

# How to Respond to Child Abuse in Public

The mistreatment of a child by an adult in a public place can be very uncomfortable. There are a few things you can do.

- **Talk to the adult to direct attention away from the child. For example:**
  - *“Shopping with a child can be difficult. Is there anything I can do to help?”*
  - *“My child has gotten upset like that, too.”*
- **Talk to the child to redirect his/her behavior.**
- **Look for an opportunity to praise the parent or the child.**
- **If the child is at risk of harm, offer to help. For example, if the child is left unattended in a grocery cart, stand by the child until the parent returns.**
- **Avoid negative remarks or looks, as it could increase the adult’s anger and make matters worse.**

If you don’t feel safe responding to the mistreatment of a child in public, contact your local police department.



# How to Make a Difference

Preventing Child Abuse...  
We Can Succeed

Everyone can make a difference in the lives of children. Actions you can take to help prevent child abuse include:

- **Be a nurturing parent and seek help if you need it.**
- **Support other parents in times of stress.**
- **Teach children how to be safe and how to protect themselves from abuse.**
- **Believe children if they tell you they’ve been abused and let them know it’s not their fault.**
- **Know the warning signs of child abuse.**
- **Pay attention to the care of all children and report suspected abuse.**
- **Help to strengthen your community by getting involved with agencies that support children and families.**
- **Advocate for legislation that supports children.**
- **Volunteer for or donate to child abuse prevention efforts.**
- **Make child abuse prevention a priority!**

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# Today’s Children, Tomorrow’s Future:

What Everyone Can Do to Prevent and Respond to Child Abuse



# What Is Child Abuse?



Child abuse is any behavior directed toward a child by a parent, guardian, caregiver, family member or other adult that endangers or impairs a child's physical or emotional health and development.

Child abuse affects all segments of society and has no socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic or religious boundaries. Factors that may contribute to child abuse are alcohol and substance abuse, lack of parenting skills, economic difficulties or poverty, domestic violence, and previous victimization.

(Source: National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence)

Child abuse can happen anywhere. Often, the abuser is someone the child knows, such as a parent, caregiver, relative, neighbor, or family friend. An abuser can be anyone who has contact with children.

Child abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. These forms of abuse may occur separately or together. The definitions and common signs are as follows:

- **Physical Abuse** – A non-accidental injury to a child that may include beating, burning, biting or shaking a child. Signs may include unexplained bruises, burns, black eyes, welts or other injuries; apparent fear of a parent or caregiver; and school absences.
- **Emotional Abuse** – May involve verbally insulting, yelling, threatening or swearing; controlling, isolating, rejecting or withholding love; or a child witnessing violence in the home. Signs may include extreme changes in behavior, acting overly mature or immature for the child's age, attempted suicide or lack of emotional attachment to the parent.

- **Sexual Abuse** – Any touching or non-touching sexual contact with a child or sexual exploitation of a child including rape, fondling, incest, pornography, exhibitionism or Internet crimes. Signs may include pain, difficulty walking or sitting, redness or injury in the genital or anal area; bedwetting or nightmares; and sexual knowledge or play with toys, self or others that is beyond what is normal for the child's age.
- **Neglect** – Failure to provide for a child's safety or basic physical, emotional, medical or educational needs. Neglect also includes willingly putting a child in harm's way. Signs may be poor hygiene, lack of needed medical or dental care, missing school frequently, malnutrition or a child saying there is no one at home to care for him/her.

Abused children may show physical or behavioral signs. These signs don't prove that a child is being abused, but they could be a signal that the child and family need help.

Signs of child abuse may not always be observed in children. Sometimes, adults or caretakers display behaviors that could put a child at risk. The warning signs listed here might suggest an adult or caretaker needs help if they:

- See the child as worthless or a burden.
- Seem secretive or isolate the child.
- Often blame, belittle or insult the child.
- Deny any problems at school or at home.
- Avoid discussing the child's injuries or give conflicting explanations for them.
- Depend on the child for emotional support.
- Use harsh physical discipline.

# How to Report Abuse

If you have contact with a child you suspect is being or may have been abused or neglected, you should call the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) hotline and/or inform your local law enforcement agency.

The DCFS hotline phone number is 1-800-25ABUSE (1-800-252-2873).

- **Have the following information, if possible:**
  - Name of child
  - Address
  - Date of birth
  - Phone number
  - Information about siblings
  - Parent/guardian's name
- **State why you have reason to believe the child is abused and/or neglected (report factual information and observations).**
- **As a member of the general public, you may make a report to the DCFS hotline without giving your name.**

