


# Recognizing and Responding to Child Abuse

CADDY TOOTELL, LICSW  
MDT Program Manager  
Forensic Interviewer

ERICA CHEPULIS, LCSW  
Training Program Manager



## Children may not tell because they...

- Are afraid of what will happen to them or their family
- May not understand boundaries were crossed
- Are confused because the abuser is someone they know or trust
- Believe the abuse is their fault
- Were bribed, threatened, or forced to keep it a secret
- Don't know how to tell you something is wrong


### Why do children usually not tell?



## Defining Child Abuse

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- Sexual Abuse**
  - Sexual contact between a caregiver and a child; or between children, especially when there is a significant difference in age or development
- Physical Abuse**
  - A non-accidental physical act upon a child by a caregiver which causes or creates a substantial risk of physical or emotional injury
- Exploitation**
  - When a child engages, agrees to engage, or offers to engage in sexual conduct with another person in exchange for money, food, shelter, clothing, education, or care
- Neglect**
  - Failure by a caregiver, either deliberately or through negligence or inability, to take actions necessary to provide a child with minimally adequate essential care




## Consider Your Own Feelings

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If a child discloses to you...

- How might you react?
- What might you be thinking?
- What might you be feeling?
- How might you personally be impacted?


**What is your role as a volunteer with BPIE?**



## Learn the Signs

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PHYSICAL	BEHAVIORAL	EMOTIONAL	RELATIONSHIP (Adult or older teen)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bruising or injuries</li> <li>Trouble eating or drinking</li> <li>Complaints of pain</li> <li>Trouble sleeping</li> <li>Nightmares</li> <li>Unexplained expensive items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Withdrawn and/or secretive</li> <li>Clingy</li> <li>Sudden mood changes</li> <li>Self-injury</li> <li>Avoids going home</li> <li>Advanced sexual knowledge or behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General fearfulness</li> <li>Fear of certain people or places</li> <li>Easily startled</li> <li>Moodiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives child excessive time or attention</li> <li>Asks to take child alone</li> <li>Gives gifts</li> <li>Has excessive physical contact/poor boundaries</li> </ul>



## How to Respond to the Child

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DO	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Speak with the child 1 time</li> <li>✓ Ask simple, open-ended questions</li> <li>✓ Thank the child for telling you</li> <li>✓ Let the child know what is going to happen next</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Rushing, surprise, alarm</li> <li>✗ Asking "Why?" questions or for details</li> <li>✗ Talking to the person suspected of the abuse</li> <li>✗ Making promises to the child or family</li> </ul>




## Children May Tell in Many Ways

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Accidental	Hints	Disguised	Strings Attached	Purposeful, Direct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pregnancy or STI</li> <li>Found texts or images</li> <li>Tells friend (to keep secret)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I don't want to go to [so-and-so]'s house anymore."</li> <li>"My babysitter keeps bothering me."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"What would happen if a girl was being touched in a bad way and she told someone about it?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"I have a problem but if I tell you about it, you have to promise not to tell."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tells staff</li> <li>Writes it knowing it will be read</li> <li>Tells friend (seeking help)</li> </ul>


**Disclosure is a process, not an event!**



## Minimal Facts:

Only ask questions to assess for immediate safety.

- What happened?  
▶ "Tell me about what happened."
- Who is the alleged offender?  
▶ "Who did that to you?"
- Is the child safe to go home?  
▶ "How old were you/what grade were you in the last time that happened?"  
▶ "Where were you when that happened?"



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## Tell the child:


You are **glad** they told someone about the abuse.

It was **brave** to talk.

You care about them, and **you** are going to get help.

The abuse is **not** their fault.

# Validate & Reinforce




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## Policy & Protocol

- Inform the teacher/principal of any concerns for the child's safety.
- Inform your Partnerships Manager/BPIE supervisor.
- You may contact BPS Office of Equity for assistance.

**PHONE:** 617-635-9650  
**EMAIL:** bpsequity@bostonpublicschools.org



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## How to File a 51A Report

- ▶ **Weekdays 9am-5pm:** Call DCF area office that serves city where child lives
- ▶ **Nights/Weekends/Holidays:** Call the 24/7 Child Protection Hotline: **1-800-792-5200**
- ▶ **After calling,** must send a written **Child Abuse Reporting Form** to the DCF office within 48 hours
- ▶ Visit [mass.gov/dcf](https://www.mass.gov/dcf) for guidelines



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## Connect With Us



989 Commonwealth Ave  
 Boston MA 02215  
**Phone:** 617-779-2146  
**Email:** cac@state.ma.us  
**Website:** SuffolkCAC.org

 @CACSuffolk  
 @Suffolk\_CAC  
 @SuffolkCAC

**Caddy Tootell, LICSW**  
 MDT Program Manager  
 Forensic Interviewer  
**Phone:** 617-779-2160  
**Email:** Catherine.Tootell@mass.gov

**Erica Chepulis, LCSW**  
 Training Program Manager  
**Phone:** 781-859-7926  
**Email:** Erica.L.Chepulis@mass.gov