What is child abuse?

Child abuse isn't something that only happens to little kids. Some kids who are abused by their parents have been abused for as long as they can remember. For others, the abuse started when they got older. Almost half of the reported cases of child abuse and neglect involve teenagers. Child abuse occurs when a parent, family member, or caretaker physically hurts a child or adolescent,
Emotional abuse can include swearing at, yelling at, or insulting a young person, usually over and over again. It also can include denying a young person basic emotional needs, such as affection or security. Emotional abuse often accompanies physical and sexual abuse. Experts consider emotional abuse to be very serious, especially because victims feel bad about themselves.

Reporting child abuse can be difficult, but it is the first step toward stopping it. Many teenagers who are abused feel the only thing they can do is run away from home, which can cause more harm than good.

Abuse can and should be reported to teachers, guidance counselors, or law enforcement officers. Reports also can be made to child protective services, a unit of government that usually can be found in a local social services agency.

If you feel things are not so great in your family, you might ask yourself, "Am I abused?" There's no easy answer for this. But if things in your life hurt or confuse you, it's a good idea to check it out with an adult you trust. It is important to tell someone who can help you decide if there is someone you should talk to. If you feel things in your life hurt or confuse you, it's a good idea to check it out with an adult you trust.

It is important to tell someone who can help you decide if there is abuse in your family. If you tell someone who does not believe or help you, tell someone else. It takes courage to ask for help, but if you are abused and you tell someone, things can change. In most cases, families in which abuse occurs get the help they need and the abuse can stop. You may never have a perfect family, but you can begin a life in which you are not hurt and abused. Your community has people who can help you.

What are the facts about child abuse?

Children in the United States are more likely to be victimized violently in their own homes than on the streets. (Current Trends in Child Abuse Prevention, Reporting, and Fatalities: The 1997 Fifty State Survey. Chicago, IL: Prevent Child Abuse America, 1999)