

Frequency of Abuse/Neglect

Child abuse in the United States is a serious and widespread problem. The statistics are shocking. In the United States, the number of confirmed instances of abuse/neglect is equal to on average *one child being abused every ten seconds (or roughly 700,000 children per year)*. Because so many cases go unreported to police or social services, the actual incidence of abuse/neglect is estimated to be three times greater, with over 2 million American children being abused/neglected each year. Contrary to popular belief, child abuse knows no boundaries. It happens in every class, race and ethnicity, religious group, and all walks of life. No family is immune. No community unaffected.

Statistics About Abuse/Neglect

- Children younger than one year old have the highest rate of victimization
- 82% of all child fatalities were younger than four years old
- Over 1,500 children die every year in the U.S. from abuse/neglect
- Boys and girls are equally likely to be abused/neglected
- Nationally, “neglect” is the most commonly confirmed form of abuse (78%)
 - But in Pennsylvania, “sexual abuse” is the most frequent form of confirmed abuse (54%)
- Pennsylvania has, by far, the lowest reporting rate in the country, with 9.8 reports of suspected child abuse/neglect per 1,000 children, versus a national average of 45.8 per 1,000 children

Consequences of Abuse/Neglect

Child abuse/neglect can impair a child’s ability to establish relationships with others, develop strong self-esteem, perform well academically, and lead healthy lives. Abused children often suffer physical injuries, including cuts, bruises, burns, and broken bones. The stress of abuse/neglect can disrupt a child’s brain development and immune system. Abused/neglected children are at higher risk for a wide variety of health problems throughout their lives—depression, eating disorders, drug abuse, alcoholism, anxiety, high-risk sexual behaviors, suicide, and many others.

Facts About Abuse (cont.)

Family “stress” in any of its many forms increases the risk for abuse/neglect. This includes family violence, drugs or alcohol, poverty, chronic health problems, children with behavioral problems, and families who are isolated and/or lacking good social supports.

Things to Know About Abuse/Neglect

Because children under four years of age are at greatest risk for severe injury or death from abuse/neglect, **early childhood professionals have a crucial role in identifying and reporting at-risk children.**

Look Out for Child Abuse/Neglect when you see things that are concerning, such as:

- Bruises in unusual places
- Bruises in any child who doesn't yet walk or cruise
- Major changes in behavior that persist and are not well explained
- Major stress in a family whose child who is having significant problems

For more facts about child abuse, see:

- [Administration for Children & Families Children's Bureau Child Maltreatment](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Child Maltreatment Fact Sheet](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics](#)

Pennsylvania Law requires that once you have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse/neglect, you must make a **direct and immediate report to ChildLine** (1-800-932-0313, or file online at www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis), and then notify the person in charge at your facility or their designee.

Failure to report suspected abuse can result in financial penalties, incarceration, as well as loss of your professional license.

OFFENSE	MINIMUM CONFINEMENT	MAXIMUM CONFINEMENT	FINE MAXIMUM
3rd Degree Misdemeanor	6 months	1 year	\$2,500
2nd Degree Misdemeanor	1 year	2 years	\$5,000
1st Degree Misdemeanor	2.5 years	5 years	\$10,000
3rd Degree Felony	3.5 years	7 years	\$15,000