

How to Respond When You Suspect Your Child Has Been Physically Abused

Ways to help your child:

Report concerning injuries as soon as possible.

You can make a report either to the Child Abuse Hotline (503) 378-6704, or to the local law enforcement agency in the town, city, or county where the injury occurred.

Have your child seen by a medical provider.

Get injuries documented by a reliable third party.

Reliable third parties include: Child Welfare, law enforcement, emergency room personnel or a primary care physician.

Keep your own records related to your concerns

The types of information to record might include when and where the injury occurred, any additional information about the nature of the injury and how the injury occurred.

Seek legal counsel if necessary.

You may need to find out if it is possible to take legal steps to ensure your child only has supervised visits with the person of concern, to determine whether contact can be stopped entirely, or to see whether there is some other legal recourse to keep your child safe.

Leave the investigating to the authorities.

It is important to let the authorities handle any investigation. Don't confront the person you suspect of abusing your child or allow others to do so.

Ask your child only neutral questions.

If your child makes statements about being injured, it is ok to ask a few neutral questions such as *How did you get hurt?* or *What happened?* but it is important to avoid asking leading or suggestive questions or engaging in repeated questioning of your child.

Be careful about saying, *AI* promise to your child.

It is important that you are seen by your child as a safe and trustworthy person. Even if you make a promise to your child with the best of intentions, it is not always possible to control what will happen.

Talk about adult problems only where/when your child cannot hear you.

Talking specifically about the suspected abuse where your child can hear you may taint any legal investigations taking place and can be overwhelming for your child.

Use only non-physical forms of discipline.

It is best to use natural and logical consequences, the removal of privileges, or time-outs when disciplining your child.

Ways to help yourself:

Get support for yourself.

Liberty House can provide family support and referrals to other agencies to help both parents and children.

Stay consistent.

It is important that your and your child's lives stay as normal or consistent as possible. The exceptions to this are any changes that need to be made to ensure your child's safety.

Recognize the resiliency in your child.

Children are remarkably resilient. In fact, children often bounce back quicker from adverse situations than do adults. If you can recognize the resilience in your child, can provide supportive resources such as counselling should your child need this, and can continue to keep your child safe, the long-term effects of the abuse should be greatly reduced.

Contact Liberty House with Questions.

The mission of Liberty House is to serve as the hub of our community's response to child abuse. We can provide families with information about abuse, can help direct families to appropriate resources for themselves and their children and, especially when a child has current injuries which can be documented, may be able to schedule an evaluation of the child.

If you have any additional questions about what to do if you suspect your child has been physically abused or about resources that are available for you and your family, please contact Liberty House at (503) 540-0288.