

CRB Training Module

Child Abuse and Neglect

Learning Objectives

After studying the information in this training module, you should be able to

- Identify actions and symptoms that indicate physical abuse.
- Identify actions that constitute sexual abuse.
- Identify actions that constitute emotional abuse.
- Identify actions that constitute physical, emotional, and educational neglect.
- Identify high-risk factors for abuse or neglect.

Introduction

In 2001, approximately 903,000 children were confirmed victims of abuse and neglect in the United States. Of these, approximately 59% were neglected, 19% were physically abused, 10% were sexually abused, and 6% were emotionally or psychologically abused. In the same year, New Mexico's Child Protective Services received 23,314 reports of child maltreatment. Of these referrals, 6,929 children were confirmed to have been abused or neglected. In 2001, five New Mexico children died as a direct result of abuse.

Children whose cases are reviewed by the NM Child Abuse & Neglect Citizen Review Board have come into state custody because they have been abused, neglected, or abandoned. Detailed definitions of abuse, neglect, and abandonment are provided in the "Abuse and Neglect Act," Chapter 32A, Article 4, of the New Mexico State Statutes and summarized below.

An **abused child** is one who has suffered or who is at risk of suffering serious harm because of the action or lack of action of the child's parent, guardian, or custodian. This harm can include:

1. Physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse, or sexual exploitation.
2. Being knowingly, intentionally, or negligently placed in a situation that may endanger the child's life or health.
3. Torture, cruel confinement, or cruel punishment.

A **neglected child**, according to the NM Children's Code, is a child who experiences any of the following:

1. Abandonment.
2. Lack of proper parental care and control or lack of subsistence, education, medical, or other care or control necessary for the child's well-being.
3. Physical or sexual abuse when the parent, guardian, or custodian knew or should have known of the abuse and failed to take reasonable steps to protect the child.
4. Placement for care or adoption in violation of the law.

An **abandoned child** is one whose parent, without justifiable cause,

1. left the child without provision for the child's identification for fourteen days
2. left the child with others (including the other parent or an agency) without provision for support and without communication, for a period of three months if the child is under six years old or a period of six months if the child is over six years of age.

A child's physical, psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social development can be devastated by abuse and neglect. Abuse and neglect can cause brain injury, retardation, developmental delays, chronic medical problems, mental illness, drops in IQ, and neurological and learning disabilities. Abused and neglected children are more likely to perform poorly in school, to have trouble relating to peers, to commit crimes, and to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs. The effects of abuse and neglect can last a lifetime.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves physical injury that is caused by caregivers. The injury may be either intentional or unintentional, as in the case of excessive discipline or punishment. Physical abuse includes punching, beating, burning, biting, shaking, or kicking a child.

Physical abuse is suspected when the explanation for injuries doesn't match the nature of the injuries, when there is no justifiable explanation, when circumstances suggest that the injuries could not have been accidental. The following may be evidence of physical abuse by a caregiver, although most can also occur for reasons other than abuse:

- fractured bones
- bruises
- burns
- scratches
- bite marks
- bleeding
- malnutrition
- failure to thrive

Strangely twisted fractures, multiple fractures, joint dislocations, and fractures in infants too young to be mobile may be indicators of physical abuse. Bruises in the shape of a hand mark or finger mark, bruises in infants (especially those too young to be mobile), or bruises of a variety of colors (indicating they have been received over a period of time) may be indicators of physical abuse. Burns may be caused by cigarettes or by ropes.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves any activity designed to stimulate a child sexually or to use the child either for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or of another person. It includes criminal sexual contact, incest, and criminal sexual penetration. It may involve fondling a child's genitals, oral sexual contact, intercourse, rape, sodomy, or exhibitionism. Sexual exploitation involves allowing or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution or to participate in production of obscene or pornographic materials. In either sexual abuse or sexual exploitation, developmentally immature dependent children or adolescents are involved in sexual acts that

they do not fully understand, that violate social taboos, and to which the child is unable to give informed consent.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can include extreme or bizarre forms of punishment such as confining a child in a dark closet, as well as habitual scapegoating, belittling, or blaming. It can also involve rejection of a child, treating siblings unequally, or persistent lack of concern for the child's welfare. Speech disorders, severe anxiety, lags in physical development, depression, withdrawal, or excessive aggressive behavior may be signs of emotional abuse, although these symptoms may also arise from other causes.

Neglect

Neglect of a child involves failure of a caregiver to provide for the child's basic needs. Consideration of cultural values plays a part in determinations of neglect, as does recognition that poverty and lack of necessary services can play a role in failing to provide for a child's necessities.

Physical neglect includes failing to seek health care, failing to obtain routine immunizations, abandonment, evicting a child from the home, refusing to allow a runaway to return home, and inadequate supervision. Physical neglect can also include prenatal exposure to illegal drugs, alcohol, or HIV/AIDS.

Emotional neglect involves serious inattention to a child's needs for affection, domestic violence in the child's presence, and failure to provide necessary psychological care.

Educational neglect includes failing to enroll a child in school, failing to attend to a need for special education, and allowing chronic truancy.

Implications for CRB Members

When faced with the case of an abused or neglected child, decision makers are faced with an enormous task: to discover and understand the specific needs of each child and to identify solutions and services that will successfully address those needs. They must therefore develop an in-depth understanding of a broad spectrum of subject areas, including the following:

- Physical and psychological symptoms and long-term effects of abuse and neglect
- Types and nature of treatments and service providers available in the region
- Paths toward achieving well-being, safety, and permanency for the child
- Applicable laws and court proceedings
- Roles and responsibilities of interested parties (for example, foster parents, social workers, guardians ad litem, court-appointed special advocates, Citizen Review Board members, and judges)
- Family dynamics of dysfunctional families
- Cultural and ethnic factors affecting the child

Decision makers must develop understanding of the context in which the risk for child abuse and neglect is high. Parental abuse of alcohol and illegal drugs is a key risk factor. Poverty or

economic stress, homelessness, adult domestic violence, and adult mental health problems also contribute significantly to the risk for abuse and neglect.

Those who make decisions on behalf of children may themselves have been abused or neglected as children, or may as children have experienced similar social or health problems. As adults, it is their responsibility to recognize those times when their emotions become highly charged as a result of their own history. While their deep empathy and knowledge are certainly assets, these decision makers must be careful not to interpret each child's case solely on the basis of their own personal experience and not to insist that the specific solutions that worked for them will apply to each child's situation.

Citizen Review Board members contribute a powerful voice to decisions concerning the welfare of abused and neglected children through their recommendation reports to the court. Their informed recommendations are a call to action on behalf of a child in need.

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Sources: *Abuse and Neglect Act*, Chapter 32 [32A], Article 4, NMSA 1978; National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, online at www.calib.com/nccanch/pubs/factsheets/childmal.cfm; U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, *Child Maltreatment 2001* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2003); Child Welfare League of America, online at www.cwla.org/programs/childprotection.

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If you are ready to take the test for this training module, click on the link below. Once you submit the test, your answers will be e-mailed to you and forwarded to Terri Newman for scoring.

[Click Here to Take the Test](#)