

CHILD MALTREATMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Detection and Prevention:

1. Recognize the signs of possible child maltreatment

Physical Abuse	Neglect	Emotional Abuse	Sexual Abuse
Unexplainable, excessive, or repeated bruises and broken bones	Refusal of recommended services or treatment	Poor self-esteem	Sexual knowledge beyond their years
Aggression	Little or no supervision	Withdrawal	Withdrawal, anxiety, depression, nightmares, bedwetting
Fear of caregiver(s)	Hording of food	Aggression	Bladder infections, Excessive masturbation
Fear of going home	Poor school attendance	Self-destructive behaviors	Acting out sexually

2. Be familiar with your state and district regulations and laws regarding what qualifies as abuse and the responsibilities of professionals working with children who may be at risk.

3. Approach children you suspect have fallen victim to abuse. This informs the child that they are being looked after and there is an accessible adult in case they feel the need to disclose any abuse they have experienced. An example question which can start the conversation follows:

“Children can get punished (disciplined) for doing different things; how often do you get punished and in what ways?”

4. Know how children communicate. Children may only tell some of what happened or pretend it happened to someone else to see how you will react.

5. Educate parents through parenting workshops and other sources of information and encourage them to begin talking to their children about their bodies, sex, and sexual abuse early. Typically, school counselors and school psychologists provide such information.

If a child discloses maltreatment:

1. Remain calm

2. Maintain the child’s privacy. If a disclosure is made during class, let the student know that you heard them. However, do not discuss the situation in front of other children. Find a private, interruption-free place to talk.

3. **Listen carefully** to the child. They may tell you information that is crucial to making a good report. Do not ask for too many details about what happened.
 4. **Let the child know that you will help them by reporting the abuse to someone who has helped other children like them.**
 5. **Take IMMEDIATE action.** Follow your school's procedures and make sure the Child Protective Services and/or police are contacted. Remember, **teachers are required by law** to report suspected cases of physical abuse. Report suspected cases immediately to school administrator, counselor, or nurse. Do not try to conduct an assessment yourself.
 6. **Write down as much of the details of the disclosure as soon as you can.** If a telephone report is made by the school, it also must be followed up with written reports including relevant information. Parents are informed that a report has been made.
7. **DO NOT:**
- **Panic, convey anger, or shock.** A child victim may not understand your emotions or reactions.
 - **Promise to keep the child's secret.**
 - **Ask direct or leading questions.** This may interfere with further investigation of the allegation.
 - **Say negative things about the abuser.**
 - **Discuss the situation with others who are not involved in the investigation.** Protect the child's right to confidentiality as much as possible. Only discuss with people outside of the investigation on a "need to know" basis.

Classroom and School Support:

1. **Emphasize structure and routines.** Clearly stated rules let all children know your expectations. This fosters a sense of safety and security for the child.
2. **Recognize and select discipline methods that are appropriate for the maltreated child.** Forceful discipline could evoke fear in physically abused children. Also, neglected children may have difficulty appropriately seeking attention.
3. **Let the child make choices, when appropriate.** This is thought to help a child gain a sense of control in their chaotic life.
4. **Incorporate social skills training.** Children exposed to maltreatment have been modeled inappropriate ways of dealing with emotions, like anger and impulsive behavior. Learning new strategies for coping with and expressing one's emotions will not only foster positive behavior in the classroom but also may help children's confidence. Model appropriate interpersonal relationships as well.
5. **Utilize positive behavioral support systems** which can be tailored to the child's individual needs and reinforce desired social behaviors. When this is consistently applied, it can incorporate many of the strategies helpful for working with maltreated and other at-risk students.

- 6. Listen to the student and provide emotional support.** Be a constant source of encouragement and acceptance.
- 7. Provide a safe environment** in the school by being aware of and intolerant of any abuse by fellow students or other school employees.
- 8. Tailor curriculum** for abused children so that they experience success with their assignments in order to foster self-esteem. Draw on the child's strengths and provide them with opportunities to demonstrate and build on these strengths in order to enhance an optimistic outlook for their future.
- 9. Seek consultation and counseling services** for the student, as needed, from the school psychologist, school counselor, or school nurse.

Resources:

**To report Child Abuse and Neglect in Delaware (24 hours a day, 365 days a year)
1-800-292-9582**

Delaware State Police	302-739-5882
Delaware Helpline	1-800-464-4357
Office of Prevention & Early Intervention Resource Center	302-892-4505
Prevent Child Abuse Delaware	1-866-925-7223
www.pcadelaware.org	

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