

STARTING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

CHILD ABUSE

If you are concerned that a child is the victim of abuse, you may not be sure what to do or how to respond. No matter what your role is, you have the power to make a positive difference in this child's life.

WHAT DO YOU DO? ARE YOU REQUIRED TO REPORT IT? WHO ARE YOU REQUIRED TO REPORT IT TO?

1. As referenced in MARADMIN 547/17 Marines are required to report credible information regarding suspected child abuse or neglect that occurred in the family or home of a service member.
2. A Marine does not need to have proof that an incident occurred, just a reasonable belief that a child experience abuse or neglect.
3. Marines must report suspected child abuse within 24 hours to the appropriate installation Family Advocacy Program or 24-hour victim advocacy helpline. Contact information is on MCCS websites.
4. Department of Defense personnel who are considered "covered professionals" (such as mental health professionals, social workers, teachers, school counselors, guidance counselors, law enforcement, etc.) are to report any information that gives reason to suspect that a child in the family or home of a service member has experienced child abuse or neglect. Reports are made within 24-hours of suspicion to the appropriate installation Family Advocacy Program or the 24-hour victim advocacy helpline. Additionally, a report must be made to the appropriate child protection service.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse can have a strong impact on the course of a child's life. While every child's experience is unique, there are some common immediate reactions. Children may become withdrawn, aggressive, and anxious. They may have trouble sleeping, eating, and lose interest in things they used to enjoy. It is common for adults who experienced abuse as a child to have difficulty forming healthy and long-lasting relationships. Child abuse is not limited to physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. The Department of Defense defines witnessing domestic abuse as a form of child abuse. Here are some examples of common reactions children have after witnessing domestic abuse by age group.

Birth to Five: Sleep disturbances, increased separation anxiety, increased aggressive behaviors, withdrawal, and anxiety

Six to Eleven: Nightmares, poor peer interactions at school, difficulty concentrating, increased aggression, and withdrawal

Twelve to Eighteen: Antisocial behaviors, substance use, anxiety, poor school performance, depression, and running away As with the other forms of child abuse, witnessing domestic abuse may have a lasting impact. Adults who witnessed domestic abuse as a child are more likely to commit a violent crime, use substances, and have physical health problems. Fortunately, children are resilient and are able to move forward after a stressful or traumatic event.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT A FRIEND IS ABUSING THEIR CHILD OR IS HEADING IN THAT DIRECTION

Every day, there is an opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child. Even if you are not a parent, you play a vital role. Offering support when you see a parent struggling can make all the difference in the world. Being a parent is not easy; dealing with a deployment or a PCS can make parenting even more stressful. Knowing what to do can be challenging when you are trying to help someone. Here are a few tips that might be useful:

1. Listen. Sometimes people just need to vent and be heard. Let them express their frustrations without judgement. Remind them that there is no such thing as a perfect parent. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.
2. Offer help. Everyone needs a break sometimes. Offer to make a dinner, have a cup of coffee, or take the kids on a walk. This allows parents a moment to recharge their batteries and take care of themselves.
3. Know your resources. Resources are available on and off the base. Know what is available so that you can share with someone else when needed.
4. Say something. People feel awkward and uncomfortable about saying something when they see a child in an unsafe situation. It takes courage to make the right choice. If you see something, say something.

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SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Services are available to help a child after experiencing abuse. The Family Advocacy Program provides supportive services for children and parents. The New Parent Support Program can provide in home support for parents with children between the ages of zero to five.

Additional Resources:

Military OneSource has additional information at **1-800-342-9647** or **<http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>**.

