CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Common questions children may have when you have the critical conversation about child abuse.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is when an adult hurts a child, and it is not an accident. Hitting, constant yelling, or unwanted touching can all be child abuse. If someone is hurting you or making you uncomfortable, ask them to stop or leave, and tell someone you trust about what happened.

Physical abuse is when an adult hurts a child by hitting, shaking, choking, burning, pinching, beating, or any other action that causes pain or injury. If you are physically abused, you may notice cuts, bruises, or other marks on your body.

Emotional abuse is when an adult hurts a child by always yelling at the child, threatening to leave, or saying mean things. If you are emotionally abused, you may feel like you are all alone and that no one cares about you.

Child sexual abuse is when someone touches the private parts of a child's body or has a child touch another person's private parts. It is also sexual abuse if an adult shows a child pictures or movies of people without their clothes on or takes these types of pictures or movies of a child. If someone is sexually abusing you, you may feel uncomfortable, scared, or confused.

Neglect is when an adult does not give the food, care, or place to live that a child needs. If you are neglected, you may not have clean clothes, a bed to sleep in, or medicine when you are sick.

Who abuses kids?

Some kids are abused by strangers, but most are abused by someone they know — a parent or stepparent, another relative, a babysitter, a teacher, or another kid.

Why would someone abuse a kid?

Most adults care about kids and never hurt them. It can be hard to believe that someone you love or who is nice can hurt you or other kids, but some adults lose their tempers or can't control the way they act. Drinking alcohol or using drugs can also make it hard for some people to control how they act. An adult who hurts children has a problem and needs to get help to stop.

Is it my fault that this happened to me?

No. No matter what, abuse is never your fault, and you don't deserve it. It's normal to feel upset, angry, and confused when someone hurts you. But don't blame yourself or worry that others will be angry with you. Even if you think you've done something wrong, that does not make it okay for someone to hurt you. All kids deserve to have adults in their lives who love and support them as they grow up.

How can I stop it?

If you think that you are being abused, the bravest and most important thing you can do is tell someone you trust. Never keep it a secret, even if the person hurting you tells you that something bad will happen if you tell. Trusting someone after you've been hurt can be hard. If you can't trust anyone at home, talk to someone at school (like a teacher, counselor, or school nurse) or a friend's mom or dad. And if that person cannot help you, keep telling until you get the help you need to feel safe.

What will happen to the person who hurt me if I tell?

An adult who hurts children needs special help to learn to stop. While this person is getting help, you may see less of him or her. This may be tough for you, especially if that person is a part of your family. Your whole family may need help, too.

Mandated Reporting

You may find that the child asking questions is a victim. In North Carolina, all adults are mandated reporters — you are required by law to report suspected abuse to both Law Enforcement and the Department of Social Services. To get phone numbers and more information about reporting suspicions of child maltreatment visit www.CACNC.org/Report

Laws about reporting suspected child abuse vary from state to state. For more information about laws and reporting procedures outside of North Carolina, visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway website (www.childwelfare.gov).