



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON  
Health



# Brush Up on Oral Health

## July 2015

- **Supporting Children and Families**
- **Child Abuse**
- **Oral Health Signs of Child Abuse**
- **Resources for Head Start Staff**

## Did You Know?

- About one in 100 children are victims of child abuse and neglect in the United States.
- Children who are physically abused tend to grow up with low self-esteem, which makes it hard for them to form close relationships when they are teens and adults.



## Supporting Children and Families

When children are physically or sexually abused, their health and well-being may be affected for the rest of their lives. Head Start staff can play an important role in helping to prevent child abuse by building on family strengths, supporting families under stress, and protecting children who are at risk.

This issue provides Head Start staff with an overview of child abuse and describes oral health signs of physical and sexual abuse. It also highlights resources that are available to Head Start staff to help them support children and families.

## Child Abuse

Child abuse is generally defined as any mistreatment of a child that results in harm or injury. But, the definition of child abuse varies from state to state. Child abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional.

## Oral Health Signs of Child Abuse

- **Physical abuse.** Sixty to 75 percent of all physical child abuse occurs to the head, face, mouth, or neck. These injuries include cuts and bruises around the mouth and on the cheeks, tongue, and gums. Teeth can be loosened, broken, or chipped. There can also be broken facial and jaw bones; burns; scarring on the corners of the mouth; bite marks on the cheek, chin, or nose; and other injuries on the face and head. Unintentional injuries to these areas are common in children.
- **Sexual abuse.** Oral injuries from sexual abuse are more difficult to identify than oral injuries from physical abuse. Signs include unexplained soreness or bruising around the mouth and on the roof of the mouth toward the back of the child's throat. Often a child who is sexually abused suddenly changes his or her behavior. He or she may begin acting out or throwing tantrums. He or she may also grow withdrawn, become afraid of certain places or people, or start acting in ways that are not normal for the child.



## Resources for Head Start Staff

There are many resources to help Head Start staff learn more about working with families to prevent child abuse, recognize signs of child abuse, and learn requirements for reporting suspected child abuse to the state child protection agency.

- The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF's) [2015 Prevention Guide: Making Meaningful Connections](#) includes strategies to support community-based service providers in their efforts to prevent child abuse. The guide focuses on protective factors that build family strengths and promote optimal child development and social and emotional well-being.
- ACF's [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#) webpage provides resources on [training on the identification of child abuse and neglect](#). Resources include training curricula and other materials for frontline workers on identifying child abuse, including abuse among various ethnic groups and among children with developmental disabilities.
- The [Prevent Abuse and Neglect Through Dental Awareness](#) (P.A.N.D.A.) educational program offers trainings for dentists, dental hygienists, and other professionals, including Head Start staff, in many states on how to recognize and report suspected abuse. Most of these trainings are delivered by trained volunteers and are offered for free or at minimal cost. To see if P.A.N.D.A. trainings are offered in your state, contact your [state dental association](#).

## Contact Us

Beth Lowe: [eal38@georgetown.edu](mailto:eal38@georgetown.edu) • 202-687-1864  
Katrina Holt: [kholt@georgetown.edu](mailto:kholt@georgetown.edu) • 202-784-9551

The National Center on Health welcomes your feedback on this newsletter issue, as well as your suggestions for topics for future issues. Please forward your comments to [nchinfo@aap.org](mailto:nchinfo@aap.org) or call 1-888-227-5125.

Subscribe or view all issues of [Brush Up on Oral Health](#) on the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

This newsletter was produced under cooperative agreement #9OHC0005 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Health.

This publication is in the public domain, and no copyright can be claimed by persons or organizations.

Photo Sources: Stefano Mortellaro | Flickr | CC BY-ND 2.0 (page 1) and Erica Zabowski | Flickr | CC BY-ND 2.0 (page 2)

***School readiness begins with health!***