



Frequently Asked Questions: Child Abuse Prevention

What is Child Abuse?

Child Protective Services Law in PA defines child abuse as intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly causing, creating the likelihood of, or failing to act to protect a child from abuse. Child abuse includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or exploitation, trafficking, neglect, and a few specific acts like shaking an infant under one year of age. Specifics are outlined [online](#).

How do you report child abuse?

PA has both mandated reporters and permissive report options. Mandated reporters are required to report child abuse immediately because of their professional or volunteer role. They must make an immediate and direct report of suspected child abuse to ChildLine either electronically at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis or by calling 1-800-932-0313. Mandated reporters must report, no matter where or how they learn about the suspected abuse. It is important to know that ANY community member may act as a permissive reporter. This means they may call Childline at 1-800-932-0313 to make a report. Reports are kept anonymous.

What is the difference between foster care and adoption?

Foster care involves a temporary placement of children with a family who provides care until the child can be placed back with their biological family or an adoptive family. In foster care, the agency involved retains rights and decision-making power over the child's welfare. Foster care can take place through government entities, or private foster care agencies. Adoption is a legal process. It involves a court transferring all legal rights to the adoptive parents.

What happens after a report is made?

After a report is made to Childline, it receives a report number so that it can be tracked. The information received is evaluated and then forwarded to the appropriate investigators. Child Abuse reports can lead to a criminal investigation, a civil investigation or both. This means that a given report may be referred to local law enforcement, a county child protective services agency, or both to be investigated at the same time. Child protective services, including Lebanon County's Children & Youth department, has a specific amount of time to do a safety check, and conduct their investigation.

There are three possible outcomes for child protective services (CPS) cases: Indicated, Founded, or Unfounded. Indicated and Founded cases had enough evidence that the alleged abuse occurred based



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on medical evidence, Child Protective Services Investigation, admission of the abuse by the perpetrator or offender, or that there has been a judicial adjudication based on the investigation.

An Unfounded investigation means that there is not enough evidence to rule the case as Indicated or Unfounded. An Unfounded investigation does not necessarily mean that abuse did not occur. Rather, it means that there was not enough information to Found or Indicate. If you suspect that abuse has occurred, you can make another report with additional information.

How quickly will reports be investigated?

Remember that not all reports made have sufficient information to investigate. There are two protective service branches through Lebanon County Children & Youth: Child Protective Services (CPS) and General Protective Services (GPS). Child protective services investigates physical abuse, sexual abuse, serious neglect, and mental injury that meets the criteria of child abuse under Child Protective Services Law. General Protective Services investigates everything that doesn't meet the criteria of a Child Protective Services investigation, but still has to meet the threshold to be investigated.

Childline identifies whether the report is determined a GPS, CPS or Law Enforcement referral. If a Child Protective Services case, CYS has to assure the safety and see the victim child and all other children in the home within 24 hours. If the report is a General Protective Services (GPS) report, it is screened by a local supervisor who determines whether it will be investigated and the what the response time will be. Response times can range from immediate to 10 days after, based on the risk and safety concerns identified in the report. If the case is not accepted for investigation because it doesn't meet the safety or risk threshold, CYS Administration staff will review the case to ensure that they agree with the decision, as a system of checks and balances.

What are signs that a child is experiencing abuse?

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is learning the signs of child abuse and neglect. First and foremost, if you notice any extreme or unexplainable changes in behavior, this is an indication that abuse may have occurred. General behavioral changes include the child being detached or withdrawn; unusual or excessive fear, or fear of a particular person; hypervigilance; and changes in sleep or school performance. Sometimes, behavioral changes show up as risk-taking behavior. This could include running away, substance use, truancy, self-harming behavior, or fear of going home.

Abuse related to bodily injury may involve bruises, burns, marks that are unexplained, or repeated injuries over time. Some children will wear extra layers of clothing to cover marks and bruises.

Signs of sexual abuse may include acting out sexually, fear or resistance to removing clothing, regression (i.e. thumb sucking or bedwetting, or medical issues like bladder infections, sexually transmitted infections, or pain when going to the bathroom).



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We are learning more and more about human trafficking as well. Signs of trafficking include chronic running away, access to material things that youth typically cannot afford, or having a much older, controlling, or domineering partner.

Signs of serious physical neglect include inadequate weight gain or growth, delays in physical development, persistent hunger, lack of hygiene or personal care items, or consistently soiled clothing. Physical neglect can also include lack of supervision, untreated medical conditions, or depriving a child of food, water, heat, and shelter.

What are signs that an adult is abusing a child?

Children are not responsible for their abuse, or responsible for stopping it. Rather, adults in the community are responsible for identifying signs that abuse is occurring. It's important to pay attention to adults who:

- Insist on hugging/tickling/wrestling with a child, even when a child says "stop"
- Spend time alone with children
- Regularly offer to babysit children for free
- Introduce special attention to a child like gifts, money, etc.
- Encourage unhealthy behaviors (alcohol, smoking, viewing pornography)
- Destroy the child's trust in others (No one will believe you if you tell)
- Undermine the way others view the child (troubled child, child who lies)
- Isolate the family from the community

What are the impacts of child abuse?

Child abuse is common. Studies show that nearly 60% of the population experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse as a child, and almost 25% experienced emotional abuse or neglect. Childhood traumas often happen in clusters and build on each other. Experiencing one type of abuse increases risk for more abuse and violence later on.

Child abuse accounts for an increased likelihood of using alcohol or other substances, and starting to use earlier. Child abuse also affects life-long health outcomes. This can include increases in body weight and obesity, cancer, heart disease, and depression and suicidal behavior.



How do you prevent child abuse?

Many forms of violence and abuse share common risk factors. Reducing risk for child abuse involves making changes in society, your community, in relationships, and providing support to individual people.

In society, cultural norms that support aggressive behavior, income inequality, weak health policies, education systems, and economic policies, and harmful ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman all increase risk for child abuse.

In our communities, poverty in specific neighborhoods, easy access to alcohol, community violence, high unemployment rates, and poor neighborhood support all lead to increased risk for child abuse.

In relationships, including families, risk factors include social isolation or lack of support, poor parent-child relationships, family conflict, and economic stress all increase risk.

With individual community members, we can reduce the risk of perpetrating child abuse by promoting education, building non-violent problem-solving skills, treating any history of violence or trauma, intervening to keep someone from experiencing or witnessing violence, and providing support and access to substance abuse treatment.

Why don't children tell about abuse?

Children often avoid telling adults about the abuse they experience. This is for several reasons. Children often fear that they will not be believed, or they may be told by the person abusing them that they are responsible for the abuse. Child abuse may involve grooming, manipulation, or coercion. People who abuse children may be known, trusted, and respected in the community. Many children fear that they will not be believed.

Still, many children *try* to tell about the abuse. This can happen through play, changes in behavior, or avoiding certain situations or people. Pay attention to the signs, and do not be afraid to check in with a child you are concerned about. If you suspect abuse, report it. You can report abuse, and still check in with the child and family to let them know that you see some signs that concern you, and want to help them if you can.

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

First, take the time to **listen** to the child and thank them for telling you about the abuse. Make time and find a quiet space to talk with the child. Do your best to keep your reactions calm and neutral. Many children fear negative reactions, being blamed for the abuse, or making the situation worse by telling.

Next, let the child know that you **believe** them, and care about them. Share how you will take action, and as much as you know about the process that will follow. If you don't know, offer to look into it together. Even if you are not sure of the details or if what the child is sharing qualifies as abuse, they are still seeking your help and guidance for a difficult situation.



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Then, **Take Action**. If there is immediate risk to the child's safety or imminent danger, call 911. Any community member can make a report of suspected abuse to Childline at 1-800-932-0313. Reports are kept anonymous. Mandated Reporters are REQUIRED to make a report by law. You can also assist the child in getting medical care, access to food or clothing, and helping them to connect with a safe person to talk about what happened.

How do we overcome barriers to reporting?

It's important for everyone to remember that anyone can report *suspected abuse*. You do not need to have witnessed the abuse, or have concrete evidence that abuse occurred to report your concerns. There are protections under the law to protect from liability and discrimination for making a report. Identity of the reporter is protected by both law enforcement and child protective services. Do not assume that someone else with more experience or expertise will report or know how to help. We all have a responsibility to know the signs of abuse, and act to support the health and safety of children.

For more information:

ChildLine

Make a report of suspected abuse by calling
1-800-932-0313

Lebanon County Children & Youth

Room 401, Municipal Building. 400 South 8th Street. Lebanon, PA 17042-6794
Phone: (717) 228-4430

Connected Together Coordinator

Get involved with a local community leaders team working on violence prevention. Contact Fitzroy Lewis at 717-270-6972 ext. 360 or flewis@sarcclebanon.org

Children's Resource Center

Provides forensic interviews and medical exams are part of child abuse investigations.
618 Cornwall Rd Building 3, Lebanon, PA 17042
Phone: (717) 675-7086

SARCC

No-cost counseling, therapy, and prevention education related to sexual violence & abuse.
615 Cumberland Street, Lebanon, PA
24-hour hotline: 717-272-5308

Domestic Violence Intervention (DVI)

Shelter, advocacy, hotline, counseling support and community education for survivors of domestic & family violence.
24-hour hotline: 717-273-7190

Empower the Mind

Provides no-cost Trauma Therapy for Children & Adults through the Connected Together Initiative.
Email mobiltx@empowerthemind.org

United Way of Lebanon County (211)

Call 211 anytime to receive free, 24/7, non-emergency health and human service information in Lebanon County from a live call specialist.

