

Types of Abuse

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Child abuse continues to plague San Antonio and its surrounding areas. Whether it is on the news or in the newspaper, stories of abuse are constant reminder of the tragedy affecting so many of our children. When many of us think of abuse our focus turns to physical beatings or sexual assault, but the Texas Family Code states that there are four types of abuse: physical, mental, neglect, and sexual.

When we hear the word abuse, most of us think of physical abuse. This type of abuse is the most visible. The child is punched or hit in a way that leaves a mark on the child. The child may end up with broken bones or possibly a black eye. Children will get bruises, broken bones, and other physical marks, either through play or in sports. For adults, we need to look at the bruises and look for any fist marks or finger marks. We also cannot be afraid to question the children. If their answer is suspicious, then there may be abuse. We also need to distinguish between discipline and abuse. Some parents believe that the laws no longer allow them to discipline their child, but that is not the case. The basic rule of thumb is that discipline should not leave a mark on the child.

Mental abuse or emotional abuse is the hardest to detect and also the least reported. With this type of abuse, children are tormented, terrorized, or ridiculed to a point where they can no longer function. There needs to be a significant delay in development for the authorities to acknowledge mental abuse. The child needs to stop growing emotionally. Mental abuse is usually attached with physical abuse.

Neglect is often the most reported due to it being broken down to five types. The first, physical neglect is when a child is not given the basic needs; food, shelter, and/or clothing. Second, neglectful supervision is when there isn't an adult to supervise a child. The law does not specify how old a child has to be in order to be left alone. The authorities are looking for the maturity level of the child. There are some 9 year olds that are trustworthy but there are some 12 year olds that shouldn't be left alone. It all depends on the child. The third type medical neglect is when a child is not given the appropriate medical attention. A child must be taken to the doctor if they have a recurring illness or a broken bone. The fourth type of neglect is Abandonment. This is when a parent drops off their child at a family member's home or other facility and they do not pick up their child. The parent just disappears. The Baby Moses Law is the only way a parent can legally abandon their child. A baby no older than 60 days can be dropped off at a hospital, fire station, or ambulance station with no legal repercussions. The last type of neglect is Refusal to Accept Parental Responsibility. This usually happens when a parent of a teenager gets so frustrated that they want the State to take their child.

The last type of abuse, Sexual, is drastically different than the other types of abuse. In some situations, stress or frustration may lead to a parent losing control and hurting their child. No one gets stressed or frustrated and decides to have sex with their child. It is categorically different than the others due to the cause being solely due to the perpetrator.

Something inside this person causes them to hurt their child sexually. In a future article, I will examine sexual abuse much more thoroughly.

If someone suspects that a child is being abused in any way, it is their responsibility as an adult and as a concerned Catholic to report it to the authorities. The key word is suspects. If you just suspect someone is being abused, you must report. Either notify the police or call Child Protective Services. We must all respond and speak up on behalf of the children. There is too much at stake for us not to.