

Child Safety: Child Abuse and Maltreatment (Video 3)

Nate Chomilo: Hello. I'm Doctor Nate Chomilo. I'll be your host for this episode of "Keeping Them Safe." Today's topic is child abuse and maltreatment and how to keep children safe in your programs, centers, and family child care homes. Requirements for your programs vary greatly from state to state. Most states, territories, tribes, or local health departments may have different regulations, training requirements, or other procedures in place. It is important to understand and follow your state or local regulations. As wonderful as it is to care for children, it can be overwhelming and stressful for families and caregivers. It is important for caregivers and teachers to be aware of the physical signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect or child maltreatment, and as professionals you should recognize signs of stress to avoid situations where a child may be abused or mistreated by program staff. As early childhood education professionals, you are mandated by law to report any suspected child maltreatment to your local protective services and police. The same laws protect you from any adverse consequences related to reporting any abuse you may suspect. Often, reporting of any suspected case of child maltreatment will initiate family support services regardless of whether the child was determined to be abused or not. Some states, territories, and tribes have specialized programs in place for families experiencing stressors that lead to unintentional neglect due to inadequate income, housing, or parenting concerns that are a result of overstressed home environments.

First, let's talk about ways to prevent child maltreatment. All staff caring for children have to receive training on the different types of abuse and the dangers related to being abused or exposed to violence. This training should address ways to identify signs of stress in families and how to assist families through timely and appropriate referrals to resources and support when needed. Another way to prevent child maltreatment is for caregivers and teachers to understand how to promote protective factors. Children with special needs are at a higher risk for being abused, so staff should understand how to protect vulnerable children from child maltreatment.

Next, let's talk about prohibited caregiver or teacher behaviors. As caregivers and teachers, you have a large impact on a child's safety, growth, and development. In order to assure that children feel safe and protected in your program, caregivers and teachers should know that the following behaviors are prohibited: corporal punishment, isolating children in an area where they cannot be seen or supervised, binding or restricting movement by tying a child, withholding food or drink as a form of punishment, teaching or learning methods that punish, demean or humiliate a child, any form of emotional abuse, verbal, abusive, or derogatory language. You can find more guidance from "Caring for Our Children," a collection of best practice standards for early care and education programs. Head Start program performance standards also align with many of the "Caring for Our Children" guidelines when it comes to prohibited behaviors. For more information on the prevention of child maltreatment, please review the resources provided on the landing page. Caring for groups of young children can be stressful at times. Staff may have their own personal stressors such as illness or their own

experience with trauma or maltreatment, which can impact how they respond to stress. So, an important strategy for the prevention of child maltreatment is prioritizing and supporting staff wellness. When programs support and prioritize staff wellness, staff are better able to provide the quality care and nurturing that children need. For more ideas and strategies on how to support staff wellness, please see the resources on the landing page.

Finally, let's talk about recognizing and reporting suspected child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Since caregivers and teachers are mandated reporters, it is important to have a written policy for reporting child maltreatment. Every staff should be aware of this policy and know what and how to report suspected abuse. Caregivers and teachers should be trained regularly on the prevention of child maltreatment, as well as how to recognize the signs of child abuse and neglect. If you need help accessing appropriate child maltreatment trainings, make sure you reach out to your local pediatricians, child care health consultants, children's hospital, or child protection advocates for guidance and support. At the end of this episode, be sure to check out the online webinar as well as resources for staff and families on the video page.

Before we close, I have two reflective questions for you. What plans and policies do you have in place to help staff identify and report suspected child maltreatment? How do you support staff wellness as a way of creating safe and nurturing environments for children? Thank you for spending this time with me. We will see you on another episode of "Keeping Them Safe." Remember the more you learn, the safer they are.