

The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

(Adopted 1981; revised 1985, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2015)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

It is the school counselor's legal, ethical and moral responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities. School counselors work to identify the behavioral, academic and social/emotional impact of abuse and neglect on students and ensure the necessary supports for students are in place.

The Rationale

The National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) (2014) indicated a significant rise in reported child abuse and neglect incidents in recent years. This increase presents a public issue that must be addressed through advocacy for child protection. A child who is a victim of abuse and neglect may experience consequences including, but not limited to: immediate physical and/or emotional harm, the inability to build healthy relationships, increased likelihood of being abused by another perpetrator or becoming an abuser and lowered self-worth.

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2013) has defined maltreatment as: "A particular form of child maltreatment determined by investigation to be substantiated or indicated under state law." Types include:

- physical abuse
- neglect or deprivation of necessities
- medical neglect
- sexual abuse
- psychological or emotional maltreatment
- and other forms included in state law

The School Counselor's Role

School counselors are among those mandated by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974, Public Law 93-247 to report suspected abuse and neglect to proper authorities and are critical in early detection and recognition of abuse. It is imperative that school counselors gain essential knowledge of policies and referral procedures by staying current on reporting requirements and state laws. Laws and definitions pertaining to child abuse and neglect vary among states; therefore, school counselors should commit themselves to become familiar with and abide by Child Protective Services (CPS) laws in their respective state (see a summary of state laws pertaining to child abuse and neglect at <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/legal-ethical>).

In addition to mandated reporting, school counselors:

- Understand child abuse and neglect and its impact on children's social/emotional, physical and mental well being
- Provide interventions that promote resiliency, healthy interpersonal and communication skills and self-worth
- Make referrals to outside agencies for child or family support when appropriate
- Engage families in the school community
- Identify barriers and limitations that affect healthy family functioning and may lead to child abuse or neglect
- Identify instances of child abuse and neglect and respond on both individual and systemic levels

ASCA recognizes it is the absolute responsibility of school counselors to serve as child advocates. Responsible action by the school counselor can be achieved through the recognition and understanding of the problem, knowing the reporting procedures and participating in available child abuse information programs. School counselors play an integral role in helping to promote child welfare by providing direct and indirect student services. Those services include advocating for students' needs by addressing issues that could affect their academic, personal and social/emotional well being.

Summary

School counselors are a key link in the child abuse prevention network. It is their responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. School counselors must be able to guide and assist abused and neglected students by providing appropriate services. School counselors are committed to providing high-quality services to children who are victims of abuse and neglect with research-based intervention techniques.

References

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