.9 per thousand, and the rate for other married parents was 8.6.

Rates for neglect were similar. Rates for children in households with married biological parents were 6.5, 6.7 and 1.9 per thousand for physical, emotional and educational neglect respectively. The lowest family type category for each type. Single parent cohabiting households were consistently highest at 47.4, 68.2 and 11.9 per thousand for physical, emotional and educational neglect. Unlike abuse, the rates for neglect in other married families were lower than single parent families. Rates for single parent families were 29.4, 24.5 and 10.0 per thousand, while rates for other married parents were 15.1, 21.6 and 3.6 respectively.







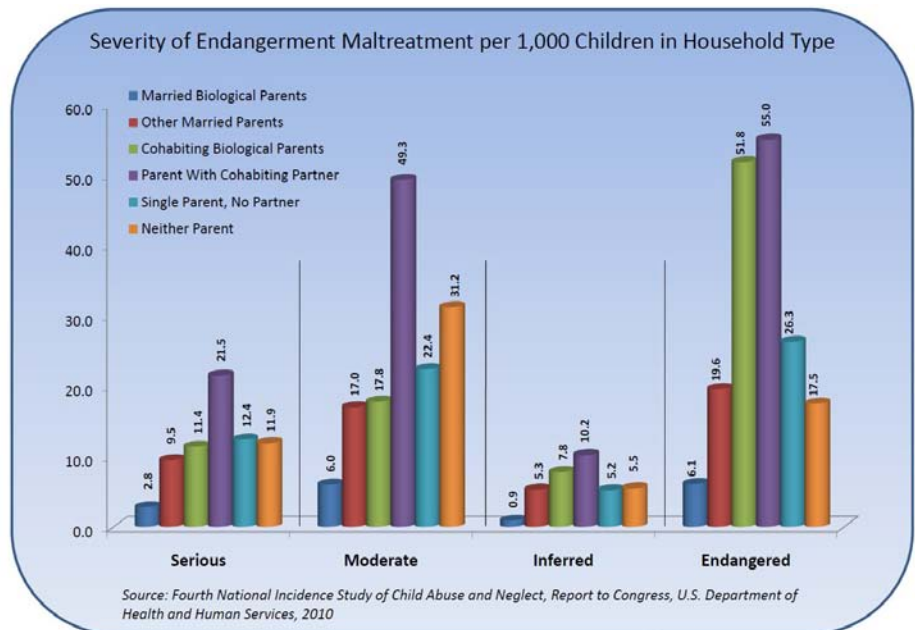
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These results, taken together with the abuse rates show us a significantly increased rate of maltreatment when an unrelated party is introduced into the family either through marriage (step families) or cohabitation. Rates for single parent families are higher than step-families for abuse but lower for neglect.

Our final chart looks at the severity of harm by family type for all maltreatment classified under the endangerment standard. Serious harm results are similar to those under the harm standard with children in single parent cohabiting household having the highest rate by far at 21.5 children per 1,000. For moderate harm, the rate for children in these households was 49.3 per 1,000 compared to 6.0 per 1,000 for children living with married biological parents, 16.0 for children living with other married parents and 22.4 for children living with single parents. Those children deemed endangered under this standard were 55.0 per 1,000 for children in single parent cohabiting households compared to 6.1 per 1,000 for children living with married biological parents. The rates were 19.6 per thousand for other married parents and 26.3 per 1,000 for single parents.



These graphs, and the study taken as a whole, demonstrate that the rate of neglect and abuse (regardless of the standard used for classification) is highest in homes with a single parent who is cohabiting. Single parent homes and other married parents (including step families) differ in their respective levels depending on the type of abuse and the standard used, but both are always significantly higher than the rates for children living in households comprised of married biological parents. The results are undeniable; children of divorce, children in single parent families and children living in cohabiting homes are at a much greater risk of abuse and neglect.





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### **RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF POTENTIAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

As those who work with children, and those interested in ministering to at risk kids, it is important that we understand the warning signs of potential abuse and neglect. This section includes some general guidance as well as specific things to look for in both children and their parents for the different types of abuse and neglect. I have gathered this information from the various sources listed at the end of this article. Accordingly, I have not endeavored to cite a source on each individual sign. The single best source I have found, and the starting point for many of the items in these lists, is the publication [Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms](#) from The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The signs listed in this section may be indicators of abuse and neglect. The existence of one sign or even the prolonged existence of one sign does not necessarily prove the existence of abuse or neglect and may be related to other factors. While we must be on the lookout for potential signs of abuse and neglect, we must also proceed with caution in concluding that abuse or neglect is present based only on these signs. We will talk more later in this article about what to do when you suspect abuse, but it is important to remember that false accusations of abuse or neglect can harm not only the accused by the child you are trying to protect in the first place. In the end, the best way to assess a situation is to have a personal relationship with the child that you have developed beforehand that will allow you to discern what is going on. Of course, this is not always possible.

Each section includes potential signs of abuse to look for in the children and to look for in parents. The section of general signs also includes things to look for specifically related to the relationship between the child and the parent.

#### **General Signs and Information**

We will look at signs to look for when it comes to specific types of abuse and neglect later, but the following represent general signs that a child might be suffering maltreatment.

Things to look for in children:

- ✓ Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- ✓ Has not received help for physical or medical problems brought to the parents' attention
- ✓ Has learning problems (or difficulty concentrating) that cannot be attributed to specific physical or psychological causes
- ✓ Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- ✓ Lacks adult supervision





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- ✓ Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- ✓ Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home

Things to look for in parents:

- ✓ Shows little concern for the child
- ✓ Denies the existence of—or blames the child for—the child's problems in school or at home
- ✓ Asks teachers or other caregivers to use harsh physical discipline if the child misbehaves
- ✓ Sees the child as entirely bad, worthless, or burdensome
- ✓ Demands a level of physical or academic performance the child cannot achieve
- ✓ Looks primarily to the child for care, attention, and satisfaction of emotional needs

Things to look for in the relationship between the child and parent:

- ✓ Rarely touch or look at each other
- ✓ Consider their relationship entirely negative
- ✓ State that they do not like each other

### **Physical Abuse**

Things to look for in children:

- ✓ Burns
- ✓ Bites
- ✓ Bruises
- ✓ Welts
- ✓ Lacerations or Cuts
- ✓ Broken bones
- ✓ Black eyes
- ✓ Hair loss
- ✓ Fading bruises or other marks
- ✓ Seems frightened of parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- ✓ Shrinks at the approach of adults
- ✓ Seems always watchful or on alert for something bad to happen
- ✓ Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- ✓ Injuries appear to have a pattern (as from a foreign object)
- ✓ Uncommon location for injuries (e.g., underarms, neck, back, stomach, thighs)
- ✓ Shies away from touch





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- ✓ Flinches at sudden movement
- ✓ Appears afraid to go home
- ✓ Wears inappropriate clothing (e.g., a coat on a warm day) to cover up bruises
- ✓ Recurring injuries with inconsistent, implausible or guarded explanations
- ✓ Hesitation regarding showing certain body parts
- ✓ Acts out aggression on others
- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Has fantasies, artwork or threats of violence
- ✓ Regression
- ✓ Nightmares
- ✓ Insomnia

Things to look for in parents:

- ✓ Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury
- ✓ Describes the child as "evil," or in some other very negative way
- ✓ Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- ✓ Has a history of abuse as a child

### **Emotional Abuse**

Things to look for in children:

- ✓ Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- ✓ Is inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example)
- ✓ Is inappropriately infantile (frequently rocking or head-banging, for example)
- ✓ Excessively withdrawn, fearful or anxious about doing something wrong
- ✓ Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- ✓ Has attempted suicide
- ✓ Reports a lack of attachment to the parent
- ✓ Doesn't seem to be attached to caregiver
- ✓ Dramatic changes in behavior
- ✓ Unusual fears for the child's age
- ✓ Inability to react with emotion
- ✓ Inability to develop emotional bonds with others







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- ✓ Hides eyes
- ✓ Lowered gaze
- ✓ Biting lips or tongue
- ✓ Forcing a smile
- ✓ Fidgeting
- ✓ Annoyance
- ✓ Defensiveness
- ✓ Exaggeration
- ✓ Confusion or denial
- ✓ Feeling of nakedness, defeat, alienation or lack of worth
- ✓ Regression
- ✓ Poor self-esteem
- ✓ Angry acts
- ✓ Withdrawal
- ✓ Insecurity
- ✓ Alcohol or drug abuse
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Difficulty in relationships
- ✓ Eating disorders
- ✓ Sleep disorders/nightmares
- ✓ Speech disorders
- ✓ Developmental delays
- ✓ Nervous disorders or somatic symptoms

Things to look for in parents:

- ✓ Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- ✓ Is unconcerned about the child and refuses to consider offers of help for the child's problems
- ✓ Overtly rejects the child

### **Sexual Abuse**

Things to look for in children:

- ✓ Has difficulty walking or sitting
- ✓ Suddenly refuses to participate in physical activities
- ✓ Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- ✓ Experiences a sudden change in appetite





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- ✓ Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- ✓ Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- ✓ Runs away
- ✓ Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- ✓ Makes a strong effort to avoid a specific person without an obvious reason
- ✓ Compulsive masturbation and teaching others to masturbate
- ✓ Excessive curiosity about sex or sexuality
- ✓ Stained, torn or bloody underclothing
- ✓ Frequent, unexplained, sore throats, yeast or urinary tract infections
- ✓ Bed wetting
- ✓ Soiling pants
- ✓ Playing with feces
- ✓ Complaints of pain or itching in genitalia
- ✓ Excessive bathing
- ✓ Withdrawn or aggressive
- ✓ Sexual inference in artwork
- ✓ Overly compulsive behavior
- ✓ Fears and phobias
- ✓ Sleep problems
- ✓ Fire starting
- ✓ Somatic symptoms (e.g., stomach aches, headaches, etc.)

Things to look for in parents:

- ✓ Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- ✓ Is secretive and isolated
- ✓ Is jealous or controlling with family members

### **Neglect**

For purposes of signs of neglect, we have not endeavored to break them down by type of neglect. Recognizing the particular type of neglect is not nearly as important as knowing the signs of neglect themselves.

Things to look for in children:

- ✓ Is frequently absent from school
- ✓ Begs or steals food or money





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- ✓ Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- ✓ Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- ✓ Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- ✓ Is frequently unsupervised, left alone or allowed to play in unsafe conditions
- ✓ Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- ✓ States that there is no one at home to provide care
- ✓ Poor hygiene including lice, scabies, severe or untreated diaper rash, bed sores
- ✓ Squinting
- ✓ Untreated injury or illness
- ✓ Lack of immunizations
- ✓ Indicators of prolonged exposure to the elements (sunburn, insect bites, etc.)
- ✓ Height and weight significantly below age level

Things to look for in parents:

- ✓ Appears to be indifferent to the child
- ✓ Seems apathetic or depressed
- ✓ Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- ✓ Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

### **A WORD OF WARNING ABOUT THE SIGNS OF ABUSE AS THEY RELATE TO CHILDREN OF DIVORCE**

As I was putting this article together and listing the different potential signs of abuse, I noticed some stark similarities between that list and the various reactions you might see from children of divorce. Indeed, many of the “signs” are very similar. Items included in both listings would include the following (and perhaps others):

- Shows sudden changes in behavior or school performance
- Is always watchful, as though preparing for something bad to happen
- Lacks adult supervision
- Is overly compliant, passive, or withdrawn
- Comes to school or other activities early, stays late, and does not want to go home
- Acts out aggression on others
- Fear
- Withdrawal





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- Depression
- Regression
- Shows extremes in behavior, such as overly compliant or demanding behavior, extreme passivity, or aggression
- Is inappropriately adult (parenting other children, for example)
- Reports a lack of attachment to the parent
- Dramatic changes in behavior
- Unusual fears for the child's age
- Inability to react with emotion
- Inability to develop emotional bonds with others
- Confusion or denial
- Angry acts
- Withdrawal
- Insecurity
- Difficulty in relationships

While children of divorce are at an increased risk of abuse, we also must be cognizant of the fact that some of the potential signs of abuse may instead be related to the divorce itself. We must be cautious about jumping to conclusions while at the same time be diligent in the protection of children. In short, some discernment is required in ascertaining whether a particular sign could be an indicator of abuse or neglect or is actually just a reaction to their parents' divorce.

### ***WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT***

#### ***General Goals***

Before we jump into the specifics about what to do when you suspect abuse or neglect, there are some overarching goals, or guiding principles, which we should all have when it comes to abuse and neglect, particularly the church. These include:

- ✚ Protecting the child from any further harm
- ✚ Stopping the offender's abuse
- ✚ Healing the victim's brokenness
- ✚ Restoring the family (or helping victims to mourn the loss of relationship where this is not possible)





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Although there is a legal system and various state agencies set up to deal with issues of abuse and neglect, as the church we cannot and must not forget that our primary goal is ultimate healing and restoration through a relationship with Jesus Christ. The gospel of Christ must guide us in all that we do.

### ***What To Do When You Suspect Abuse or Neglect?***

What to do when you suspect abuse or neglect is a very serious thing, and you should have a plan both as an individual and as a church. As an individual, if you suspect abuse or neglect you should:

- Pray for guidance in how to handle the situation.
- Document what you have observed that has led to your suspicions. This should be done in writing.
- Do not approach the child (we will talk later about how to talk to a child who has told you they are being abused or whom you find out has been abused or neglected).
- Follow your church's policy on reporting suspected abuse.
- As an individual who works with kids, you should check your state laws to determine if you are required to report the suspected abuse to authorities or if reporting it to the designated person in your church is sufficient. You can find out more about this in the section of this article on who is required to report suspected abuse and neglect.

Of course, as a church, we should be training our volunteers in the list above, but we also need to have a church wide plan for dealing with instances of suspected abuse or neglect. Once you suspect abuse or neglect, that it not the right time to try to develop a policy for dealing with. Your church generally, and your children's ministry in particular, should have a policy in place for dealing with suspected abuse and neglect long before you ever encounter it. These policies will vary by church, and based on state law, but the policies should generally:

- Have a point person at your church (a children's ministry director, family ministry coordinator or executive pastor) who is the individual ultimately responsible for receiving reports of suspected abuse and reporting those suspicions to the appropriate authorities.
- Have a clear and easy system of reporting. For example, volunteers should report to the person in charge of the program they are working in, or the church's "point person" if that leader is not available. Program leaders should report all suspicions to the church's abuse and neglect "point person."
- Stress the need for confidentiality.





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- If the suspected abuse involves a volunteer, or staff, at the church, that person should be immediately removed from working with children pending the resolution of an investigation.
- Parents should be notified, where appropriate. Note that caution should be used where the suspected abuse or neglect was, or may have been, at the hands of parents.
- Train your volunteers and staff on the signs of abuse and neglect and the procedure for, and importance of, reporting suspected neglect abuse.
- Churches should also check with their counsel and/or insurance carrier regarding responsibility for reporting suspicions.

A sample policy (derived from a review of numerous policies from various churches and denominations) is included as Appendix A to this article).

### **HOW TO TALK TO AN ABUSED OR NEGLECTED CHILD**

If you find out for certain that a child is being abused, or if a child comes right out and tells you, it can be an uncomfortable situation, and it is often difficult to find the “right thing” to say to them. Many times there is no “right thing” to say, but you can be prepared by knowing how to handle the situation. Here are some suggestions.

**Avoid Denial and remain calm.** If your actions, tone or words reveal a sense of denial or shock or disgust, the child may react by shutting down. You need to remain as calm and as reassuring as you possibly can. Don’t be afraid to talk about it. If children sense that you are afraid to talk, they will not bring it up and they will definitely not open up. Remember, children don’t benefit from “not thinking about it” or “putting things out of their mind.” They benefit from talking about their emotions and working through what they have experienced.

**Listen to what they have to say and empathize with them.** So many times, our natural inclination is to want to jump straight to problem solving or solution mode. A child who has been abused or neglected, and is willing to talk to you about it, is crying out to be listened to. Be a person that they can talk to, cry with and mourn with. Remember that empathy is not the same thing as feeling sorry for them.

**Be nurturing, comforting, and affectionate, but be sure to do this in an “appropriate” way.** Children who have suffered abuse often will be confused by, and fearful of, intimacy or touch. Hugs and other physical comfort might not be welcomed. One good rule of thumb is to only provide such physical contact when the child seeks it. Do not instigate it yourself.





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**Don't interrogate or ask leading questions.** Let the child tell you what happened in their own words. Any questions should be open-ended questions designed only to get the child talking. Like so many other traumatic events in a child's life, they benefit greatly just by having someone to talk to. Resist the urge to solve their problems and just listen. One site I reviewed suggested that you ask only the following four questions as it pertains to the abuse or neglect itself:

- What happened?
- Who did this to you?
- Where were you when this happened?
- When did this happen?

Document what the child says in reply to these questions in case it is needed for the investigation.

**Talk with the child.** Give them age appropriate information. Lack of information often breeds fear and insecurity. As we said earlier, you may be uncomfortable, but that discomfort pales in comparison to what the child who has been abused or neglected has been through.

**Reassure the child that they did nothing wrong.** Many children who are abused or neglected begin to think it is their fault. Many have even been told this over and over by their abuser until they accept it as fact. Reassure them often and convincingly that they did nothing to cause the abuse or neglect and it is not their fault. Let them know that they are doing the right thing by talking about it.

**Let them know that you take what they say very seriously.** As you can imagine, children who have been abused or neglected by a caregiver often have a hard time trusting adults. Let them know that what they tell you matters and that you take it very seriously. Make sure that you listen in such a way that conveys this message as well.

**Remember that safety comes first.** If the situation is best handled by a professional and your involvement might bring further harm upon the child, refer it to the professional and take a secondary role in supporting the child.

**Give the child choices.** Children who have been abused often feel as if they have no control over their lives. Many times, that sense of control has been stripped from them by the abuser or neglecter. Give them choices over things that they can control to help rebuild a sense of control over their own lives.







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**Protect the child.** If something is causing an abused or neglected child trauma or grief, do not hesitate to cut that activity short. Don't intentionally continue with something that is causing them mental anguish.

**Avoid making promises.** These children have been let down time and again in the most extreme way. Don't make promises that may need to be broken as the situation proceeds. For example, don't promise the child, "I won't tell anyone" when your moral or legal duties may require you to report certain disclosures.

**Help the child to develop a support system.** Enlist other adults who care for the child to help build a support system. Let the child choose who should be part of the support system and assist them in putting it together, but do not betray a child's confidence by talking to other adults about their situation without their permission (even if it is for purposes of building a support system).

**Ask for help when you're in over your head.** Don't be hesitant to admit that you need help. We can't all be experts in everything. If you feel in over your head, refer the situation to a Christian counselor or someone with more experience in dealing with these types of situations.

**Pray with and for the child.** Prayer is a powerful thing. Pray that God would comfort the child and that his will would prevail. Pray that the child would find physical and emotional healing through Jesus Christ.

**Point the child to God.** God is the source of all healing and the means by which these kids can be made whole again. However, be careful about "Christian platitudes" like "God never gives us more than we can handle." Help the child to understand that the blame for what has been done to them belongs on the perpetrator of the act and not on God. Your love in this situation is comforting and reassuring, but it is the unconditional love of God that can truly help to heal the child who has suffered abuse or neglect.

### REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

#### *Where to Report Suspected Child Maltreatment*

To find out who to call in your state, visit the [State Child Abuse Reporting Numbers](#) page at the Child Welfare Information Gateway. The Child Welfare Information Gateway also includes a listing of [Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers](#) that you should keep on file.

You can also contact Childhelp®. Childhelp® is a national organization providing crisis assistance and other counseling and referral services. The [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#) is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days





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a week, with professional crisis counselors who have access to a database of 55,000 emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are anonymous. Contact them at 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453).

### **Who is Required to Report Suspected Abuse?**

While anyone who suspects abuse is allowed and encouraged to report it, most states have mandatory reporting laws for certain professionals. Many states include:

- Social Workers
- Teachers and other school personnel
- Physicians and other health care workers
- Mental health professionals
- Child care providers
- Medical examiners and coroners
- Law enforcement officers

Selected states also include:

- Commercial film or photograph processors (11 states)
- Substance abuse counselors (14 states)
- Probation and parole officers (17 states)
- Domestic violence workers (7 states)
- Animal control or humane officers (7 states)
- Members of the clergy (26 states)

Additionally, there are 18 states (plus Puerto Rico) where anyone suspecting abuse is required to report it. These states include Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming.

Some states allow for anonymous reports while many states require that mandatory reporters include their name in the report. For more information on the specific laws of your state, please visit the [State Statutes Search](#) website from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Child Welfare Information Gateway.





## CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – DEFINING, RECOGNIZING AND REPORTING IT AND THE INCREASED RISK FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE, COHABITATION, AND SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

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09/19/2011 through 10/17/2011 (Originally published in nine articles)

### ***Setting Straight Some Common Fears About Reporting***

Some people fear reporting child abuse for any number of reasons. Some of the more common fears, as well as information to set the record straight about those fears, are:

*I don't want to get involved in someone else's family business.* You need to remember that the effects of abuse last a lifetime. Your involvement can help to break the cycle of abuse which all too often passes from one generation to the next. Jesus calls us to care "for the least of these." Don't let your uncomfortableness with the current situation or fears about getting involved stand in the way of doing what is right. As a society, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to abuse and neglect.

*What if my report breaks up their home?* Not every report made to state and local authorities results in children being taken out of the home. Professional agencies offer several other avenues such as parenting classes and anger management that can help an abuser to stop the abuse. In the case of severe abuse or neglect, breaking up the home may be necessary, but you can rest comfortably knowing that it was in the best interest of the child.

*The abuser will know it was me who called.* In most states, abuse and neglect can be reported anonymously. While this fear is understandable, I would ask you to stop for a second and reflect on the fact that you are afraid of the abuser. Imagine how much more frightened a child who has no means of protecting themselves must feel.

*It won't make a difference.* If you suspect mistreatment, it is better for the sake of the child to be safe than sorry. Your action could be the one that saves a child. If you suspect and report abuse, you will have done your part to try to put an end to the cycle.





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### SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Most of the information in this article was garnered from the following sources. While I have not attempted to site individual sources for each piece of information presented, I am grateful to these resources for providing the information that comprises this article. I hope that the accumulation and synthesis of the information from these numerous sources will help those who work with kids, and particularly those who work with kids in a church setting, to be better equipped to understand the risks and types of child maltreatment, recognize the signs of maltreatment and develop a plan for responding to suspected maltreatment.

- [What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm) (April 2008), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
([www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/whatiscan.cfm))
- [Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CM_Surveillance-a.pdf) (January 2008), Department of Health and Human Services: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.  
([http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CM\\_Surveillance-a.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/CM_Surveillance-a.pdf))
- [Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect \(NIS-4\)](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/reports/natl_incid/nis4_report_congress_full_pdf_jan2010.pdf) (2010), Sedlak, A.J., Mettenburg, J., Basena, M., Petta, I., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S., Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.  
([http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse\\_neglect/natl\\_incid/reports/natl\\_incid/nis4\\_report\\_congress\\_full\\_pdf\\_jan2010.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/natl_incid/reports/natl_incid/nis4_report_congress_full_pdf_jan2010.pdf))
- [Recognizing Child Abuse and Neglect: Signs and Symptoms](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm) (June 2007), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
(<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/signs.cfm>)
- [Toll-Free Crisis Hotline Numbers](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/tollfree.cfm) (May 2011), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
(<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/tollfree.cfm>)
- [State Child Abuse Reporting Numbers](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=W-00082) (September 2011), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
([http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl\\_dsp.cfm?rs\\_id=5&rate\\_chno=W-00082](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/reslist/rl_dsp.cfm?rs_id=5&rate_chno=W-00082))





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- [Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/define.pdf) (February 2011), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
([http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/define.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/define.pdf))
- [Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/clergymandated.pdf) (April 2010), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
([http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/clergymandated.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/clergymandated.pdf))
- [Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: Summary of State Laws](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm) (April 2010), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.  
([http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/manda.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/manda.cfm))
- [Child Abuse and Neglect](http://helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm) (Accessed 09/02/2011), Helpguide.org.  
([http://helpguide.org/mental/child\\_abuse\\_physical\\_emotional\\_sexual\\_neglect.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm))
- [Child Abuse FAQs](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/ca-faqs/?searchterm=child%20abuse) (Accessed 09/02/2011), Faith Trust Institute.  
(<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/learn-the-basics/ca-faqs/?searchterm=child%20abuse>)
- [Signs and Symptoms](http://www.childhelpinfocenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=41) (Accessed 09/02/2011), Arizona Child Abuse Info Center.  
([http://www.childhelpinfocenter.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=41](http://www.childhelpinfocenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=41))
- [Fact Sheet: Emotional Child Abuse](http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/emotional_child_abuse.pdf?docID=122) (Accessed 09/02/2011), Prevent Child Abuse America.  
([http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/emotional\\_child\\_abuse.pdf?docID=122](http://member.preventchildabuse.org/site/DocServer/emotional_child_abuse.pdf?docID=122))
- [Principals of Working With Traumatized Children](http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working_children.htm) (Accessed 09/02/2011), Perry, Bruce.  
([http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working\\_children.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/bruceperry/working_children.htm))
- Johnson, Martin, [When the Bough Breaks](http://www.childrensministry.com/articles/when-the-bough-breaks) (Accessed 09/14/2011), ChildrensMinistry.com  
(<http://www.childrensministry.com/articles/when-the-bough-breaks>)
- Hayes, Alley & Wagner, Nate, [They Are In Our Midst](http://www.childrensministry.com/articles/they-are-in-our-midst) (Accessed 09/14/2011), ChildrensMinistry.com  
<http://www.childrensministry.com/articles/they-are-in-our-midst>
- Wilcox, W. Bradford, [Why Marriage Matters, Third Edition](http://www.americanvalues.org/bookstore/pub.php?pub=81) (August 2001), Institute for American Values & National Marriage Project (<http://www.americanvalues.org/bookstore/pub.php?pub=81>).



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- [State Statutes Search](#), Department of Health and Human Services: The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the U.S.

This vehicle allows you to search for specific state statutes related to the following areas involving abuse and neglect:

- Child Witnesses to Domestic Violence
- Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Cross-Reporting Among Responders to Child Abuse and Neglect
- Definitions of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Definitions of Domestic Violence
- Disclosure of Confidential Child Abuse and Neglect Records
- Establishment and Maintenance of Central Registries for Child Abuse Reports
- Immunity for Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Making and Screening Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Parental Drug Use as Child Abuse
- Penalties for Failure to Report and False Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect
- Representation of Children in Child Abuse and Neglect Proceedings
- Review and Expunction of Central Registries and Reporting Records

It is a fantastic vehicle for researching the laws in your state.

([http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state/index.cfm?event=stateStatutes.showSearchForm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state/index.cfm?event=stateStatutes.showSearchForm))



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### ***APPENDIX A – A Sample Policy on Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect***

The following sample policy on reported suspected child abuse and neglect is based on an online search for sample policies. A number of such “sample policies” were located, and a listing of links is included at the end of this appendix. Many were very similar, and rather than reproduce them all here, I have compiled one singular sample policy which includes elements of many of the policies reviewed. Before we get to a specific sample policy on reporting suspected neglect and abuse, I wanted to share some of the other sections included in many of the general safety and security policies. They included:

- Required Screening for Volunteers
- Monitoring/Supervision
- Rules Regarding Transportation of Children
- Rules Regarding Overnight Activities
- How the Church should Respond to Allegations of Abuse Within the Church

If you are compiling a comprehensive policy manual, you will likely want to include these sections in addition to the sample policy on reporting below.

#### ***A SAMPLE POLICY ON REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT***

The following is compiled from the various samples reviewed. Portions of certain policies have been borrowed and reproduced in whole, and we would like to thank those churches for making their policies available online to benefit the entire church community. Other sections are based on detailed information included earlier in this article and have not been duplicated in this sample policy.

#### **Types of Abuse and Neglect**

SEE THE SECTIONS OF THIS ARTICLE ENTITLED “WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?” AND “DEFINING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT” FOR DEFINITIONS TO INCLUDE IN THIS PORTION OF YOUR POLICY MANUAL.

#### **Signs of Abuse and Neglect**

SEE THE SECTION OF THIS ARTICLE ENTITLED “RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF POTENTIAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT” FOR A LISTING OF SIGNS OF POTENTIAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT WHICH CAN BE INCLUDED IN THIS PORTION OF YOUR POLICY MANUAL.







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### **Training of Volunteers**

All staff and volunteers will be required to attend/review training including, but not limited to, defining abuse, recognizing signs of abuse, dealing with abused children and understanding the policies set forth herein. This training will be provided periodically by the church.

### **Person Within the Church Responsible for Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect**

\_\_\_\_\_ has been named the person responsible for investigating and reporting suspicions of abuse and neglect for this church and is referred to in this policy manual as the “Designated Reporter.” In the absence of the Designated Reporter, suspicions should be reported to \_\_\_\_\_ referred to herein as the “Alternate Reporter.”

### **Responding to A Child Who Tells You They Have Been Abused**

SEE THE SECTION OF THIS ARTICLE ENTITLED “HOW TO TALK TO AN ABUSED OR NEGLECTED CHILD” FOR ADVICE TO INCLUDE IN YOUR POLICY MANUAL ON HOW TO HANDLE THIS SITUATION.

### **Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect**

The laws of the State of \_\_\_\_\_ require that \_\_\_\_\_ (INCLUDE A LISTING OF ANYONE IN THE CHURCH WHO MIGHT BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO REPORT) report any incidences where child abuse or neglect is reasonably suspected. [THIS INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND IN THE SECTION OF THIS ARTICLE ENTITLED “REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT.”] While other volunteers or staff may not be required by law to report suspected abuse, we do have a moral responsibility to protect those entrusted to our care, and this policy mandates that any suspected abuse or neglect be reported to the Designated Reporter or the Alternate Reporter in his absence. [A SAMPLE FORM IS INCLUDED AT THE END OF THIS APPENDIX] Once reported to the Designated/Alternate Reporter, the person making the report will maintain the confidentiality of the parties involved and cooperate with church and state officials in any investigation.

In certain extreme circumstance, those suspecting abuse are encouraged to report directly to state authorities. The appropriate numbers for reporting suspicions directly are included in the following section. Those circumstances would include:

- Where there is immediate danger
- When the Designated Reporter and Alternate Reporters are not available





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- When the person suspecting the abuse or neglect does not believe the Designated or Alternative Reporters has effectively dealt with those suspicions

Reports to local authorities may be made confidentially or anonymously. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith and without malice. "In good faith" means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true. It is not the responsibility of the reporting person or the paid staff to substantiate any allegations or suspicions.

Reasonable suspicion is a suspicion that a reasonable person would have, based on the facts and drawing on that person's experiences and training. Therefore, not all people would necessarily come to the same suspicion. We are not all expected to be experts. It is not our duty to investigate suspicions of abuse. Our duty lies in appropriately reporting so that the vulnerable will be protected.

No single indicator of abuse or neglect is necessarily cause for alarm, but it may be cause to observe a given person or situation more closely. When multiple indicators appear together, however, it is appropriate to discuss the situation with someone else in the church or, in urgent cases, to make an actual report to the civil authorities.

Reporting abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, failing to report abuse can have severe consequences to a child at risk. Therefore, if you have reasonable cause to suspect abuse, you should talk with the Designated Reporter to see what steps could and should be taken to protect the child and help the family.

### Duties of the Designated Reporter and/or Alternative Reporter

Upon receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect, the Designated/Alternate Reporter will undertake the following steps:

1. Immediately take all steps needed to ensure the safety of the suspected victim. This must be the primary concern in all suspected cases of abuse and neglect. If imminent threat exists, the Designated/Alternative Reporter will immediately call 911 or local authorities to ensure the safety of the alleged victim.
2. Conduct an expedient investigation to determine whether or not the suspicions of abuse or neglect meet the standard of "reasonable suspicion."
3. Take all reasonable steps, where possible, to ensure that the alleged perpetrator of the abuse/neglect has no further contact with the alleged victim.





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4. Notify the parents except in those cases where it is suspected that the parents might be the perpetrators of the abuse or neglect and/or be allowing the abuse or neglect to continue.
5. If the suspicion is deemed to be reasonable, report the suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities as quickly as possible.
6. In the suspicion is not deemed to be reasonable, the Designated/Alternative Reporter will submit that determination to the Elders/Review Board for a second opinion.
7. Notify the reporter of the suspected abuse of the decision to report/not report. In the event that the suspicions are not deemed reasonable, a reason should be given to the person originally making the report and they should be counseled on their options to independently report their suspicions.
8. All reports of suspected abuse will be documented in writing.
9. Maintain confidentiality.

### Where to Report

USE THE INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THIS ARTICLE IN THE SECTION ENTITLED “REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT” AND/OR LOCAL RESOURCES TO LIST THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES TO BE NOTIFIED IN THE EVENT OF SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT.

### **BEFORE ADOPTING THIS POLICY FOR YOUR CHURCH**

You should check with your legal counsel, insurance carrier and other professionals about the legality, applicability and/or completeness of the above sample policy. The policy may need to be altered for the laws of your state and/or requirements of your church, denomination or insurance carrier.

### **POLICY EXAMPLES**

Here are some of the policies I reviewed in putting together this appendix:

- [http://download.cpg.org/insurance/publications/pdf/larg\\_font\\_model\\_policies.pdf](http://download.cpg.org/insurance/publications/pdf/larg_font_model_policies.pdf)
- [http://www.fairmountchurch.org/PDFs/youth/ CPP.pdf](http://www.fairmountchurch.org/PDFs/youth/_CPP.pdf)
- <http://immanuel-oxford.org/ESW/Files/SafeChurch.pdf>
- <http://www.cypressbible.org/assetmanager/assets/Policy%20Manual/ReportingSuspectedChildAbuse.pdf>
- [http://www.nccucc.org/resources/Safe\\_Church\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.nccucc.org/resources/Safe_Church_Policies.pdf)
- <http://www.edod.org/safe.pdf>
- <http://www.brethren.org/childprotection/documents/policy-beacon-heights-pdf.pdf>
- <http://evangelicalucc.org/files/SafeChurchSummary.pdf>





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- <http://www.firstchurchucc.org/08SafeChurchPolicy.pdf>
- <http://www.inumc.org/pages/detail/920>
- <http://www.rpcusa.org/files/child-protection-policy.pdf>
- <http://www.stpaulswickford.org/vestry/SafeChurchPolicy.pdf>
- <http://www.dioceseofnewark.org/safechurchpolicy.pdf>
- <http://www.immanuelcma.org/pdf/safeplace.pdf>
- [http://harmonybaptist.net/forms/Child\\_Protection\\_Policy\\_2011.pdf](http://harmonybaptist.net/forms/Child_Protection_Policy_2011.pdf)
- <http://www.hopeingod.org/sites/default/files/documents/Policies%20and%20Definitions%20Regarding%20Inappropriate%20Behavior%20Related%20to%20Children%20at%20Bethlehem.pdf>





## REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1

**Reported By:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Information About Alleged Victim:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age & Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Person Suspected of Misconduct:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to Victim: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_





## REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Date of Report: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2

Please describe the incidents/suspicions of abuse or neglect including date(s), time(s) and locations and nature of the suspected/known abuse or neglect (add additional pages if needed).

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Please describe your observations that gave rise to this report (add additional pages if needed):

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Please list any additional witnesses including names, addresses and phone numbers if available (add additional pages if needed):

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Please include any additional information which may be helpful to the investigation (add additional pages if needed):

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