Child Abuse Awareness

Optimizing Your Potential as a 4-H Volunteer

Purdue University
Cooperative Extension Service
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Introduction

• Child abuse is a serious problem today.
• In fiscal 2002, there were 70 confirmed deaths of children from abuse or neglect in Indiana.
• It’s a problem that multiplies itself.
  --40% of sexual offenders and
  --76% of serial rapists
  Report having been abused as children.

Child abuse is a serious problem. Each year in the united States over 2 million children are abused. In Indiana (fiscal 2002) 70 children died from abuse or neglect. Of these, 33 were under age 4.

Child abuse is a difficult problem that tends to multiply itself. 40% of sexual offenders and 76% of serial rapists report they were sexually abused as children *(U.S. Dept of Justice)
We Must Do Our Part

- Everyone has a moral, civic, and legal duty to help prevent child abuse.
- 4-H volunteers who work with children over long periods of time may notice changes that signal concern.
- Indiana law requires that anyone with knowledge about child abuse must report it to the authorities.

We all have a moral and civic responsibility to help prevent child abuse. Also, Indiana law requires that ANYONE with knowledge about child abuse report it to the authorities. 4-H staff and volunteers have an additional duty to report to their immediate supervisor.

We in 4-H/Extension who work with children over a period of time may be able to identify changes in a child’s behavior or appearance that signal a problem.

With this presentation we hope to provide you with some background information to help you identify potential abuse situations, give you information about your legal responsibilities, and tell you what steps you should take when reporting a suspected case.
What Is Child Abuse?

Indiana code 31-34-1

“…The child’s physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury by the act or omission of the child’s parent, guardian, or custodian.”

In everyday language:

Any non-accidental injury caused by a child’s caretaker.

The legal definition of child abuse (Indiana Code 31-34-1) is:

“…the child’s physical or mental health is seriously endangered due to injury by the act or omission of the child’s parent, guardian, or custodian”

A layman’s definition is: Any non-accidental injury caused by a child’s caretaker.

According to the law, a child is in need of services (for further definition see Indiana Code in 4-H Policies/Procedures) if the child’s physical or mental condition is seriously impaired or seriously endangered as a result of the inability, refusal, or neglect of the child’s caretaker to supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision; or the child is seriously injured by an act of the child’s caretaker.
Child Abuse Definitions

Physical abuse:
Any non-accidental physical injury caused by the parent or caregiver, or a serious injury caused by the caregiver’s failure to take action to prevent injury.

Neglect:
Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision.

Sexual abuse:
Any physical contact with a child for sexual gratification.

Physical abuse is defined as any non-accidental physical injury to a child caused by a parent or caregiver. A child may also be considered physically abused if (s)he is injured as a result of a parent’s failure to take appropriate action to prevent injury.

Neglect is the failure to provide a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, or supervision. Neglect is a chronic problem often resulting not from poverty, but from lack of knowledge by the parent regarding proper care for children or household management.

Sexual abuse is defined as any physical contact with a child for sexual gratification by an adult or older child in a position of power over the child. Other terms that may refer to child sexual abuse include child molesting, child exploitation, incest (if the abuser is a member of the child’s family), or child pornography.
Who Should Report Abuse or Neglect?

- Any suspicion must be reported.
- Anyone failing to report commits a class B misdemeanor.
- Staff and volunteers have “double duty” to report:
  - On their own behalf.
  - Notify Extension educator in charge of program, who also has duty to report.
- Anonymous reports are accepted.

Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect MUST MAKE A REPORT. If you suspect a child is in need of services, and you fail to contact the authorities, you are committing a Class B misdemeanor.

4-H staff members and volunteers have a “double duty” to report: first, on their own behalf, and then also to their immediate supervisor, who also has an obligation to report.

Anonymous reports are accepted.
How to Report

Report to Child Protective Services
24-hour/ 7-day-a-week hotline
1-800-800-5556

Local number for Child Protective Services in every county

Child abuse or neglect should be reported to Child Protective Services. They operate a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week hotline: 1-800-800-5556

There is also a local number in every county through the Division of Family and Children of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. You can also contact local law enforcement to report abuse or neglect.
When Making a Report of Abuse or Neglect

• Provide identifying information
  – Name.
  – Age of child.
  – Address and phone number.
• When describing a situation
  – Remain calm.
  – Provide dates, eyewitness accounts, and direct observations.

If you need to report a case of child abuse or neglect, it is important to have all identifying information in front of you.

Include names and ages of children, and their address and phone number if you know them.

When describing a situation, remain calm and present a “factual” report with the dates, any eyewitness observations, and any direct conversations.

Remember that any biased language on your part will send up a “red flag” for Child Protective Services, so do your best to keep your report factual.
Recognizing Physical Child Abuse

• Physical indicators:
  – Bruises, burns, fractures.
  – Dental or head injuries.

• Behavioral indicators of the child:
  – Verbally reports abuse
  – Too eager to please
  – Depression, low self-esteem
  – Appears frightened.

• Behavioral indicators of caretaker:
  – Harsh disciplinarian.
  – Constantly describes child negatively.
  – Defensive.

It is always difficult to know if a child we are working with or are acquainted with is a victim of child abuse. How do you know that those bruises or a certain behavior are a result of improper treatment? The problem is that we do not know, but as adults we have a responsibility to make sure that all children are safe.

When working with children in our program, you might be suspicious of a child who consistently has:

• Unexplained bruises, welts, burns, lumps, bumps, or fractures.
• Any cigarette or immersion-type burns; or
• Head injuries indicated by absence of hair or hemorrhaging under the scalp.

Children who are being physically abused may tell you about it, or they may be too eager to please you. They may be depressed and exhibit low self-esteem. They may be timid, or cry when it is time to go home, or appear frightened of their caregiver. Be cautious when a child’s explanation of his injury seems vague, or confused, or when his stories conflict.

Caretakers may also exhibit behavior that may send up “red flags” for you. Some indicators of possible abuse by the caretaker may include:

• A harsh disciplinarian, one who consistently describes the child in a negative manner.
• One who is defensive, or conceals or misleads about a child's injuries.
• A substance abuser.
Recognizing Child Neglect

• Physical indicators:
  – Dirty, smelly, torn, or inappropriate clothing for the weather.

• Behavioral indicators of the child:
  – Dull, listless
  – Begging or stealing food
  – Constant fatigue
  – Inappropriate seeking of affection.

• Behavioral indicators of caretaker
  – Substance abuser
  – Chaotic life style
  – Apathetic
  – Expects too much of child.

Some indicators that may signal to you that a child is not receiving basic food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education or supervision are:

Children who are underweight with poor growth patterns; or children who have torn, dirty or inappropriate clothing for the weather.

Other signs may include children who are constantly begging or stealing food, or children who are dull or listless and constantly fatigued. Children may tell you that there is no one to take care of them, or children who seem to be assuming adult roles and responsibilities may be victims of neglect.

Parents of caregivers who neglect may be substance abusers, they may lead chaotic life styles, be apathetic, or may be individuals who expect too much of the child.
Recognizing Sexual Child Abuse

• Physical indicators:
  – Difficulty/pain in walking or sitting.
  – Torn or stained clothing.

• Behavioral indicators of the child:
  – Anxiety, irritability, or constant inattentiveness
  – Sleep disorders
  – Abrupt change in behavior
  – Excessive clinging to, or fear of being left alone.

• Behavioral indicators of caretaker:
  – Extremely protective of family privacy.
  – Does not allow child to be involved in activities.

Children who are being sexually abused may show an unusual interest in, or knowledge of, sexual acts or language. They may wear inappropriate clothing, such as pants or shirts that are too tight or revealing.

They also may exhibit an abrupt change in their behavior or personality. They may complain of sleep disorders, or become shy or withdrawn. They may express fear of a particular person or place, or they may even report the abuse to you. They may complain of pain or itching and have difficulty in walking or sitting.

Possible indicators of a caregiver who may be sexually abusive include:
• substance abuse
• Being extremely protective of the family’s privacy,
• Not allowing the child to be involved in extra-curricular activities or to engage in developmentally appropriate activities such as dating.
If you suspect that a child involved in any Cooperative Extension program in being abused, you must report it to Child Protective Services. You will also want to make the county Extension educator in charge of the program aware of your suspicions. The educator, in turn, will notify their immediate supervisor and the State 4-H Dept.

Confidentiality in these matters is key, and you will not want to discuss it with others in the program or anyone who could in any way disrupt an investigation.
Determining Child Abuse

- Never black and white.
- Often unclear whether to report or not.
- When questions arise, seek advice from county educators.
- Always err on the side of the child.

Few child abuse cases are truly “black and white.” Allegations are usually based on your suspicions, and abusers will usually deny any wrongdoing. It is often unclear whether or not a situation should be reported.

When you are unsure, seek advice from your county Extension educator. Together you can decide upon the appropriate action.

When a question exists, always err on the side of the child. That way you will never be wrong.
The End!

Questions?????

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References


- **Prevent Child Abuse Indiana.** [http://www.pcain.org/](http://www.pcain.org/)