

# **POLICY FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE**

Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church

## **Reporting Suspected Child Abuse**

According to Oklahoma law, every person who has reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused is mandated to report the suspected abuse. Volunteer leaders and workers are no exception.

At any Conference or district event, if a worker/leader suspects the abuse of a child/youth, whether it may have occurred at the event or prior to the event, that worker/leader should discuss his/her suspicions with the head of the event and together ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report. Information should include the following:

- Name, age and gender of the child/youth and other family members
- Address, phone number and/or directions to the child's home
- Parents' places of employment
- Description of the suspected abuse
- Current condition of the child/youth

Acquire a reporting form from the dean/head of the event, the camp director/manager, or the Conference Ministry Center. The person making the report should keep a copy of the report and consider it confidential information.

The leader/supervisor should then contact the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Abuse Hotline in the presence of the head of the event. That number is:

**1-800-522-3511**

The site official and the Director of Camps and Retreat Ministries should be promptly informed when his report is made. The Director of Camps and Retreat Ministries contact phone number is 405-530-2016 or 1-800-231-4166 ext 2016. DHS is, however, the only one to receive a *detailed* report. Contact of the child/youth's parents and/or pastor should be discerned on a case-by-case basis.

## **Making a Determination of Child Abuse**

Whether a child gives indication of abuse through behaviors, physical condition or verbal communication, the leader/supervisor should be sensitive to the conflict and trauma the child has experienced.

- Do not panic or overreact to what the child/youth discloses
- Do not criticize the child/youth or claim that the child/youth misunderstood what happened.
- Do not promise not to tell anyone, but respect the child/youth's privacy. Assure the child/youth that you will keep the disclosure in limited confidentiality discussing it only

with adults in charge who need to be involved in the reporting process. Follow through on this assurance for the protection of the child/youth's dignity.

Avoid interviewing the child/youth repeatedly but encourage him/her to be willing to share with other adults who will act to provide help.

The event head and the worker/leader should refer to materials on indications of psychological maltreatment, neglect, physical and sexual abuse to guide their discernment of possible abuse if there are questions.

### **Suspected Abuse Involving Event Staff**

Any suspicions of abuse by event leaders/supervisors should immediately be brought to the attention of the head of the event. When suspicions are determined to be well founded and report information as described above has been collected, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Abuse Hotline should be called. That number is:

**1-800-522-3511**

When such a report is made, the Director of Camps and Retreat Ministries should be promptly informed of the report but not the details of the incident. The Conference Office number is 405-530-2016 or 1-800-231-4166 ext. 2016. If the suspected abuser is a minor, his/her parents/custodians/guardians should also be informed. The need for confidentiality is always to be a high priority.

The suspected abuser shall immediately be removed from situations where direct, private contact with the children/youth could occur. Appropriate measures should be taken by the leadership of the event to preserve a sense of security and normality. This could mean that the suspected abuser is requested to leave.

### **Other Considerations**

Inappropriate sexual advances should not be confused with physical contacts that are appropriate expressions of affection and concern. All workers/leaders should take the following precautions to prevent confusing situations:

- Have other staff members present anytime children/youth are dressing, undressing, bathing, etc.
- Respect the child/youth's privacy and do not become more intrusive or curious than necessary monitoring health or welfare.
- Respect the child/youth's wishes in terms of limiting means of the expression of affection and concern.
- Protect your own privacy and do not discuss personally sensitive or intimate matters with children or youth.
- Do not pursue personal, private relationships with children/youth following an event.

*These guidelines were developed from **For Kid's Sake: A Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting Kit**, Oklahoma State Department of Health, and **For Camp Counselors: Guidelines on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation**, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.*



4. The report was made as a result of:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ Observing physical and /or behavioral indications which led to the suspicion of abuse
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ A statement made by the minor

If based on observation, describe behaviors that led to your suspicion. Use additional pages if necessary. Also, attach **Visual Supplement Report Form** if appropriate.

If based on the minor's statement, accurately and objectively write below what was said. If possible include information on who, when, where, and what happened. Use additional pages if necessary.

What were the circumstances surrounding the disclosure? When, where, and how did the individual tell you? Use additional pages if necessary.

5. Additional comments, concerns, or observations. Use additional pages if necessary.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

# VISUAL SUPPLEMENT REPORT FORM

## for Instances of Suspected Abuse of a Minor

Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church

*Attach to Report Form for Instances of Suspected Abuse of a Minor.*

Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

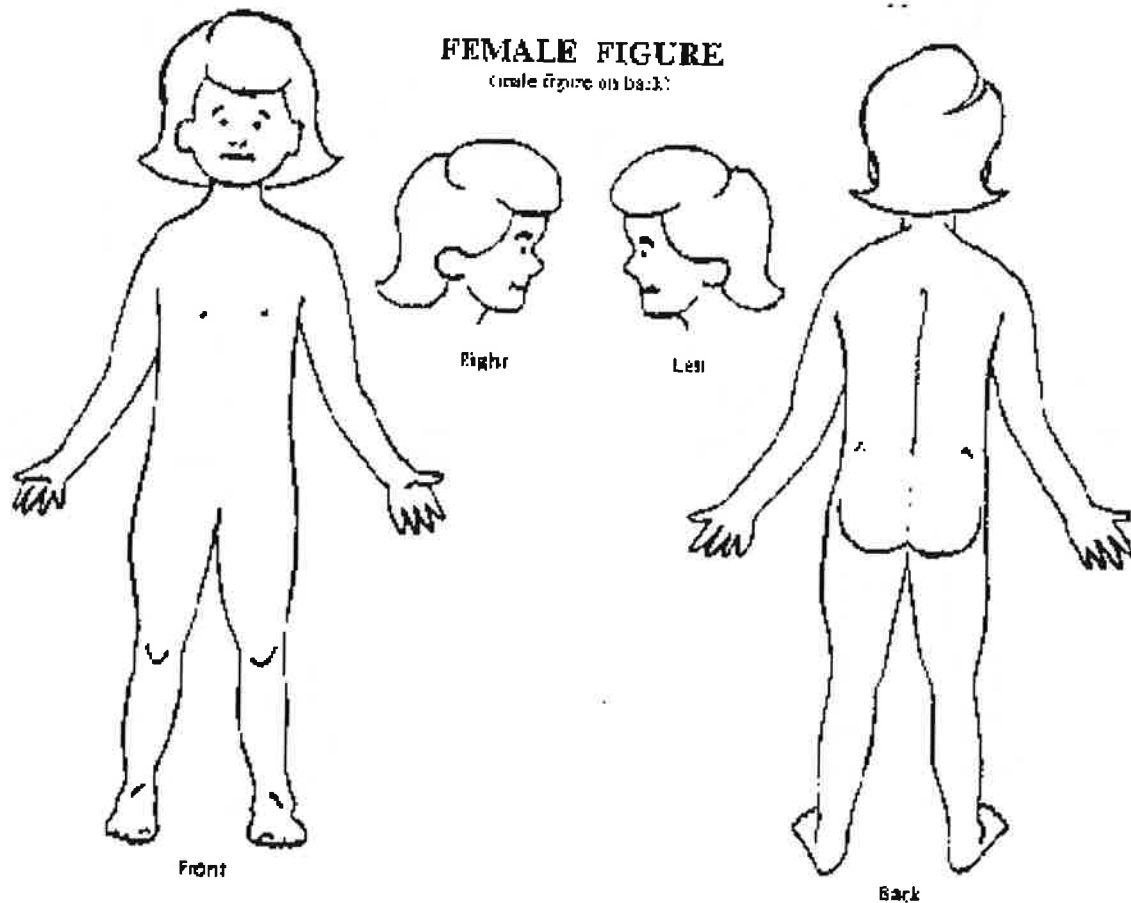
Location \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person reporting \_\_\_\_\_

Name of child/youth \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Indicate on the following diagram the areas in which physical injury is evident. Beside each injury or apparent burn, please note the color, size, pattern, texture and degree of pain.

- |        |                  |                             |               |
|--------|------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| injury | Use an "X"       | to indicate the location of | a superficial |
|        | Use an "O"       | to indicate the location of | a deep injury |
|        | Use shaded areas | to indicate areas of        | apparent burn |





## Important Phone Number

Child Abuse Reporting Hotline

Department of Human Services..... 1-800-522-3511

### ...REPORT

(Statewide)

#### What is the law?

Title 21, Section 845 of the Oklahoma Statutes states, "Abuse and neglect... means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare..." This includes, but is not limited to, non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, or neglect.

#### Who must report?

EVERY PERSON, private citizen or professional, in Oklahoma who has reason to believe that a child under 18 has been abused is mandated by law to report the suspected abuse. Failure to do so is a crime. No person, regardless of their relationship with the child or family, is immune from reporting suspected abuse. A person making a report in good faith is immune from both civil and criminal liability.

#### When to report?

A report of suspected abuse is only a request for an investigation. A request for investigation should be made when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or adolescent has been abused or neglected or is in danger of being abused. The person making the request for investigation does not need to prove the abuse. Investigation and validation of child abuse reports are the responsibility of the Department of Human Services or law enforcement personnel. If additional incidents of abuse occur after the initial report has been made, make another request for investigation.

#### How is abuse reported?

A request for investigation can be made to any county office of the Department of Human Services or to the Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-522-3511. This number is answered 24 hours a day.

#### When reporting, the following information will be requested:

- Name, age and gender of child and other family members
- Address, phone numbers and/or directions to child's home
- Parents' place of employment
- Description of suspected abuse
- Current condition of the child

#### What happens to the report?

A child protection worker from the Department of Human Services investigates the reported abuse. The investigation will result in one of the following conclusions:

- Abuse or neglect ruled out
- Uncertain findings
- Abuse or neglect confirmed

In confirmed cases, a service plan is developed to prevent the recurrence of abuse to the child. When appropriate findings are reported to the District Attorney for possible legal action.

**Remember:** A report of suspected child abuse is a responsible attempt to protect a child.

**FOR KIDS SAKE...**

## ...LISTEN

### What if a child tells you about abuse?

There may be times when children or adolescents tell you, directly or indirectly, about abuse in their family. Remember how very difficult it is for children to talk about their abuse,

Especially as they may think it will get them or their family into trouble. Therefore, it is very important for you to handle their disclosure with sensitivity.

### In talking with children, it will be helpful if you:

- Provide a private time and place to talk
- Do not promise not to tell; tell them that you are required by law to report abuse
- Do not express shock or criticize their family
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing by telling
- Use their vocabulary to discuss body parts
- Tell them that the abuse is not their fault, that they are not bad or to blame
- Determine their immediate need for safety
- Tell the child you must report the abuse to the proper authorities
- Tell them that the abuse is not their fault, that they are not bad or to blame
- Determine their immediate need for safety
- Tell the child you must report the abuse to the proper authorities
- Let the child know what will happen when you report

**Remember:** Many children are too young to tell about their abuse. They depend on you to notice and report.



## **What is Psychological Maltreatment?**

Two types of psychological maltreatment are generally recognized: psychological neglect and psychological abuse. Subtypes of psychological maltreatment include: rejecting, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting/corrupting and denying emotional responsiveness.

Psychological neglect is the consistent failure of a parent or caretaker to provide a child with appropriate support, attention and affection.

Psychological abuse is a chronic pattern of behaviors such as belittling, humiliating and ridiculing a child.

Both types of maltreatment can result in significantly impaired psychological growth and development in the child.

## **Scope Of The Problem**

Psychological maltreatment is seen as the core component of all forms of abuse. It may occur as the only form of maltreatment or in conjunction with other forms of abuse.

All abused children, therefore, suffer some form of psychological maltreatment.

## **Examples of Psychological Maltreatment**

A parent or caretaker chronically:

- Takes little or no interest in the child and the child's activities
- Criticizes a child for behavior that is developmentally normal.
- Belittles and shames the child
- Blames the child for things over which the child has little or no control
- Uses the child as a scapegoat when things go wrong
- Treats the child differently from other children in the household.
- Restricts the child's activities and peer relationships.
- Engages in bizarre acts of torture or torment, such as locking the child in a closet.
- Imposes extreme forms of punishment

## How to Recognize Psychological Maltreatment

The signs of psychological maltreatment may be less obvious than other forms of abuse.

Psychological maltreatment is suspected when a child exhibits impaired development, destructive behavior or chronic somatic complaints that can't be explained, medically or circumstantially.

A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing psychological maltreatment.

### Physical Indicators

- Eating disorder, problems
- Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- Inappropriate wetting or soiling
- Speech disorders, stuttering

- Failure to thrive
- Developmental lags
- Asthma, severe allergies or gastrointestinal ulcers

### Behavioral Indicators

- Habit disorders, such as biting, rocking, head banging, thumb sucking in an older child
- Poor peer relationships
- Behavioral extremes, overly compliant – demanding; withdrawn – aggressive
- Sad appearance

- Apathy
- Lack of responsiveness
- Self-destructive behavior, oblivious to hazards and risks
- Chronic academic underachievement
- Irrational and persistent fears, dreads or hatreds

## **What is child neglect?**

Neglect is the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide a child under 18 with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, educational opportunity, protection and supervision.

## **Scope of the Problem**

In the United States, it is estimated that the incidence of child neglect may be five times greater than that of physical

Abuse. At least 50 percent of child neglect reports are confirmed. Over 5,000 incidents of child neglect are confirmed each year in Oklahoma.

## **Myths**

Most poor families neglect their children.

Children will outgrow the effects of neglect.

Neglect is not as serious a problem as abuse.

If a family is reported for neglect, the children are automatically removed from the home.

## **Facts**

Poverty is not neglect. Families with limited resources can provide basic care for their children by using free clinics or social services

There are well-documented psychological, intellectual and neurological deficits in children resulting from neglect.

Both physical abuse and neglect pose a serious health problem for children. Over 50 percent of child abuse reports in Oklahoma are for neglect.

Children are removed only if there are conditions that threaten the life, safety or health of the child.

## How to Recognize child neglect

A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing neglect.

### Physical Indicators

- Height and weight significantly below age level
- Inappropriate clothing for weather
- Poor hygiene, including lice, body odor, scaly skin
- Child abandoned or left with inadequate supervision

- Lack of safe, warm, sanitary shelter
- Lack of necessary medical and dental care

### Behavioral Indicators

- Begs or steals food
- Falls asleep in school, lethargic
- Poor school attendance, frequent tardiness
- Chronic hunger

- Dull, apathetic appearance
- Runs away from home
- Repeated acts of vandalism
- Reports no caretaker in the home
- Assumes adult responsibilities

### **FAILURE TO THRIVE: A possible case of child abuse**

Failure to thrive (FTT) is a condition in which children show a marked retardation or cessation of growth. On a normal growth chart, FTT children may fall below the 3<sup>rd</sup> percentile, or may show little to no growth over time. FTT can result from 1) a medical condition, 2) environmental factors, such as neglect or disturbed parenting, or 3) a combination of medical and environmental factors.

#### **FAILURE TO THRIVE**

- Can be life threatening
- Is usually diagnosed in children 2 and under
- Must be confirmed by a medical evaluation

## **What is Physical Abuse?**

Physical abuse is any non-accidental injury to a child under the age of 18 by a parent or caretaker. Non-accidental injuries may include beatings, shaking, burns, human bites, strangulation or immersion in scalding water with resulting bruises and welts, broken bones, scars or internal injuries.

Child abuse is typically a pattern of behavior that is repeated over time but can also be a single physical attack. It occurs when a parent or other person injures or causes a child to be injured, tortured or maimed, or when unreasonable force is used upon a child. Abuse may also result from unnecessarily harsh discipline or from punishment that is too severe.

## **Scope of the Problem**

The National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse estimates that approximately 675,000 children are physically abused each year. In Oklahoma approximately 5, 000

Incidents of physical abuse are confirmed annually. It generally is accepted that Oklahoma's figures under represent the actual incidence of abuse.

## **Myths**

The majority of parents who abuse their children are mentally ill.

Physical abuse only occurs in lower socioeconomic families.

Young children have frequent accidents that result in broken bones.

A physician's opinion is needed before a report of physical abuse can be made.

Only children under age 16 can be reported as physically abused.

Children who are being abused by their parents will ask someone for help.

## **Facts**

Fewer than 10 percent of abusive parents have a severe mental disorder

Reports of physical abuse have been confirmed in all socioeconomic levels.

Many broken bones in children under age two are the result of intentional injury. Proof of injury is not necessary to make a request for investigation.

Physical abuse to any child under age 18 should be investigated

Children are usually afraid to talk about their injuries, or are too young to ask for help.

# HOW TO RECOGNIZE PHYSICAL ABUSE

## Physical Indicators

### Unexplained bruises and welts

- Are the most frequent evidence found
- Are often on the face, torso, buttocks, back or thighs
- Can reflect shape of object used (electric cord, belt buckle)
- May be in various stages of healing

### Unexplained burns

- Are often on palms, soles, buttocks and back
- Can reflect pattern indicative of cigarette, cigar, electrical appliance, immersion or rope burn

## Behavioral Indicators

- Requests or feels deserving of punishment
- Afraid to go home and/or requests to stay in school, day care, etc.
- Overly shy, tends to avoid physical contacts with adults, especially parents
- Displays behavioral extremes (withdrawal or aggressiveness)

### Unexplained fractures/dislocations

- Often involve skull, ribs and bones around joints
- May include multiple or spiral fractures

### Other unexplained injuries

- Lacerations, abrasions, human bite marks or pinch marks
- Loss of hair/bald patches
- Retinal hemorrhage
- Abdominal injuries

- Suggests that other children should be punished in harsh manner
- Cries excessively and/or sits and stares
- Reports injury by parents
- Gives unbelievable explanations for injuries

## CHILD FATALITIES: Did you know?

- Head trauma and shaken baby syndrome are the two most common causes of child abuse and neglect deaths.
- Children at highest risk are infants age one and under.
- A child fatality typically is the only or youngest child.
- Child abuse death rates are similar in urban and rural settings.
- Children die from intentional gunshot wounds, drowning and suffocation

## **What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

Child sexual abuse is the exploitation of a child or adolescent for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes behaviors such as intercourse, sodomy, oral-genital stimulation, verbal stimulation, exhibitionism, voyeurism, fondling, and involving a child in prostitution or the production of pornography. Incest is sexual abuse that occurs within a family. The abuser may be a parent, stepparent, grandparent, sibling, cousin or other family member.

## **Scope of the Problem**

Approximately 405,000 cases of child sexual abuse are confirmed annually in the United States. Oklahoma confirms approximately 1,300 cases of child abuse a year. It generally is accepted that these figures are significantly less than the actual incidence of abuse.

Current research indicated that one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by the age of 18.

## **Myths**

Sex offenders can be easily identified, as they are strangers who offer rides or candy to children.

Most sexual abuse victims are teenagers who can protect themselves from exploitation.

Children often lie about being sexually abused.

Incest offenders only molest children in their own families.

The lack of physical violence in child sexual abuse means children are willing participants.

Sex offenders are severely mentally disturbed, homosexual or mentally retarded.

Child sexual abuse is more typically an ongoing relationship that can last up to several years. Verbal threats and coercion are frequently used to force children to participate and keep the abuse a secret.

## **Facts**

Eighty to ninety percent of sex offenders are known to the child; they are family members and friends, neighbors and babysitters. Children of all ages are sexually abused

Children typically do not have the experience or vocabulary to accurately describe sexual activity.

Research indicates that many incest offenders also molest children outside their families.

Verbal threats and coercion are frequently used to force children to participate and keep the abuse secret.

Many sex offenders appear to be responsible and respectable citizens. They may be married and appear to function well in many areas of life.

## How to recognize child sexual abuse

Children are unable to give informed consent to sexual activity. Many children do not report their abuse and rely on adults to be aware of specific

behavioral and physical indicators. A child who persistently shows several of the following characteristics may be experiencing sexual abuse.

**Remember:** One of the most reliable indicators of child sexual abuse is the child's verbal disclosure.

### Behavioral Indicators

- Excessive masturbation in young children
- Sexual knowledge or behavior beyond that expected for the child's developmental level
- Depression, suicidal gestures
- Chronic runaway
- Fearfulness, anxiety
- Frequent psychosomatic complaints, such as headaches, backaches, stomachaches
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Avoidance of undressing or wearing extra layers of clothes
- Sudden avoidance of certain familiar adults or places
- Decline in school performance
- Sleep disturbance

### Physical Indicators

- Somatic complaints, including pain and irritation of the genitals
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Pregnancy in young adolescents
- Frequent unexplained sore throats, yeast or urinary infections