



## Is My Baby Safe?

Straight Talk to Teen Parents  
On Child Abuse and Neglect





## **Some Shocking Facts About Child Abuse**

Each year in the United States, child abuse and neglect kill about 2,000 infants and children, and cause about 18,000 to become permanently disabled. Over 400,000 children live in foster care because of abuse or neglect.

Most child abuse and neglect is committed by parents and parents' spouses or boyfriends/girlfriends – not strangers, daycare providers, or other adults.

### **What can cause parents to hurt their children?**

- Too much stress at home and/or school
- Uncontrolled anger or feelings of frustration
- Depression; feeling all alone
- Not enough money for living expenses
- Violence in the home or in relationships
- Drug or alcohol abuse: your own or by those close to you
- Feeling too sick or too tired to cope with a child's needs

## **Why Do I Need to Read A Brochure About Child Abuse?**

You probably think you could never harm your child, but in a moment of stress it can happen. Just like most teen parents, you have to cope with many responsibilities in your daily life. You need to be aware of danger signs and of places where you can turn to for help. Even if you didn't mean to hurt your child, you are still responsible.

Other people, even those you feel you can trust, like a boyfriend or girlfriend, babysitter, or relative, may hurt your child. You are responsible for protecting your child from abuse or neglect by others.

## **What Is Child Abuse and Neglect?**

### **Child Abuse Includes:**

- Physical Abuse – hitting or intentionally hurting a child. Bruises, burns or broken bones are some signs of physical abuse.
- Sexual Abuse – touching a child in “private” areas such as the vagina, breast or penis, performing a sexual act with a child, or using a child in prostitution or pornography.



- Emotional Abuse – treating a child in ways that make the child feel unwanted, or like a bad person – so much that the child’s normal development, learning or behavior suffers. This may include name-calling, harshly criticizing or blaming the child.
- Shaken Baby Syndrome – shaking or roughly handling a baby. This is the most common way that a young child becomes seriously brain injured or dies as a result of abuse.

## **Child Neglect Includes:**

**PHYSICAL NEGLECT** – not making sure a child has enough food, clothing, shelter, or supervision.

**MEDICAL NEGLECT** – not making sure a child gets regular health care, or not taking a very sick or injured child to the doctor.

**ABANDONMENT** – Leaving a child alone without supervision or leaves a child with someone else for a long time without making contact or plans for care of the child.

**PARENT’S DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE** – using drugs or alcohol while pregnant can be considered neglect. If a baby is born affected by drugs or alcohol and there are other factors that also put the baby at risk, the parents will be reported for abuse or neglect. Also, parents who abuse drugs or alcohol are more likely to neglect or abuse their children.



# Who Must Report Child Abuse?

There are people called MANDATED REPORTERS who must report child abuse if they suspect it. Other people may report child abuse if they suspect it, but are not required by law to report it.

## **Mandated Reporters Include:**

- Doctors and Nurses
- Mental Health Professionals
- Teachers
- School Employees
- Day Care Workers
- Foster Parents
- Counselors and Social Workers
- Film Developers

If you suspect that another person has abused or neglected your child, like a relative or babysitter, first take steps to protect your child from future contact with the person. Remember – you are responsible for protecting your child from abuse or neglect by others. If you are concerned that the person will continue to abuse you child or other children, you may need to make a report to the Child Protection Hotline and /or that police; a trusted adult such as a teacher or counselor can help you do this.



## **What Happens When A Child Abuse Report is Made in Los Angeles County?**

A call is made to the County Child Protection Hotline at 1-800-540-4000. This hotline is run by the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

DCFS asks for information, including the child's name, where the child lives and the type of abuse or neglect being reported. If they think the child is in danger, they send an emergency response worker to interview the child as well as any adults who may know whether the child was abused. This happens within a few hours to several days depending on how young the child is and the type of abuse or neglect reported.

When a child is not in immediate danger, in-home services may be offered to help keep the family together. If DCFS thinks the child would be in danger, even with these services, DCFS may remove the child immediately and place him or her with relatives or in foster care.

If your child is removed from your custody, you will most likely be allowed to have visits. You will also be offered help to solve the problems that led to the abuse or neglect. If you do not get help and follow your case plan, your child may be taken away permanently and placed for adoption or guardianship.



For more information on what happens when a child is taken from a parent and placed into foster care by DCFS, read Public Counsel's brochure "Teens in Foster Care and their Babies."

## How Does Abuse Affect My Child? What are Some Signs of Abuse?

Child abuse and neglect hurt children in very serious ways and each child will show the results of abuse differently. Here are some common signs that a child may have been abused:

- Some children who have been physically abused may show changes in their normal behavior, like becoming very quiet and sad, or very angry, or may seem afraid of their parents or other adults.
- Sexually abused children show many of the same signs as physically abused children. There is often little physical evidence of sexual abuse. They may go back to younger behaviors like soiling their pants or wetting the bed, have eating problems, or have problems at school.
- Neglected children may also look depressed, may refuse to open up to talk, be “clingy” or overly friendly with strangers or with people they have just met. They may say things like, “Mommy always say’s I am bad.”

## I am Afraid I Might Hurt My Baby. What Can I Do? Where Can I Go For Help?

Almost all parents sometimes feel they are not doing a good job and maybe they were not yet ready to be a parent. These are normal feelings that can come and go. But if you often feel angry, afraid, out of control, or you often wish you didn’t have a child, you need to get help right away.



You also may not be sure if the way you discipline your child would be considered abuse. Seeking help may be the best thing you can ever give your child, and yourself. If you know someone you can trust, talk with them about your feelings. It can help just to talk to someone who will listen without judging you – a friend, family member, or counselor. This is a good way to begin coping with stress and fear. Also, there are programs that can help you make sure you know all your options. Here are a few of them:

**HOTLINES**

- Domestic Violence .....800/978-3600
- Teen Line .....800/TLC-TEEN  
(800/852-8336)  
Open from 6pm to 10pm PDT

**Adolescent Family Life Programs**

**AltaMed Health Services**

- Cal Learn and Family Life Program .....323/307-0160  
Serves East Los Angeles and Monterey Park  
Pregnancy & Parenting Services, health care.

**El Nido Family Centers**

- Family Source Center .....818/896-7776  
Parenting education, support groups, counseling.

**Foothill Family Services**

- Intake Number .....866/304-4337

**Project NATEEN at Children’s Hospital .....323/361-5981**

- Serves Hollywood Area  
Case Management for pregnant &  
parenting teens 17 and under; support groups.

## OTHER RESOURCES

**Big Brothers Big Sister of Greater L.A.:** .....800/207-7567  
213/481-3611

**Children's Home Society** .....562/256-7400  
Serves Long Beach, Norwalk, Bellflower,  
Cerritos, Lakewood, San Pedro  
Resources/referrals.

**Connections for Children** .....310/452-3202  
West Los Angeles, South Bay  
Resources/referrals.

**Center for Community and Family Services** .....626/319-3501  
Serves 10 communities from Palos Verdes to  
Downey, North of Long Beach  
Information on free health, dental, pre-natal, shelters, food assistance,  
child care, WIC, child development training and counseling.

**Home Safe** .....323/934-7979  
Serves Hollywood, Mid-Wilshire area  
Child care, counseling, support services.

### **International Institute of L.A.**

**Child Development** .....323/224-3800  
Serves Central Los Angeles, East Los Angeles,  
San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley  
Child care and child development services.

**Parents Anonymous** .....909/621-6184  
Pregnant and Parenting Teen support groups.

**Public Counsel** .....213/385-2977 ext. 500  
Legal services for pregnant & parenting teens who live in  
Los Angeles County.

Public Counsel, the public interest law office of the Los Angeles County and Beverly Hills Bar Associations, is the largest pro bono law firm in the U.S., and also is the Southern California affiliate of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Public Counsel coordinates the contributions of thousands of volunteer lawyers each year. Public Counsel serves those in need — such as children and the elderly, literacy projects and low income housing providers, refugees and the homeless — by providing legal representation and matching financially eligible clients with volunteer attorneys.

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