

HOW TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN



Give them the information they need.

Guarding Against Child Neglect And Abuse

By law, children under age 18 are protected from abuse. The criminal acts are defined as physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, negligent treatment and maltreatment. The crime is widespread, but difficult to detect.

Part of the problem is that children don't recognize that adult abuse is wrong. We teach children to obey their parents. They are dependent upon us, even if we are abusive. In addition, some parents do not realize that they are abusive. But there are ways to tell if children we know are being abused.

Observe Adults

It's thought that child abuse is handed down through generations. That is, we look back to our own childhood, and the way we were treated to learn how to cope with our own youngsters. If you were beaten as a child, it may seem natural to beat your own child.

However, there is no clear-cut stereotype to determine who will and won't be a child abuser. Many things such as unsatisfactory family relationships, financial and social problems, drugs, alcohol, lack of self-esteem and other stress factors can bring out child abusing tendencies in many people.

Observe Children

A child is most vulnerable between birth and age 3. At any age, these signs can indicate a problem of abuse or neglect:

- Bruises or black eyes
- Regularly dirty or inappropriate dress
- Passive or withdrawn behavior
- Fear of adults
- Constant hunger
- Obvious dental and medical needs

- Abnormal height or weight
- Pain or resistance to physical exercise
- Difficulty staying awake
- Disruptive, aggressive, hostile or non-co-operative attitudes
- Reluctance to go home
- Talk with peers about sexual experiences
- Unusual acting out behavior

What To Do

Because of the stigma attached to child abuse, few adults identify the problem in themselves. For this reason, experts suggest that watching and listening to the child is the key to discovery.

If a child tells you of abuse, it's important to offer support and protection. Child protective services exist almost everywhere to help you. If medical treatment is needed, you can lessen the child's fears. Talk about what is going to happen.

You can report child abuse to the police. You can make anonymous telephone reports. There are 24-hour help lines listed in the telephone directory.

It's generally recommended that you refer situations to professionals. Family dynamics, legal issues, and the rights of the child can complicate every situation.

How You Can Prevent It

Information is the key to prevention. For example, sexual abuse is most often committed by someone the child knows. You might explain to your child that it's appropriate not to want to be touched. Support groups exist for parents. Social service agencies, schools and community groups can help children and adults. If you have any questions, be sure to ask.

