

All Girl Scouts of Northern California volunteers are protectors of children and are required to complete our [Mandated Reporter Course](#). As an adult volunteer, it is your role to keep your eyes and ears open, and to report any suspicious activity to the appropriate authorities and to council. Use this tip sheet as a reminder of possible red flags that may indicate abuse or neglect and what to do if you suspect child abuse or neglect.

Physical Abuse

Child's appearance and behavior that may indicate physical abuse:

- Has unexplained injuries, such as burns, bites, bruises, broken bones, or black eyes
- Has fading bruises or other noticeable marks after an absence from school
- Seems scared, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, or aggressive
- Seems frightened of his or her parents and protests or cries when it is time to go home
- Shrinks at the approach of adults
- Shows changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Abuses animals or pets

Parent or caregiver's behavior that may indicate physical abuse:

- Offers conflicting, unconvincing, or no explanation for the child's injury or provides an explanation that is not consistent with the injury
- Shows little concern for the child
- Sees the child as entirely bad, burdensome, or worthless
- Uses harsh physical discipline with the child
- Has a history of abusing animals or pets

Sexual Abuse

Child's appearance and behavior that may indicate sexual abuse:

- Has difficulty walking or sitting
- Experiences bleeding, bruising, or swelling in their private parts
- Suddenly refuses to go to school
- Reports nightmares or bedwetting
- Experiences a sudden change in appetite
- Demonstrates bizarre, sophisticated, or unusual sexual knowledge or behavior
- Becomes pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted disease, particularly if under age 14
- Runs away
- Reports sexual abuse by a parent or another adult caregiver
- Attaches very quickly to strangers or new adults in their environment

Parent or caregiver's behavior that may indicate sexual abuse:

- Tries to be the child's friend rather than assume an adult role
- Makes up excuses to be alone with the child
- Talks with the child about the adult's personal problems or relationships

Emotional Abuse

Child's appearance and behavior that may indicate emotional abuse:

- Shows extremes in behavior, such as being overly compliant or demanding, extremely passive, or aggressive
- Is either inappropriately adult (e.g., parenting other children) or inappropriately infantile (e.g., frequently rocking or head-banging)
- Is delayed in physical or emotional development
- Shows signs of depression or suicidal thoughts
- Reports an inability to develop emotional bonds with others

Parent or caregiver's behavior that may indicate emotional abuse:

- Constantly blames, belittles, or berates the child
- Describes the child negatively
- Overtly rejects the child

Neglect

Child's appearance and behavior that may indicate neglect:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical care (including immunizations), dental care, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Parent or caregiver's behavior that may indicate neglect:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). [What is child abuse and neglect? Recognizing the signs and symptoms](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.

What to do if you suspect abuse or neglect

- **If you see abuse happening, the child is in immediate physical harm, or there are serious mental health concerns call 911 right away.**
 - Then, follow [GSNorCal's Emergency Management Plan](#).
- **If the danger is not immediate, it is best to report the suspected abuse to your county agency and then to council by reporting to your assigned Volunteer Support Manager (VSM). If you do not know who that is, contact info@gsnorcal.org to be put in contact with your VSM.**
 - Each county has its own agencies that handle child welfare cases. Find the number for your county on the [California County Emergency Response Child Abuse Reporting Telephone Numbers](#) website.
 - After filing a phone report, you will need to fill out and submit the [Suspected Child Abuse Form SS 8572](#) within 36 hours.

When you call your county's Child Abuse Reporting Hotline, you will be asked to provide the following information:

- Your name (you can remain anonymous if you are not a mandated reporter)
- Name and address of the child and the child's parents or caregivers
- Present location of the child
- Child's age
- Nature and extent of the injury/abuse, including any evidence of previous injuries
- The name, age, and condition of other children in the same household
- Any other information requested by the child protection agency or information you feel may be helpful in establishing the cause of the abuse/neglect to the child
- The person(s) responsible for the abuse/neglect of the child

Remember:

- Do not try to investigate on your own. It is not your responsibility to prove abuse, you just need to call attention to it if you suspect it.
- Making a report is not making an accusation, it is requesting an investigation and assessment to determine if help is needed.
- Proof of abuse will be determined through investigation by child welfare professionals or law enforcement.