



**Montgomery, AL- June 16, 2015:** Being a parent during the summer inevitably means children from the neighborhood, school, and church will end up at your house, or better yet, your child may end up at theirs! The break is also filled with mission trips of service and goodwill towards those in need. You may travel to an exotic location and serve a great mission. However, there are children *right here*, in Alabama that need your help. You may recognize words like *neglect* and *abuse*, but do you actually know what they mean?

Unfortunately, the children of Brantwood are all too familiar with the meaning of neglect and abuse as many are in our care for protective reasons. Part of Brantwood's role in the community is to help other children seek refuge and stop the cycle of abuse. Educating our community about the meaning of child abuse and neglect and how you can spot the signs is a critical step. It could be the step that saves the life of your child or a child you know.

So, what is **child abuse**? Under Alabama law, child abuse is classified as "harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare which can occur through nonaccidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or attempted sexual exploitation."

What is **child neglect**? The Alabama law considers child neglect to be the "negligent treatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food, medical treatment, clothing, or shelter."

How does child abuse and neglect relate to you? According to the Alabama Department of Human Resources, **a child in Alabama is abused or neglected every 56 minutes** with a total of 9,367 child victims in the state alone. *Every 56 minutes* is staggering, but how do you know what to look for? Here are ten signs that indicate abuse or neglect:

1. Unexplained Injuries- children get into things. However, if you notice unexplained bruises, marks, or burns, especially in the shape of objects, be concerned. Also note if a child does not have a convincing reason for their injury.
2. Fear of going home- Wanting to spend the night with friends is one thing, but if you notice a child in a state of anxiety about going back to their house or even a certain person picking them up, PAY ATTENTION.

3. Changes in behavior- abused children may seem on edge, aggressive, withdrawn, depressed, or more timid than usual.
4. Regression of progress- abused children may regress into an early childhood development state. They may begin to wet the bed, forget things, fear the dark, thumb sucking, and have a fear of strangers or new people.
5. Eating habits- children suffering from abuse may carry a great deal of stress and anxiety. This may contribute to changes in eating habits which can lead to weight gain or weight loss (especially in neglected children).
6. Sleeping patterns- if you are noticing a child to seem tired or fatigued, it may be a consequence of abuse. Abused children can have difficulties falling asleep and suffer from night terrors.
7. Academic performance- an abused child's academic performance may be on the decline due to concentration and energy deficiencies. Also take note of children who have multiple absences, as their parent or abuser may be hiding injuries from authorities.
8. Risk-taking behaviors- abused and neglected children may abuse controlled substances and carry weapons, or participate in other high-risk activities.
9. Lack of personal care of hygiene- a child that is abused or neglected may have an intense body odor and appear unkempt at all times. They may also lack the appropriate clothing for weather changes.
10. Overly sexual- children who have been sexually abused may engage in hypersexual activities and use suggestive language.

### **What can you do to help?**

1. Keep calm
2. Tell the child you believe them
3. Show interest and concern
4. Reassure and support the child
5. Report the abuse to the Department of Human Resources, or when in doubt, call the police department.
6. Prepare to have a written report to accompany your oral report.
7. Know that you are protected. All persons reporting suspected abuse or neglect are BY LAW immune from legal, civil, or criminal action that could be taken against them.
8. Educate others in your community. Knowledge is power.

Children are some of the most vulnerable among us. We have a responsibility to protect not just their lives, but their futures. At Brantwood, we believe in equipping every child with the tools necessary to have the best chance for a great life so that they may end the cycle. It is not acceptable that *nearly five children die every day because of abuse or neglect*. We can do better; we must do better, and together, *we will*.