



RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

Preventing Child Abductions and Exploitation

Child abductions and exploitation are directly linked to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Children who are targeted for abuse may be exploited sexually or may be victims of abduction for the purpose of facilitating their abuse. They may also be abducted and even murdered to prevent disclosure of abuse. It is important to understand how to recognize signs of abuse to help prevent child abductions and exploitation.



Looking back at history, the early years of American colonization was witness to a number of European assimilation tactics that forced child-rearing to occur in a more rigid and militaristic manner than was traditional in Native communities. Assimilation practices like these would linger for hundreds of years to come, leading to an increased risk of child abuse in Native communities today (NICWA, 2013). While modern statistics on American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) children experiencing abuse are limited, we do know they make up 1.1% of all child maltreatment victim reports to state and county child welfare agencies (Children's Bureau, 2012). AI/AN children are also more likely than those of other ethnicities to be confirmed as victims of neglect (59.7%), and are least likely to be confirmed as victims of physical abuse (6.4%) (Children's Bureau, 2008).

What is Abuse?

Child Welfare Information Gateway defines abuse as “**an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.**” Often times, people associate child abuse as only occurring through physical harm, however, child abuse can occur in several forms. Some of which include neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual harm. This can often make warning signs difficult to recognize. Therefore, it is important to not only look out for blatant changes in a child's behavior and appearance, but also subtle differences.

Types of Abuse and Warning Signs

• Physical abuse

The parent or guardian may not always have intended to hurt the child, but nevertheless injury may have resulted from over-discipline or physical punishment.

Signs of physical abuse: bruises, scratches, broken bones, burn marks, limping, bodily shakes, easily frightened, and being abusive to others.

• Emotional Abuse

This encompasses actions that cause, or could cause serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders. Actions as mild as belittling a child, scape-goating, or rejecting treatment for them are included.

Signs of emotional abuse: yearning for attention, exhibiting avoidance tendencies, depression, withdrawing from others, low self-esteem, and being short tempered.



- **Child Neglect**

Child neglect is described as a failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Neglect can be physical, educational, medical, and/or emotional.

Signs of child neglect: lack of supervision, food, medical care, inappropriate emotional mood swings, substance abuse, and chronic truancy.

Reporting Child Abuse

Reporting child abuse can be unnerving, especially if a child is being abused by someone close to them, or by someone you know. But if you suspect a child has been abused or neglected, we urge you to call the **National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)** at 503-222-4044, your state's **Child Protective Services** and/or **Social Services**, your **local law enforcement agency** (Tribal or State), and/or the **Bureau of Indian Affairs Division of Human Services**.

For a list of staff by region, see: <https://on.doi.gov/2vT1dR4>, or call 202-513-7642.

Never allow abuse to go unreported!

Sources

- National Indian Child Welfare Association. "American Indian/Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence in the Home. Testimony of Dr. Sarah L Kastelic, Deputy Director." December 9, 2013. <http://bit.ly/2xm07ee>.
- Child Welfare Information Gateway. "Definitions of child abuse and neglect." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, 2016. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/define.pdf>.
- Kickapoo Social Services. "Child Abuse and Neglect in Indian Country, Definitions, Indicators and Reporting." Kansas Kickapoo Tribe. <http://bit.ly/2wxUKeL>.
- Cooper, Randall. "Children's Advocacy Centers and Indian Country." Update, vol. 24, no. 2, 2014, pp. 1-4. National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse. www.ndaajustice.org/pdf/Update%20Vol24_No2.pdf.