

What you will learn in this module

What the facts are about child abuse — what it is, what causes it, how to recognize it, deal with it, and prevent it

Child abuse happens more often than you think.

How to identify signs of child abuse in infants and toddlers with disabilities

Stress in young children is sometimes hard to separate out from the characteristics of some disabilities.

How to work as a team to reduce stress and protect children

Having other people around reduces the risk of child abuse.

You already know a lot that can help you prevent the abuse of young children

You know that teaching infants and toddlers is hard work.

Caring for young children is both physically and emotionally exhausting. Teachers need to take care of themselves, find ways to reduce stress, and have people they can turn to for help. Common stresses like feeding, diapering, and lifting can last much longer when a child has a disability.

You know that there is never an excuse for abusing a child.

There are ways to head off abuse. Caring for young children is less stressful when several teachers work together in a child development center or when a family childcare provider has access to a support network. This is especially true when caring for children with disabilities. It's important for teachers and providers to support one another and offer help when someone seems tired or irritated.

You know that parenting involves skills that all of us can learn.

Sometimes parents need help in developing their ability to care for children. Certain disabilities make it harder to “read” or comfort a child. This threatens parent confidence and can increase the risk of abuse or neglect.

You know that teachers need support from other adults to do the best job they can.

Teaming with other adults increases our understanding of individual children, and of child development as a whole. Caring for young children with disabilities makes partnerships with parents, peers, and service agencies especially important.

The facts about child abuse — child abuse happens more often than you think

What is abuse?

Child abuse is any violation of a child's right to safety and to physical and emotional integrity. Physical abuse is any type of physical contact or discipline that puts the child at risk of injury. Sexual abuse is the use of a child for an adult's sexual gratification. Emotional abuse includes failing to nurture and support a child, and using child rearing techniques that shame the child and rob her of a sense of worth.

Neglect is another form of abuse. It may be hunger, dirtiness, or lack of clothes or medical care. But neglect may also be emotional — ignoring a child's non-physical needs for stimulation, for friends, and for affection. Emotional neglect damages a child's self-confidence and impedes her development, even if there isn't any physical hardship. Sometimes abuse and neglect can be identified by physical signs. But when there are no bruises or signs of neglect, the child's behavior provides the only clues.



What causes abuse — knowing the history

There are several theories about what causes abuse. Some people think that parents abuse their children when they are under a lot of stress. They may be taking care of a sick parent, or maybe their partner is leaving. Children's demands for attention may push them beyond healthy coping behavior. Other people think that reaction to the child's characteristics triggers the abuse. The child may be very demanding or unresponsive. Perhaps this reminds the parent of a partner, a sibling, or a parent who hurt them in the past. The third suspected cause is lack of support. Parents may be isolated from friends and family and have no one to turn to.