

The suspicion of daycare abuse is nerve-racking for every parent. Changes in your child's behavior, sudden and unexplained injuries, or your child's stories about their experiences at daycare may all point to possible abuse.

Types of Abuse

There are four main types of abuse:

- * Physical abuse - an intentional act against a child that produces physical harm.
- * Neglect - the failure to provide food, shelter, safe environment, education and/or health care, and may result in physical harm. Neglect is the most common type of child abuse.
- * Sexual abuse - contact abuse involves sexual contact with a child, including touching and penetration; non-contact abuse includes watching or posing for pornographic pictures or videos, observation of intercourse, performance of sexual activities, or to witness sexual exhibitionism.
- * Emotional abuse - lack of action, failure to show affection, verbal abuse, bullying, and other forms of mental harm point to emotional abuse.

Things to Look For

Your child is the best indicator as to whether abuse may be occurring at daycare. Ask your child questions and listen intently to the answers. Don't simply accept a yes/no answer; your child may not realize what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable. Other cues that may indicate abuse:

- * Changes in your child's behavior and extreme mood swings
- * Changes in bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances
- * Acting out inappropriately - hitting, striking, or other rebellious behavior
- * Acting out inappropriate sexual activity or showing an unusual interest in sexual matters
- * Regression to infantile, clingy behavior
- * School problems, behavioral problems
- * Changes in toilet habits
- * Fear of certain places, people or activities
- * Fear, aggression, and/or clingy behavior on arrival at the daycare facility

How to Investigate

If you suspect daycare abuse, there are several mechanisms to investigate. Start first by a trip to your child's doctor and address your concerns. Medical doctors are trained to spot signs of abuse, and may be able to shed light on the situation. Social workers and law enforcement officers are also trained to spot signs of abuse.

Second, talk to the parents of other children at the facility. Are they noticing the same things you are? Be open and frank with other parents. Vigilance is best achieved in groups, and if abuse is rampant, other parents may have noticed the same things you have.

Third, if abuse is still suspected, it's time to report it. Call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-422-4453, or visit your state's child abuse website to learn about other reporting mechanisms. Most states require reporting suspected child abuse, and maintain separate daycare reporting mechanisms for daycares and childcare facilities.

