



# The Little Voice

*Recognizing Child Abuse and Your Duty to Report It*

*The little voice tells you, something isn't right*

*The little voice wakes you and keeps you up at night.*

*The little voice makes you look at the bruises on my arm*

*The little voice makes you wonder, who would do me harm?*

*The little voice grows louder as each day passes by*

*The little voice makes you notice each tear that I don't cry*

*The little voice speaks out loud because it knew it was right*

*The little voice belonged to you and it saved my life.*

— *Anonymous*



[www.tyla.org/thelittlevoice](http://www.tyla.org/thelittlevoice)

## Q. Who Is Required To Report Child Abuse?

*If YOU suspect child abuse, it is YOUR duty under the law to report it!*

**The Public:** Any person having cause to believe that a child is being abused or neglected shall immediately make a report.

Examples of the Public Include:

- A neighbor
- A friend
- A parent
- A guardian
- A managing or possessory conservator
- Any person offering housing to a child who may be subject to abuse
- Any member of a child's family or household

**Professionals:** Professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, or child daycare workers that have cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected or may be abused or neglected MUST make a verbal report within 48 hours. A professional may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report.

**Who is considered a professional?** An individual who is licensed or certified by the state or who is an employee of a facility licensed, certified, or operated by the state and who, in the normal course of official duties or duties for which a license or certification is required, has direct contact with children.

**What if my Personal Communications Are Otherwise Privileged?** You still have a duty to report within 48 hours. Examples include attorneys, members of the clergy, medical practitioners, social workers, mental health professionals, and employees of clinics or health care facilities that provide reproductive services.

Other Examples of Professionals Include:

- Juvenile Probation Officers
- Juvenile Detention Officers
- Correctional Officers
- Any school personnel, staff, and volunteers

## Q. Why Should I Report Child Abuse?

*It's Your Duty Under The Law!  
You Could Save A Child's Life!*



## **Types of Child Abuse**

### **Emotional Abuse**

This type of abuse often includes belittling, shaming, humiliating, calling a child names, telling him that he is "worthless" or "no good," ignoring a child, or giving little to no love or attention to a child. Oftentimes, children who are subject to this type of abuse are withdrawn, fearful, overly anxious about doing something wrong, and have difficulties interacting with others and showing affection.

### **Neglect**

Child neglect is the most common type of child abuse, and is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene or even supervision. Often times, a parent or caregiver's addiction to drugs or alcohol leads to this type of abuse. Signs of neglect may include when a child is malnourished, lacks personal cleanliness, steals or begs for food, and is unattended for long periods of time.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse involves physical harm or injury to the child. It may also be the result of severe discipline that is inappropriate to the child's age or physical condition. Children will often make excuses for or intentionally hide their injuries with this type of abuse.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Often the most difficult type of abuse to spot, this type of abuse involves subjecting a child to any type of sexual act, whether a child is physically contacted or not. A good sign of sexual abuse is a child's strong reluctance to be around a specific individual.

## Warning Signs

The following are the most common warning signs of child abuse:

- Child seems detached or avoids caregiver.
- Child is withdrawn, fearful and/or shows extreme behaviors.
- Frequent and/or unexplained injuries, bruises, welts or cuts. Injuries may also appear to have a pattern such as a hand or a stick mark.
- Child is often dirty, smells bad or is in clothing inappropriate for the temperature.
- Frequent illness or injuries that are left untreated.
- Sudden and unexplained injuries that are left untreated.
- Sudden and unexplained change in school performance, participation and attendance.
- Child threatens or attempts to run away or commit suicide.
- Unusual knowledge or interest in sexual acts.
- Behavior that is inappropriately adult or inappropriately infantile.



## Tips for Talking to an Abused Child

It's important to know that the common element in all four types of abuse is the destabilizing effect each type has on a child. Children best thrive in a stable, predictable environment where they can be confident that, above all, they are safe and loved. A child experiencing any type of abuse cannot feel safe. The unpredictability of an abused child's world leaves him feeling helpless and unprotected.

**Avoid denial and remain calm:** A common reaction to news as unpleasant and shocking as child abuse is denial. However, if you show signs of "denial" to the information a child is telling you, then the child may be afraid to continue and will shut down. You must remain calm and as reassuring as possible.

**Don't interrogate:** Let the child explain to you in his or her own words what happened and do not interrupt them. Interruption will only confuse or fluster him and make it harder for the child to tell a story that is already difficult for him to explain.

**Reassure the child that he did nothing wrong:** It takes a lot of courage for a child to come forward about abuse. You need to reassure the child that you are listening and taking him seriously, and that what happened is not his fault!

**Safety comes first:** If you feel your safety or the child's safety is currently being threatened by the abuser, contact law enforcement immediately and let them handle it!



## What Happens After You Report Child Abuse?

Many people are hesitant to report abuse because (1) they don't know if abuse has really occurred and (2) they are unaware of the process that takes place after abuse is reported.

When a person reports abuse or neglect of a child, CPS is required, by law, to investigate the allegation unless the report itself does not constitute abuse. For example, if someone contacts CPS to report that he witnessed one child hit another child at daycare, that incident may not be investigated. However, if a person reports that he saw a parent slap a child across the face repeatedly, CPS would be required to investigate that incident.

After a report is made, the matter is investigated thoroughly by a trained professional. CPS has 30 days to complete the investigation and report their findings. CPS will make one of three findings: (1) "reason to believe" there is abuse or neglect; (2) "unable to determine" if abuse or neglect occurred; or (3) the allegation is "ruled out."

If there is a "reason to believe" the child has been abused or neglected, then a decision is made as to what action to take and a safety plan for the child is put into place. If CPS puts a safety plan into place, it does not automatically mean that the child is removed or that the person or people responsible for the abuse or neglect are arrested. Often, the parent(s) and the child(ren) are required to attend counseling, parenting classes, batterer's intervention or other programs which will address the problems that the family is having. If a child is removed, it is usually temporary until the parents receive the help they need or until CPS believes the child will be safe in a parent's care. Furthermore, if removal is necessary, CPS makes every effort to locate a family member or close family friend with whom the child can safely be placed. Foster care is a last resort for placement, especially if the placement may be on a long term basis.

### Important Facts

- 13,700 children are abused and neglected every day.
- 4 children die from child abuse every day.

**You can help lower these numbers to ZERO by looking out for signs and symptoms before it's too late for the next child!**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What information is helpful to have when making an abuse or neglect report?**

The name, age, address of child; your name and contact information; description of the situation and the child; current injuries, medical problems, or behavioral problems; explain how you know about the situation; any additional information that will help identify or locate the child.

### **Will the person know I've reported him/her?**

Your report is confidential, and is not subject to public release under the Open Records Act. You are immune from civil or criminal liability for any report made in good faith. Your identity is kept confidential. DFPS staff is required by law to keep the reporter's identity confidential (Texas Family Code, Section 261.101 (d)).

### **Why am I asked for my name and contact information when reporting?**

This allows field investigators to ask follow up questions if needed.

### **Will anyone know my identity?**

Your identity as a reporter may be revealed only to a judge or law enforcement personnel in certain situations.

### **How should I report if I want to remain anonymous?**

To remain anonymous, call the hotline at 1(800)252-5400.

### **What if I am not sure of abuse?**

If you have reason to suspect abuse, but are not positive, make the report. If you have doubts about whether or not it is abuse, call the hotline. They will advise you whether the signs you have observed might suggest abuse occurred.

### **How can I find out what happened with my report?**

CPS may inform you about the status, but if you do not hear anything, call CPS and request the information.

### **What if I reported and nothing happened?**

If the outcome of a report is "allegations unfounded," it does not mean abuse did not happen; it means that there was insufficient evidence to support charges. The CPS case may remain open while services are provided; the reports may still be under investigation.

**Remember** even if the child is not removed, your report may help establish a pattern that will help a child. **Continue to document new evidence of abuse and make a second report if you have reason to suspect continuing abuse.**



## To Report Child Abuse

In Case of Emergency

**911**

Texas Child Abuse Hotline

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**1-800-252-5400**

National Child Abuse Hotline

**1-800-4-A-CHILD**

Texas Runaway Hotline

**1-888-580-HELP**

Texas Youth Hotline

**1-800-98-YOUTH**

By secure website at:

**<https://txabusehotline.org>**

You can contact your local police or sheriff's department, local Child Protective Services or Children's Advocacy Center.

The information and statistics contained in this pamphlet are located at the following websites:

Texas Department of Family Services

**[www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us)**

Texas Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas, Inc.

**[www.cactx.org](http://www.cactx.org)**

Texas Young Lawyers Association

**[www.tyla.org](http://www.tyla.org)**

Prevent Child Abuse Texas

**[www.preventchildabusetexas.org](http://www.preventchildabusetexas.org)**