

Nearly five children die a day from child abuse, neglect

Written by Dr. Deirdre Golden, Director Behavioral Health, NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center
Friday, 05 April 2013 14:31



April was first declared Child Abuse Prevention Month approximately 30 years ago by Ronald Reagan in a presidential proclamation. Since then, April has been a time to acknowledge and raise awareness about the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse. The statistics are staggering and in the United States alone, nearly 5 children die every day from child abuse and neglect. According to the National Children's Alliance, there were 287,000 reported cases of abuse and/or neglect in 2012. Of these cases, many were for children most were under the age of 6 and involved sexual abuse. Due to underreporting, the actual number of children abused is likely higher. For the 1,161 cases reported in MN from July thru December 2012, most were female victims of sexual abuse, and usually, most perpetrators were relatives of the victim.

CornerHouse is an agency in Minneapolis that provides evaluations for child sexual abuse. They have promoted a mission of children first for over two decades. Information about their services and resources can be found on their website at www.cornerhousemn.org or by calling them at 612-813-8300.

There are four main types of Child Abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect and emotional abuse.

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury to a child by a parent or caretaker. You may see frequent and unexplained bruises, burns, cuts or injuries; the child may be overly afraid of the parent's reaction to misbehavior.

Sexual abuse can range from non-touching offenses, such as exposing oneself, to fondling, intercourse, or using the child for pornographic materials.

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Physical neglect is a parent or caregiver's failure to give the child food, clothing, hygiene, medical care, or supervision.

Emotional child abuse may be more difficult to identify and is maltreatment in the form of severe rejection, humiliation and actions intended to produce fear or extreme guilt in a child that results in impaired psychological growth and development. Emotional Abusers regularly reject, ignore, belittle, dominate, and criticize children. In physical abuse, the hurt and pain is external, in emotional abuse and neglect, it is internal.

Consequences of Child Abuse may be physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral and may continue long after the abuse occurred. Adult survivors of Childhood Abuse and Neglect consistently have poorer health outcomes including allergies, arthritis, asthma, bronchitis, high blood pressure, and ulcers.

Survivors are also more likely to experience emotional and psychological issues such as Depression, Panic Disorder, Anxiety or Personality disorders. Survivors are at higher risk for drug and alcohol problems, antisocial and delinquent behaviors. There is a tendency for survivors of abuse and neglect to see themselves as unworthy, undeserving and sometimes blame themselves for their abuse. Abusive parents may have also experienced abuse and neglect during their childhood.

Domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse are both risk factors for Child Abuse and Neglect. Other risk factors include Underdeveloped parenting skills, poor understanding of childhood development and lack of support also. Protective factors are strong bonds and nurturance from a caregiver early in life, strong parental coping skills, social support and access to community resources.

When someone suspects that a child is being abused or neglected, safety of the child should be the first priority. If you believe the child to be at imminent danger, call 911. It can be difficult to report suspected abuse for a number of reasons. One can feel like they are interfering in another's business and that they may feel responsible if the family breaks up. Fear of being identified may result in reluctance to report suspected abuse; however, you do not have to identify yourself if you decide to report suspected. Without identifying yourself, you may also call this number to ask questions. The consequences of unreported child abuse and neglect can impact level of functioning for the victim throughout their lifespan.

Education, strengthening child/parent or caregiver relationships and improving parent's self-care can be powerful tools in prevention of child abuse and neglect. Those interested in learning more about child abuse and neglect, prevention, positive parenting, and resources that are available may contact Dr. Golden at NorthPoint Health and Wellness, at 612-543-2566.

The National Child Abuse Hotline is a resource for confidential information on signs of abuse, questions about reporting suspected abuse and support for abuse survivors. Trained counselors are available 24/7, with communication in 140 languages through translators. All calls are anonymous and toll-free: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). Resources on parenting including dealing with difficult behavior, setting limits, using time-out effectively, and safety are

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also available.

The Hennepin County Child Abuse reporting number is 612-348-3552.