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PARENTS!

PROTECT YOUR CHILD FROM ABUSE



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Does your child have a disability or attend special education classes?

Do you know how to protect your child at school? On the bus? In after school programs? At respite care? Anywhere?

California Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance Centers

CATTA

working with communities to prevent child abuse



+ Information is power

what every parent needs to know

This document discusses one of a parent's worst nightmares – and how to avoid it or respond appropriately and get help promptly if it happens.

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Does abuse really happen to kids with disabilities?

Research show that kids with disabilities are abused 3.4 times more often than other children. In 2005, of the 86,725 substantiated child abuse cases in California, 8,172 involved children with disabilities. This represents that 22 children with disabilities are abused every day. Even so, we know that only a fraction of abuse is reported. There are fines and jail penalties for failure to report abuse.

School staff, medical professionals and therapists and most others with a professional responsibility to children are all required by law to report suspicions that abuse may have occurred or knowledge that abuse has happened. In this role they are called “mandated reporters”. They must report to the police or sheriff or to the Department of Child and Family Services.

Parents, neighbors or other community members MAY report suspected child abuse, but are not required by law to do so.

What kind of abuse happens at school?

Any kind of abuse that can occur, can happen. This includes

Physical abuse: hitting, biting, burning, tying the child, placing tape over the child’s mouth, hair pulling, kicking and even isolation for long periods of time.

Verbal abuse includes name-calling, demeaning, humiliation, ridicule, yelling or screaming at the child.

Emotional abuse includes making remarks or having behaviors that insinuate to the child that there is something wrong with the child, or the child is unlovable.

Sexual abuse is any sexual contact with the child, or showing the child anything related to sexuality for the sexual pleasure of the person doing it, and not for any educational purpose.

Bullying. This involves any of the above kinds of abuse and also includes harassing stealing and intimidating. This may involve older or more dominant children bullying younger or more vulnerable children. One child may consistently intimidate a child with a disability to give them money or items such as iPods, cell phones, gaming equipment such as Game Boys, Playstations, etc. They also may threaten harm to the child if they tell their parents about the abuse.



What are the signs of abuse? How would I know?

Some of the typical signs that your child is being hurt at school, either physically (including sexually) or verbally are:

1. The child no longer wants to go to school or get on the bus.
2. There are changes in the child's overall mood.
3. There may be changes in the child's normal patterns of eating, sleeping, and playing. For example the child may be experiencing nightmares, refusal to change clothes for bedtime, changes in reactions to having clothes changed or bathing. Play may begin to include sexual themes or violent themes.
4. The child may regress to earlier stages of development, for example where before the child could eat independently now requires assistance; may regress in toileting skills or may need to sleep with the parents again.

5. The friendly child may now be withdrawn; the happy child may now be sad or sullen.

The essential thing is that there are distinct changes within the child that cannot be attributed to anything going on at home. Of course, some changes in the child may appear whenever the child experiences normal changes or traumas such as: you move residences, a pet dies or a beloved family member moves away. People who are familiar with the child, and the things that are going on in her or his life, can easily identify these signs. The appearance of a symptom listed here, by itself, does not indicate abuse.



Who abuses children with disabilities?

Well, the answer is...anyone. Anyone who is an abuser and has access to the child can abuse the child. Usually it is someone well known to and/or trusted by the child and the family. It is often a member of the immediate family or household.

When the abuse occurs outside of school, the perpetrator can be a family or household member, or someone who often spends time with the child such as a babysitter, or neighbor.

It can also be a professional or paraprofessional who has access to the child, such as a nurse, behavior specialist, parenting skills practitioner or respite care provider. Thus it may be someone who comes to the child's house or that the child sees at the house, someone else's house, or at his or her office.

If the abuse is happening at school, the perpetrator could be a member of the administrative staff (principal or director,

assistant or vice principal, clerk, or secretarial staff), the teaching staff (a teacher, teacher's aide, paraeducator), a volunteer, a parent volunteer, an older student, or visiting professionals such as nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, speech therapists, art, physical, occupational, or other therapists.

The list includes bus drivers, bus driver aides, and transportation coordinators.

In other words, it could be anyone associated with the school. That is why it is important for you to do your part to be aware of the school policies, practices and staff. The same applies for any professional or program in which your child participates.



Who will help me if my child was abused?



If you suspect that your child has been abused, you may call either the police or sheriff serving your area, or the Department of Child & Family Services. There is a Child Protection Hotline: 1-800-540-4000 (from within California). These are the only places to which suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported.

For additional support you can also contact the Regional Center where your child is enrolled. You can find your local Regional Center information at <http://www.dds.ca.gov/RC/RCList.cfm> or contact the State Department of Developmental Services at Info: (916) 654-1690 or TY: (916) 654-2054

If your child was abused and the abuse was reported to the police, you can get help from the Victim/Witness program in your area, for therapy for yourself and the child. The costs for therapy may be covered through the [California Victims of Crime](#) program. The office of your local Victims of Crime representatives can be found by

asking the social worker or detective on your case.

In California it is called the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board. They can be contacted at their toll-free number (800) 777-9229 or California Relay Service at (800) 735-2929 TTY or online at <http://www.vcgcb.ca.gov/>

For specific information on children with disabilities and maltreatment, visit the Disability, Abuse & Personal Rights Project website: www.disability-abuse.com

How do I help my child?

The best thing you can do for your child is to listen to what is said. Listen with all your heart. Tell the child that you are proud of him or her for telling you what happened, that you love him or her and that you know what to do. Say that this was not the child's fault and you know that. Your love, calm and sense of knowing what to do will be THE BEST response you can provide your child.



Reduce the risk...

that your child will be hurt while away from home

1. Get a paraeducator to escort your child throughout the day, and make sure this is clearly stated in the IEP if you believe your child is at risk of abuse on campus.
2. Interview the paraeducator.
3. Make unannounced visits to the school to monitor for your child's safety.
4. Meet regularly with the teacher, aide and paraeducator.
5. Have daily communication with the school. Teachers and paraeducators can document the day's activities and you can inform them of important changes in your child's life when you enter this information into the notebook or email with the school.
6. Know the bus drivers and aides on the bus. Ask to be alerted to any changes in staffing of drivers or assignment of children.
7. Become familiar with the school's written policies on identifying and reporting suspected child abuse, bullying and sexual harassment.
8. Make sure the teacher and all staff involved with your child are familiar with these policies and procedures. How? By directly asking the teacher and aides!
9. Tell your child that it is important to tell you if s/he is scared or hurt at school so that you can protect him or her.
10. Ask the teacher about the disciplining practices they employ.
11. Don't make assumptions about why changes occur. Talk to your child about what you are observing.



Resources for parents

1. Child Protective Services
2. Law enforcement agencies including Police, Sheriff and Highway Patrol
3. Child Abuse Councils
4. Regional Centers
5. Disability, Abuse & Personal Rights Project

Books for Parents:

1. "SURVIVOR for Survivors of Sexual Assault who have Developmental Disabilities" (Volume One – For Those Who Read Best with Few Words; Volume Two – For Individuals with Disabilities; Volume Three – for Parents and Advocates of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities)
2. "Risk Reduction Guide for Parents and Other Advocates of Children with Special Needs". An A to Z guide on the signs and symptoms of abuse, how to interpret these, what you can do to reduce the risk of abuse for your child with a disability, whether they are a child or an adult.



Protect your child by being an Informed Parent



Written by Nora J. Baladerian, Ph.D. for the Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance Center (CATTa). Funding for the CATTa Center is provided by the Children's Branch of the California Emergency Management Agency, Public Safety and Victim Services Division.

California Child Abuse Training and Technical Assistance Centers

CATTa

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5880 Commerce Blvd.
Rohnert Park, CA94928
(707) 284-1300

<http://www.CATTACenter.org>