

Child Abuse



Child abuse occurs when a parent, caregiver or person in charge acts intentionally and as a result the minor suffers harm or is at risk of suffering physical, sexual, mental and/or emotional harm. In Puerto Rico there is Law No. 57 of 2023, Law for the prevention of abuse, preservation of the family unit and for the safety, well-being, and protection of minors.

TYPES OF CHILD ABUSE

Neglect: Parents or guardians must ensure food, supervision, access to health services, education, clothing, and safe housing for minors. In addition, they must try to have the basic and essential services for a healthy environment, according to their possibilities. Failure to do so is considered negligence.

Physical abuse: Any non-accidental blow or injury caused in a single or multiple incidents. This includes hair pulling, pushing, kicking, scratching, choking, biting, burning, shaking strongly, among others, caused to the minor using his/her own force or some object.

Emotional abuse: Not providing an adequate environment for well-being and emotional development that allows achieving independence, security and strengthening self-esteem. It includes not showing affection or protection, isolating him, ignoring him, rejecting him, verbal and emotional attacks, such as threatening, devaluing, and continually reprimanding him. Also, allowing minors to witness violence or dangerous situations such as getting drunk, taking drugs, or participating in criminal acts is considered emotional abuse and neglect.

Sexual abuse: Involving sexual conduct in the presence of a minor and/or being used to carry out sexual conduct to satisfy the abusive person. It includes any sexual act with or without contact such as touching, caressing, exposure to sexual relations, penetration, oral sex, taking photographs, prostitution, sexual trafficking, among other modalities.

Child exploitation: It is the act of recruiting, hiding, transporting, or capturing minors to force them to work or sell them sexually. Labor exploitation includes the distribution and sale of drugs, armed violence, domestic work, among others. While, sexual exploitation includes prostitution, pornography, arranged marriages and/or exploitation for reproductive purposes, among other modalities.

Institutional abuse: Occurs when an official of a public or private institution who has responsibility for a minor for his or her care, education, treatment, or detention, causes harm or exposes him or her to the risk of suffering physical or mental health damage. and/or emotional. It can happen at school, day care centers, among others.

Data of interest:

- Usually, the person who commits the abuse is someone close, for example, one or both parents, a family member, friend, or acquaintance of the minor.
- Cases of sexual abuse can happen in a single incident or a series of events where the abusive person gains the trust of the minor to get closer, using manipulations and threats so that they do not notify that they are being a victim of abuse.
- There is a high probability that a minor is being a victim of different forms of abuse at the same time.

Warning signs:

A child who is a victim of abuse may feel confusion, guilt, or shame, so they may be afraid to report the abuse. It is important to pay attention to the warning signs because these may be different depending on the type of abuse you are suffering.



- Bumps, bruises, fractures, or burns.
- Pain, bleeding, genital or anal injury.
- Have behavioral changes such as rebellious or defiant behavior, aggression, anger, hostility, or hyperactivity.
- Inappropriate sexual behavior.
- Poor hygiene.
- Health complications.
- Frequent absences from school and changes in school performance.
- Isolation from friends or activities you usually do.
- Avoid certain situations, such as refusing to ride the school bus and go to school.
- Unusual fears or sudden loss of self-confidence.
- Problems sleeping, nightmares, appearing sad or anxious.
- Show lack of supervision from their parents or caregivers.
- Self-harm or suicide attempts.
- Pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

Consequences of abuse:

Abuse in any of its forms leaves an impressive mark on the lives of those who suffer it. The effect of its consequences can affect a lifetime and include physical, mental, emotional damage and in the worst case, death.

Depending on the type of abuse that has been suffered, the age at the time of the events, the duration, the bond that exists with the abuser, psycho-social factors, and access to services, the recovery process will be of the minor due to abuse. Under Law 57, anyone who suspects abuse must report it to the following telephone lines:

Family Department:

Lines to Report Abuse

787-749-1333/1-800-981-8333

Guidance Services Line

787-977-8022

(Free of charge, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Research Department of

National security

1-866-347-2423

Social and Emotional Aspect

For recommendations, tools, and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your treatment, please visit your primary doctor or contact the following telephone lines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

APS Health

787-641-9133

References:

<https://bvirtualogp.pr.gov/ogp/Bvirtual/leyesreferencia/PDF/57-2023.pdf>

<https://adfap.pr.gov/AdministracionesAuxiliares/ProteccionSocial/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://poderjudicial.pr/educacion-a-la-comunidad/informacion-sobres-temas-legales/problemas-sociales-comunes/maltrato-de-menores/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/child-abuse/symptoms-causes/syc-20370864>

Prepared by licensed Health Educators.

Reviewed February 2024.

©First Medical Health Plan, Inc.