

Selection of child care is an important task for Kansas parents. The series ***Choosing Care for Your Children*** is designed to help you be a better-informed consumer.

While the vast majority of child care is provided by warm, capable individuals intent on providing a safe, secure, and healthy place for children, there are occasional incidents of child abuse and neglect in child care facilities. Parents and caregivers may also discover that a child has been abused by a spouse, friend, stranger or another caregiver and is in need of special services. What can you do as a parent to protect your child?

Listen to your child

When a young child spontaneously makes comments or asks questions relating to possible abuse, it is important to listen to what the child is saying. Often such statements are made by the child in a comfortable setting and usually to parents or other close adults or children. If the adult shows shock, horror, or disbelief, the child may withhold the information and keep it secret for a long time. On the other hand, parents and professionals sometimes tend to simply dismiss such reports made by a child who tries with a limited vocabulary to tell about an experience he or she does not fully understand. Generally, it should be assumed that children, especially preschoolers, do not make up stories in this area.

Know the types of child abuse

Physical abuse—Any nonaccidental injury which is inconsistent with the explanation given for it, suffered by a child as the result of an act by the person responsible for the care of the child. Physical abuse often occurs in the name of discipline or punishment, and ranges from a slap resulting in reddening of surface tissue lasting more than 24 hours to use of objects such as straps, belts, kitchen utensils, electrical cords, sticks etc.

Denial of critical care (neglect)—The failure on the part of a person responsible for the care of a child to provide for the adequate food, shelter, clothing, emotional support, medical care, or supervision necessary for the child's health and welfare that places the child in a life- or health-threatening situation.

Sexual abuse—The commission of a sexual offense with or to a child through the acts of the person responsible for the care of the child. Child sexual abuse can involve one or more different kinds of physical or nonphysical sexual contact. Nonphysical forms include exhibitionism, pornography, and child prostitution. Physical forms can include fondling, molestation, genital or oral stimulation, sexual intercourse, sodomy, and rape.

The child victim can be a girl or boy; in most cases knows and trusts the abuser; can be an infant, toddler, preschool or school age child; and is usually afraid to tell about the experience for fear of being blamed or punished.

Emotional abuse—Any interaction with or to a child over a period of time including but not limited to making excessive demands; belittling; rejecting a child; constantly treating children in the same family or group of children unequally; or lack of concern for a child's well-being to the extent that such maltreatment affects the child's physical, social and emotional development.

Recognize physical signs of possible abuse or neglect

Physical abuse:

- Bruises and welts on the face, lips, mouth, torso, back, buttocks, or thighs; clustered forming regular patterns showing shape of article used to make injury.
- Burns on the bottom of the feet, genitals, arms, legs, neck, hands or torso resulting from:
 - cigarettes, cigars, matches;
 - hot water;
 - electric burners and irons;
 - ropes.
- Fractures or dislocations on the skull, nose, face or extremities; multiple or spiral fractures; tender or swollen joints; and any fracture in a child under 2 years of age.
- Cuts and bruises on the mouth, gums, lips, eyes, external genitals, back arms, legs, and torso.
- Bald patches on head which may be interspersed with normal hair.

Neglect (denial of critical care):

- Consistent hunger, poor hygiene, inappropriate dress.
- Consistent lack of supervision especially in dangerous activities or for long periods.
- Unattended physical problems or medical needs.
- Abandonment in parked cars, buses, on field trips, at home, or at the child care facility.
- Underweight appearance, poor growth pattern: e.g. small in stature, failure to thrive.

Sexual abuse:

- Torn or stained underclothing.
- Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Vaginal or rectal bleeding, pain, itching, swollen genitals, and vaginal/penile discharge.
- Unexplained infections in the genital area.

Emotional abuse:

- Inability to accept a child with his potentialities as well as his limitations.
- Consistent belittling, downgrading, rejection, and comparison.
- Unfair demands and expectations.

Recognize physical signs of possible abuse or neglect

Children who have been abused or neglected sometimes show changes in their attitudes and behaviors. However, changes in behavior can be caused by other factors. It is important to understand the basis for changes. Be observant and try to determine the cause. The following are possible signs:

- Change in attitude about leaving parent; clinging, excessive crying, fear of separation.
- Seems anxious when other children cry.
- Recurrent nightmares or disturbed sleep patterns.
- Behavior extremes—aggressiveness or withdrawal.
- Vacant or frozen stare.
- Poor self-concept.
- Feels deserving of punishment.
- Whispering speech.
- Loss of appetite for no apparent reason, or excessive appetite.
- Unusual interest in or knowledge of sexual matters, expressing affection in ways inappropriate for a child of that age.
- Reenactment of abuse using dolls, drawings, or friends.
- Fear of a person or an intense dislike at being left somewhere or with someone.
- Other behavioral signals include: aggressive or disruptive behavior; withdrawal: delinquent behavior; and school failure.

Know what to do if you think your child may have been abused or neglected

- Observe and listen to the child without forcing words or images.
- Believe the child.
- Support the child. If your child tells you about the incident, explain that you are glad he or she told you.
- Have the child examined by a physician or other appropriate professional.
- Immediately report the incident on weekdays during business hours to the local office of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. On weekends, nights, and holidays notify your local law enforcement officer.

(Note: The report may be made in person, by telephone or by mail. The reporter is not required by law to give name, address, or telephone number. However, it is helpful if the name of the reporter is shared with the agency staff member recording the report in case further information is needed.)

- Provide descriptive and accurate information to the person recording your report.

What will happen next?

A social worker from the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services and/or a law enforcement officer will contact you. They will want to talk to you and your child and ask questions about what happened. They will also talk to other involved adults and children.

Depending on the findings, you may be asked to have your child examined by a physician, if you have not already done so. The social worker may also refer you to other available community services which may be of help to you and your child.

How can I protect my child?

- Talk to your child every day and take time to really listen.
- Know where your child is and who he or she is with at all times.
- Provide health and safety information (e.g. what to do when alone at home, when a stranger asks you to go somewhere, when someone you know wants to touch your private parts).
- Carefully choose your child's caregiver whenever you are unable to be with your child.

For more information see the following publications in this series:

MF-838: A Guide for Parents
MF-841: Child Care Centers and Preschools
MF-840: Day Care Homes

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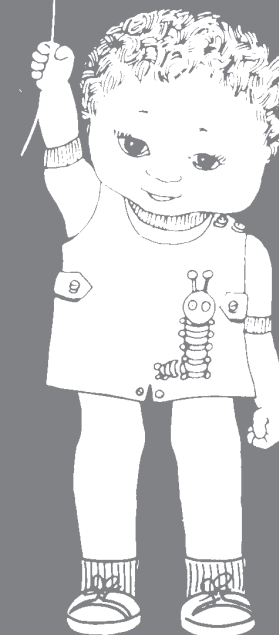
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Choosing Care for Your Children



Child Abuse and Neglect



**Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services
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