**Head Start: Keeping Children Safe**

Identifying & Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

#### Introduction

Welcome to the Head Start online course Keeping Children Safe: Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

#### Course Objectives

In this course, you will learn about the prevalence of child abuse in Texas. You will review the legal definitions of child abuse and neglect, learn to identify the red flags, and how to report abuse and neglect if you suspect maltreatment. Texas law requires that a school employee, who has “cause to believe” that a child is being abused or neglected, must file a report immediately, and no later than 48 hours.

According to the Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas, 175 children will be abused today across the State. One in every ten will be abused before their 18th birthday. At any given time, over 79,oo0 minors will be victims of human trafficking in Texas

In 2018, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) reported that 66, 352 children had been abused---3,000 children more than the previous year. Nearly 42% of the victims were under the age of three. Sadly, studies show that the greatest perpetrators of child abuse are parents.

#### Did you know?

More than fifty-four percent of perpetrators of abuse or neglect of children are women, and forty-five percent are men.

#### DFPS Data Book

The DFPS has created an interactive web page that compiles the numbers of alleged and confirmed allegations by type of abuse. You may want to spend some time researching and configuring data by county, type of abuse, and year. [Access the Data Book here](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Data_Book/Child_Protective_Investigations/Investigations/Types_of_Abuse.asp).

#### What is Child Abuse?

There are four major types of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. In this section, you will learn how to recognize the physical and behavioral indicators of child abuse and human trafficking. Identifying the warning signs of abuse is the first step in combatting it.

The consequences of abuse are numerous. Abuse impacts a child physically and emotionally. It affects the child’s life-long health and quality of life. Studies show that abuse during childhood may be linked to risky behaviors later in life, such as drug use and alcoholism, as well as physical and mental health issues, such as depression, suicide attempts, cancer, and strokes.

The Texas Family Code delineates the legal definitions of abuse and neglect, as well as clarifies who is responsible by law to report child abuse. A[ccess the Texas Family Code here](https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/DOCS/FA/HTM/FA.261.HTM).

#### Did you know?

In 2017, sixty-five percent of the reports alleging child abuse and neglect were reported by professionals. Almost twenty percent of these were from education personnel.

**Physical Abuse**

One form of abuse is physical abuse. Physical abuse is an injury that results in substantial harm to a child. The injury is at variance, or inconsistent, with the explanation given. Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent someone from inflicting injury and substantial harm to a child is also considered physical abuse.

The injury can be a result of punching, beating, shaking, kicking, biting, throwing, stabbing, hitting, burning, choking, or otherwise harming a child. Regardless of whether the person intended to hurt the child or not, these injuries can be considered physical abuse.

The warning signs of physical abuse may include:

* Frequent injuries in unusual patterns and without adequate explanation, such as bruises, human bites, black eyes, cigarette burns, lacerations, or fractures.
* Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days.
* Excessive school tardiness or absences
* Fear of certain people or places
* An unwillingness to reveal injuries
* Sudden changes in behavior, such as being passive, withdrawn, emotionless, or demonstrations of disruptive and destructive behavior
* Aggression towards other children

**Sexual abuse**

A second form of abuse is sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is any sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare. This includes continuous sexual abuse, sexual indecency, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, or using the child to create obscene or pornographic material. Failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct against a child is also considered sexual abuse.

The warning signs of sexual abuse may include:

* Difficulty with walking or sitting
* Torn clothing, stained or bloody underwear
* Genital pain, itching or injury
* Signs of sexually transmitted diseases
* Inappropriate sexual language, displays of affection, behaviors, or play
* New names for body parts
* Knowledge of sexual relations beyond what is expected for the child’s age
* Problems with sleeping
* Sudden personality changes or fearfulness
* Extreme fear of being alone with adults of a certain sex

**Emotional Abuse**

Another type of abuse is emotional abuse. Emotional abuse is mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning. Emotional abuse concerns the child’s psychological state--the child's mental stability as demonstrated by mood, behavior, and thoughts. It includes extreme punishment, such as keeping the child in a dark closet, belittling the child, or rejecting treatment for a child.

Allowing or causing the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury is also considered emotional abuse.

The warning signs of emotional abuse may include

* Rocking, sucking, or biting oneself
* Isolation or low self-esteem
* Changes in sleeping patterns and speech disorders
* Shyness, compliance or passivity
* Cruelty toward others and overly demanding

#### Did you know?

In 2017, national data shows that nearly seventy-five percent of victims were neglected, eighteen percent were physically abused, and eight percent were sexually abused.

#### Neglect

**Another form of abuse is child neglect. Child neglect involves inadequate care of a child. Physical neglect** is failure to provide the necessary food, clothing, and shelter that a child needs to maintain a healthy life. N**eglectful supervision is when a** child is left alone, which could result in substantial harm. Medical neglect is failure to seek, obtain, or administer medical treatment, that could result in substantial harm to a child.

In a**bandonment, the** parent or guardian does not plan to return for the child and leaves the child in a potentially harmful situation. Refusal to accept parental responsibility is when a parent or guardian does not allow the child to return home after being out of the home for any reason.

The warning signs of neglect may include

* A dirty appearance and/or body odor
* Clothing that is dirty, doesn't fit well, or is inappropriate
* Puffiness under the eyes and untreated illnesses
* Disorganized and chaotic home life
* Begging, stealing, or hoarding food
* Exhaustion in the classroom
* Lack of self-esteem
* School tardiness and absenteeism
* Frequent disciplinary problems

To conclude, it is not the responsibility of school employees to investigate allegations or suspicions of abuse or neglect, but rather, to report them. Texas law requires that school employees report the suspected abuse immediately, and no later than 48 hours. More information about reporting child abuse will be covered later in the course.

**Human Sex Trafficking**

Human sex trafficking—referred to as “modern day slavery”-- is the exploitation of a person by another for profit. This exploitation leaves lifelong physical and psychological effects on the victims. Children are especially vulnerable and targets for sex traffickers because of the market demands for young victims. At any given time in Texas, 79,000 minors are victims of sex trafficking.

In a measure to combat human sex trafficking, the Office of the Attorney General of Texas has produced a video to help us recognize the warning signs of this crime and to know what to do if we suspect it is happening. If you would like to learn more about human sex trafficking in Texas, you can view the video at the end of this course.

Here are some of the warning signs of human trafficking:

* Bruises at different stages of healing or other signs of physical maltreatment
* Isolation from family, friends, and community
* Hungry or inappropriately dressed
* Fearful, timid, submissive behaviors
* Signs of having been denied food, water, sleep or medical care
* Changes in school attendance, habits, vocabulary, demeanor, and attitude

In the next section, you will be introduced to a process that Head Start teachers use to identify a child’s overall well-being in the classroom. This four-step process can potentially be used to recognize the warning signs of child abuse th­at you have just learned about.

**Creating Awareness: The Daily Visual Health Check**

To identify health problems in a child, Head Start staff uses the four-step Daily Visual Health Check—Listen-Look-Feel-Smell. This procedure usually takes a minute or less. As you go through these four steps, keep in mind the warning signs of child abuse and neglect that you just learned about. Your awareness can make a difference in a child’s life.

Step 1: Start by listening.

As you greet the child and parent, ask the child how he is doing. Then ask the parent how she is doing. Listen intently to their responses. Ask the parent

- Was anything different last night with Johnny?

- How did Johnny sleep?

- Is he complaining of anything?

- Does he have any complaints of pain?

Step 2: Look for signs of illness.

Get down to Johnny’s level to see him closely.

* What is his general appearance? His mood, comfort, behavior, activity level?

- Is Johnny’s behavior unusual for this time of day?
- Is he clinging to his parent, acting cranky, crying, or fussing?

- Does Johnny appear listless, in pain, or have difficulty moving?

* Check his breathing.

- Is the child coughing, breathing fast, or having difficulty breathing?

* Notice his skin:

- Does he look pale or flushed?

- Does he show signs of a rash, sores, swelling, or bruising?

* Look at his eyes, nose, ears, mouth:

- Does Johnny’s eyes look red, crusty, gooey, or watery?

- Does he have a runny nose?

- Is he pulling at his ear?

- Are there any mouth sores, excessive drooling, or is there difficulty swallowing?

- Is he complaining of his teeth hurting, or is there evidence of cavities?

Step 3: Feel for elevated temperature.

* Gently rub the back of your hand over Johnny’s cheek, forehead, jaw or neck.
* Does he feel unusually warm, cold, or clammy?
* Does his skin feel bumpy?

Step 4: Smell for unusual odors.

* Be aware of unusual odors.
* Does Johnny’s breath smell foul or fruity?
* Is there an unusual or foul smell to his bathroom needs?

If you notice any new marks on his body, or if he is behaving differently, have a brief conversation with him about the mark or behavior. Take action if you have cause to believe that abuse is involved. If you are unsure, make a note and watch for patterns. The importance of awareness cannot be overstated. Continue watching the child the rest of the school day, being mindful of any new or different behaviors.

**Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect**In Texas, anyone who suspects child abuse and neglect has a legal obligation to report it. A professional reporter is **required** by law to report suspicion of abuse or neglect immediately and no later than 48 hours. A professional reporter includes teachers, nurses, doctors, daycare and health employees, and others that work in facilities that are licensed or certified by the state, and that come in contact with children. The law requires that the person who suspects abuse and neglect should be the one to report it.

Anyone who makes a report is protected from liability as long as the report is done in good faith and with no malicious intent. The reporter’s identity remains confidential and may only be revealed to a judge and law enforcement in certain situations.

### If you have witnessed a suspicious situation and are not sure if it is a "warning sign" or abuse, it is best to err on the side of the child’s safety by reporting it. While it would be ideal to have a clear-cut guide that determines whether a given situation constitutes abuse or neglect, there may be other factors that determine whether a situation warrants an investigation.

If a child shares with you about abuse, be a good listener, be supportive, and do not over react. The DFPS provides instructions on how to report suspected abuse and neglect. Visit [Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a Child: A Guide for the Education Professional](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/) (<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/>) for more information on reporting child abuse. At this website, you will find

* [Videos demonstrating realistic reporting scenarios](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/reporting.asp)
* [A walk-through of the web-based eReporting system](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/online.asp)
* [Guidance on commonly asked questions](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/common_concerns.asp)

#### Texas Abuse Hotline

Abuse can be reported by phone, 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling the Texas Abuse Hotline at 1-800-252-5400. You can also submit a report online. Visit the Texas Abuse Hotline website at [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org).

When reporting abuse, provide as much information as you can. Provide

* The child’s name, age, and address
* The suspected abuser’s name, age, and address
* A description of the type of abuse that is suspected
* The names of the child’s parents or guardians
* The names of other witnesses
* Your relationship to the child

If you feel that a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Remember, the emotional and physical trauma suffered by victims of abuse and neglect can last a lifetime. Not only does the abuse affect the victim, it also affects society. The cost in ruined lives and broken families can't be measured. Recognizing the physical and behavioral indicators of abuse is the first step to combatting this crime. Prevention is the key to stopping child abuse in Texas.