

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

School personnel are mandated reporters and are required, by law, to report all known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. You do not have to witness or even have definite proof to identify suspected cases of abuse or neglect. Rather, the law requires that a person have a “reasonable suspicion” of child abuse or neglect. This means that it is reasonable to suspect child abuse or neglect, based upon facts that could cause a reasonable person, in a like position, drawing on his or her training and experience, to suspect child abuse or neglect.

Warning Signs of Abuse or Neglect

The first step in helping abused or neglected children is identifying signs. The following are examples of warning signs of potential abuse (emotional, physical, neglect or sexual):

- Frequent injuries or unexplained bruises, welts, cuts; wearing inappropriate clothing to cover up
- Frequently late or missing school
- Trouble walking or sitting
- Excessively withdrawn, fearful, anxious; shows extremes in behavior
- Untreated illnesses and physical injuries
- Overly sexual behavior or language for age

Proper Interaction with Minors

Should one not currently exist, schools should develop and enforce a child abuse prevention policy that includes a section on proper interaction with minors, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Eliminate alone times without other adults being present, accessible, or in view
- Physical contact should always be non-sexual, appropriate to circumstance, and unambiguous in meaning
- Never being with minors in a concealed area
- Never host an event for minors or invite minors to homes without the presence of the minor’s guardians/parents or multiple adults as part of an approved, well-supervised District function
- Never give a minor a gift without the consent of the District
- Never provide tobacco products, drugs, or alcohol to minors or purchase such for minors

Obligations of Mandated Reporters

Employees who have knowledge of or suspect child abuse must contact an appropriate local law enforcement or county child welfare agency, such as, the police or sheriff’s department or a county probation department, if designated by the county to receive child abuse reports or a county welfare department/county child protective services. The report must be made immediately over the telephone and should be followed up in writing.

For more information regarding best practices for child abuse prevention, please contact your ASCIP Risk Services Consultant or visit our website at <http://ascip.org/risk-services/child-abuse-prevention-resources/>. Additionally, ASCIP offers an on-line training module titled **Smarter Adults – Safer Children: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse** and a refresher module to assist the district in continuing education and abuse prevention awareness for all school personnel.

