



About Child Abuse and Neglect

MAY 16, 2024



For Everyone

KEY POINTS

- Child abuse and neglect are serious public health problems.
- Child abuse and neglect can have long-term impacts on health, opportunity, and well-being.

MORE INFORMATION

For Everyone

For Public Health

What are child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse and neglect includes all types of abuse and neglect of a child under the age of 18 by a parent, caregiver, or another person in a custodial role (e.g., a religious leader, a coach, or a teacher) that results in harm, the potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child.

There are four common types of abuse and neglect:

- **Physical abuse** is the intentional use of physical force that can result in physical injury. Examples include hitting, kicking, shaking, or other shows of force against a child.
- **Sexual abuse** refers to any completed or attempted sexual acts or sexual contact with a child by a caregiver. Examples include fondling, penetration, and exposing a child to other sexual activities. Read more information about [child sexual abuse](#).
- **Emotional abuse** refers to behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being. Examples include name-calling, shaming, rejecting, and withholding love.
- **Neglect** is the failure to meet a child's basic physical and emotional needs. These needs include housing, food, clothing, education, access to medical care, and having feelings validated and appropriately responded to. [\[1\]](#)

For more information about child abuse and neglect definitions please see [Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements \[4.12 MB, 148 Pages, 508\]](#) [\[PDF\]](#).



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

From a US
national ...



Watch on

[What are child abuse and neglect?](#)

Quick facts and stats

Child abuse and neglect are common. At least one in seven children experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States. [\[2\]](#) This is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported. In 2021, 1,820 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States. [\[3\]](#)

Children living in poverty experience more abuse and neglect. Experiencing poverty can place a lot of stress on families, which may increase the risk for child abuse and neglect. Rates of child abuse and neglect are five times higher for children in families with low socioeconomic status compared to families with a higher socioeconomic status.

Child maltreatment is costly. In the United States, the total lifetime economic burden associated with child abuse and neglect was about \$592 billion in 2018.^[4] This economic burden rivals the cost of other high-profile public health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.^[5]

Outcomes

Children who are abused or neglected may suffer immediate physical injuries such as cuts, bruises, or broken bones. They may also have emotional and psychological problems, such as anxiety or posttraumatic stress.

Over the long term, children who are abused or neglected are also at increased risk for experiencing future violence victimization and perpetration, substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, delayed brain development, lower educational attainment, and limited employment opportunities.

Abuse and neglect may result in toxic stress, which can change brain development and increase the risk for problems like posttraumatic stress disorder and learning, attention, and memory difficulties.^[6]

Prevention

Child abuse and neglect can be prevented. [Certain factors may increase or decrease the risk](#) of perpetrating or experiencing child abuse and neglect.

Preventing child abuse and neglect requires understanding and addressing the factors that put people at risk for or protect them from violence.^[7]

Everyone benefits when children have safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. We all have role to play.

KEEP READING:

[Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

REFERENCES

1. Leeb RT, Paulozzi L, Melanson C, Simon T, Arias I. Child Maltreatment Surveillance: Uniform Definitions for Public Health and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2008.
2. Finkelhor D, Turner HA, Shattuck A, Hamby SL. Prevalence of Childhood Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: Results from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2015;169(8):746–754. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0676
3. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2023). Child Maltreatment 2021. Available from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>. [↗](#)
4. Klika JB, Rosenzweig J, Merrick M. Economic burden of known cases of child maltreatment from 2018 in each state. *Child and adolescent social work journal.* 2020 Jun;37(3):227-34.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.(2022). Health and Economic Costs of Chronic Diseases. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/data-research/facts-stats/>.
6. Shonkoff J, Garner A, & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics*, 129(1), e232-e246.
7. Preventing Multiple Forms of Violence: A Strategic Vision for Connecting the Dots. (2016). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.