

Summertime – Be on the Lookout for Abuse

With summertime comes lots of fun, sun, and happy memories for many children. For other children, however, summertime means weeks of no escape from abuse. When children who are abused and neglected are in school, being at school can become a safe haven for them and teachers can become mentors. During the summer break, though, those ties are broken, and abused children may have no where to turn.

Although professionals who work with children are required to report suspected abuse, anyone in the community can call the 24-hour child abuse hotline, ChildLine, at (800) 932-0313. Reports from people who are not mandated to report, including neighbors, family members, etc. may be made anonymously, and all sources are confidential.

During the summer, as you observe what is going on in your neighborhood or with the playmates of your children, be on the lookout for possible signs of abuse. When children who are abused and neglected have nowhere to turn, your vigilance may be the lifeline that they need.

Some possible signs of abuse and neglect may include:

- Unexplained bruises or injuries
- Injuries inconsistent with the explanation for the injuries
- Drastic changes in a child's behavior – for example, a child who is usually cheerful and friendly is now sullen and withdrawn
- A child you see on a regular basis is suddenly gone or is not permitted to be outside with their playmates for extended periods (i.e. for several days) without explanation
- A series of bruises in various stages of healing
- Excessive hunger or stealing food
- Reluctance to go home or fear of going home at the end of the day
- Responses such as flinching or cowering when near certain adults
- Suspicious burns
- Unattended medical needs
- Disclosures by the child
- Lack of adequate supervision, including leaving children home while at work all day

There are many possible indicators of abuse and neglect, and many of the indicators can actually be caused by things other than abuse. However, if you suspect that a child is being maltreated, reach out on their behalf, pick up the phone, and call ChildLine at (800) 932-0313.

More information on child abuse is available by visiting the section labeled Mandated Reporters or by calling PFSA's office at 800-448-4906.