

Reporting Child Abuse

Before carrying out any activities in Project ROOTS, it is the responsibility of the Facilitator to know the reporting protocols for child abuse in their state and organization. Project ROOTS Facilitators should always implement trauma-informed practices but be cautious as to *not* assume the role of a mental health professional such as a therapist or psychiatrist, nor should they assume the role of an investigator. **It is not the role of a ROOTS Facilitator to rescue a child from an abusive situation, but rather to ensure that the Participant feels safe should they wish to disclose information, to identify indicators of abuse, and make a report to the appropriate agency if child abuse is suspected.**

Per the Health and Human Services Agency, Child Welfare Services of San Diego (10/24/17) a mandated reporter *should not* inform the parent/caregiver of the disclosure as they may be the perpetrator, or they may groom the child to recant their statements. Please see the “sexual abuse” table for more definitions and tips of sexual abuse.

DEFINITION/EXAMPLES:	TIPS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any sexual act on a child including fondling, rape, oral sex, sodomy, incest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do NOT extensively interview the child regarding the details of the abuse
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Any known or highly suspected sexual abuse perpetrator living with a child	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not have more than one mandated reporter speak to the child about the disclosure or concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Children exhibiting sexual behavior outside of normal exploration or that involves coercion or violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not notify the parent/caregiver of the disclosure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Engaging the child in pornography or involving them in obscene acts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Report the information using the same words and terminology used by the child
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Adults allowing children to see sexually explicit material, witness sexual acts, or hear sexual language that is for the purpose of sexual gratification of the adult	

*The following information on child abuse was retrieved from the Mayo Clinic Child and Family Advocacy Center:*⁹⁶

Child Abuse Overview

Any intentional harm or mistreatment to a child under 18 years old is considered child abuse. Child abuse takes many forms, which often occur at the same time.

- **Physical abuse.** Physical child abuse occurs when a child is purposely physically injured or put at risk of harm by another person.
- **Sexual abuse.** Sexual child abuse is any sexual activity with a child, such as fondling, oral-genital contact, intercourse, exploitation or exposure to child pornography.

⁹⁶ Mayo Clinic Retrieved October 24, 2018, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/child-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20370864>

- **Emotional abuse.** Emotional child abuse means injuring a child's self-esteem or emotional well-being. It includes verbal and emotional assault — such as continually belittling or berating a child — as well as isolating, ignoring or rejecting a child.
- **Medical abuse.** Medical child abuse occurs when someone gives false information about illness in a child that requires medical attention, putting the child at risk of injury and unnecessary medical care.
- **Neglect.** Child neglect is failure to provide adequate food, shelter, affection, supervision, education, or dental or medical care.

In many cases, child abuse is done by someone the child knows and trusts — often a parent or other relative. If you suspect child abuse, report the abuse to the proper authorities.

Symptoms

A child who's being abused may feel guilty, ashamed or confused. He or she may be afraid to tell anyone about the abuse, especially if the abuser is a parent, other relative or family friend. That's why it's vital to watch for red flags, such as:

- Withdrawal from friends or usual activities
- Changes in behavior — such as aggression, anger, hostility or hyperactivity — or changes in school performance
- Depression, anxiety or unusual fears, or a sudden loss of self-confidence
- An apparent lack of supervision
- Frequent absences from school
- Reluctance to leave school activities, as if he or she doesn't want to go home
- Attempts at running away
- Rebellious or defiant behavior
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide

Specific signs and symptoms depend on the type of abuse and can vary. Keep in mind that warning signs are just that — warning signs. The presence of warning signs doesn't necessarily mean that a child is being abused.

Physical abuse signs and symptoms

- Unexplained injuries, such as bruises, fractures or burns
- Injuries that don't match the given explanation

Sexual abuse signs and symptoms

- Sexual behavior or knowledge that's inappropriate for the child's age
- Pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection
- Blood in the child's underwear
- Statements that he or she was sexually abused
- Inappropriate sexual contact with other children

Emotional abuse signs and symptoms

- Delayed or inappropriate emotional development
- Loss of self-confidence or self-esteem
- Social withdrawal or a loss of interest or enthusiasm

- Depression
- Avoidance of certain situations, such as refusing to go to school or ride the bus
- Desperately seeks affection
- A decrease in school performance or loss of interest in school
- Loss of previously acquired developmental skills

Neglect signs and symptoms

- Poor growth or weight gain or being overweight
- Poor hygiene
- Lack of clothing or supplies to meet physical needs
- Taking food or money without permission
- Hiding food for later
- Poor record of school attendance
- Lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems or lack of necessary follow-up care

Parental behavior

Sometimes a parent's demeanor or behavior sends red flags about child abuse. Warning signs include a parent who:

- Shows little concern for the child
- Appears unable to recognize physical or emotional distress in the child
- Blames the child for the problems
- Consistently belittles or berates the child, and describes the child with negative terms, such as "worthless" or "evil"
- Expects the child to provide him or her with attention and care and seems jealous of other family members getting attention from the child
- Uses harsh physical discipline
- Demands an inappropriate level of physical or academic performance
- Severely limits the child's contact with others
- Offers conflicting or unconvincing explanations for a child's injuries or no explanation at all

Child health experts condemn the use of violence in any form, but some people still use corporal punishment, such as spanking, as a way to discipline their children. Any corporal punishment may leave emotional scars. Parental behaviors that cause pain, physical injury or emotional trauma — even when done in the name of discipline — could be child abuse.