Chapter 1: Introduction

The Numbers

Transcript:

These numbers illustrate two things.
First: child abuse is an endemic problem in the United States.
Second: teachers and other education professionals drastically underreport the cases of abuse they encounter.
Why would this be?
Module Purpose

Transcript:

Research has shown that teachers often fail to report because they are unsure of how abuse and neglect are defined. They also tend to be unfamiliar with common signs of abuse. (Kemple & Kyoung Kim; Kenny, 2001; Sinanan, 2011)

This is a problem, because teachers are in a unique position to help protect children. They see their students every day and can observe for symptoms of maltreatment. They can also make distinctions between a child’s regular disposition and behavioral changes that may be the result of abuse. (Bell, Limberg, & Robinson, 2013).

In this module you will develop an understanding of what abuse and neglect are, and the observable symptoms that are associated with them.

This knowledge will help you ensure the safety and well-being of your students, and fulfill your responsibilities as a mandated reporter.
Chapter 2: What is Child Abuse?

Definitions

Transcript:

Let’s begin by considering this question: **What comes to mind when you hear the term “child abuse”? How would you define it?**

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines abuse in the following way. Take a moment to read it.

This federal law lays out the *minimum* standard for an action - or failure to act - to be considered child abuse. The specific child abuse laws in different states are based on this broad definition.

The wording of this definition is important, because it sheds light on what abuse *is* and *is not*, as well as the *types* of abuse that are covered under the law.

Let’s explore a little deeper…
Transcript:

First, it’s important to note that child abuse law applies to parents, caregivers, and other adults who hold a position of responsibility over a child. Harm inflicted on children by strangers is addressed by other criminal statutes. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Second, child abuse can either be an act or a failure to act. Neglect, which is a failure to provide for a child’s basic needs, is therefore a type of abuse, and actually accounts for the majority of child abuse cases that are reported. (Viezel et al., 2015).

Finally, the law identifies four specific types of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect. Later on in this module, we will explore each one in detail.

First, however, let’s examine the impact of abuse on children, as well as some factors that place them at risk for maltreatment.
Chapter 3: Impact and Risk Factors

Impact on Children

Transcript:

When a child is maltreated, he or she is deprived of the basic human need to feel safe and cared for. (Kemple & Kyoung Kim, 2011).

Abusive or neglectful environments can also produce what health care professionals call “toxic” stress, which is the chemical response from the body in response to the fear or threat of harm. (Garner et al., 2012).

This stress can disrupt children's developing brains and lead to cognitive or emotional difficulties. Children who have been abused or neglected are more likely to struggle in school, and are at greater risk for developing health problems later in life. (Centers for Disease Control, 2014; Sinanan, 2011; Stone & Zibulsky, 2015).
Risk Factors

Transcript:

Certain factors place children at greater risk of being abused or neglected. Click the tabs to read about different risk factors, then “Proceed” when you are ready to continue.

Disability

Disability

Children with a disability are twice as likely to be abused or neglected as children without one.
Parent-Caregiver Attitudes

Risk Factors for Abuse or Neglect

Parent/Caregiver Attitudes
Abuse can occur in households where the parent or caregiver:

- Blames the child for problems in the home.
- Describes the child as “bad” or burdensome.
- Has developmentally inappropriate expectations for the child.

Family Stress

Risk Factors for Abuse or Neglect

Family Stress
Abuse can occur when there is a great deal of stress in the family system. Sources of this stress might include:

- Inadequate housing
- Poverty or financial instability
- Substance abuse
- Mental illness
- Chronic health problems
- Isolation – no nearby friends, relatives, or supports
Pause and Think

Transcript:

Child abuse and neglect are often linked to environmental stress in the household of which the child is a member.

Having said that, pause and think for a moment. What should teachers keep in mind so that the risk factors for abuse are not misunderstood or misinterpreted?

Keep in Mind
Transcript:

First, the presence of a single - or even multiple - risk factors does not automatically mean that abuse is occurring.

Second, abuse can - and does - happen even if there are no risk factors present. (Viezel & Davis, 2015).

Third, teachers should be mindful of their own biases. Implicit biases about different racial or ethnic groups, or people living in poverty, can lead teachers to assume certain parents might be abusing or neglecting their children, even if there is little evidence to support this belief. In fact, studies have found that there is racial disproportionality in child abuse reporting, that is the result of racial bias and discrimination. (Ards et al., 2003; Krase, 2015).

To be clear: child abuse occurs in households of all racial backgrounds, ethnicities, and income levels.

For this reason, a report of suspected abuse must be based on observable evidence, not bias. This is why it’s especially important for teachers to understand the ways different kinds of abuse are defined, and the symptoms associated with them. Let’s explore each right now.

Chapter 4: Types of Child Abuse

Four Types

Learn about four major types of abuse:

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Neglect

Transcript:

You will now be introduced to four major types of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect. Click through the tabs to learn the definition, physical signs, and behavioral signs of each type.

The information about each type of abuse will be followed by a set of questions to help you check and extend your understanding.
Physical Abuse

Non-accidental physical injury inflicted on a child by a parent or caregiver. May result from punching, kicking, beating, hitting, etc. Physical discipline is not considered abuse as long as it is "reasonable" and does not cause bodily injury to the child.

Physical Signs

- Unexplained injuries (e.g. bruises, burns, black eyes, broken bones, etc.)
- Fading bruises visible after return from an absence
- Injuries in unusual places (e.g. face, torso)
- Wears clothing that is atypical for the child, and/or that is inappropriate for the weather (e.g. long-sleeve shirts and pants on hot days)
Behavioral

Check for Understanding

(Pick Many, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Physical Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

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<td>Spanking a child is physical abuse under any circumstances.</td>
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<td>Frequent, unexplained injuries may be a sign of physical abuse.</td>
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<td>Fear of one’s caregiver (or of adults in general) may be a behavioral symptom of physical abuse.</td>
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<td>Children who have been physically abused are more aggressive, especially toward other children.</td>
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Transcript:

Read each of the following statements. Based on the information you just learned, decide whether each one is true or false. When you are finished, click “Submit.”
Answers

Physical Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

T  F

Spanking a child is physical abuse under any circumstances.

An action only qualifies as physical abuse if a caregiver intended to cause harm to the child.

Frequent, unexplained injuries may be a sign of physical abuse.

Fear of one’s caregiver (or of adults in general) may be a behavioral symptom of physical abuse.

Children who have been physically abused are more aggressive, especially toward other children.

Optional: Commentary

Physical Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

T  F

Spanking a child is physical abuse under any circumstances.

An action only qualifies as physical abuse if a caregiver intended to cause harm to the child.

Frequent, unexplained injuries may be a sign of physical abuse.

Fear of one’s caregiver (or of adults in general) may be a behavioral symptom of physical abuse.

Children who have been physically abused are more aggressive, especially toward other children.

Transcript:

If you’d like to hear an optional explanation of the correct answers, click “Commentary.” If you are ready to move on, click “Proceed.”

Let’s address each statement one at a time.

Spanking and other forms of physical discipline are not considered (by law) to be physical abuse unless they result in an injury to the child.

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For a complete list of references, refer to the On-Demand Module ‘Identifying Signs of Child Abuse & Neglect.’
The *intent* behind a caregiver’s actions ultimately does not matter when it comes to the legal definition of abuse. If a caregiver physically harms or injures a child - regardless of intent - abuse has occurred. Frequent, unexplained injuries and fear of one’s caregiver - or other adults - are all possible signs of physical abuse.

Finally, it’s important to remember that a child’s emotional and behavioral responses to physical abuse may vary depending on the child, the form of abuse, and the context of the situation. *Some* children might respond to physical abuse by being more aggressive toward other children. By contrast, others might become passive or withdrawn.

**Sexual Abuse**

*Sexual Abuse*

Sexual involvement imposed upon a child or adolescent by a parent or caregiver; may include rape, incest, molestation, indecent exposure, sexual exploitation, exposure to (or involvement in the production of) pornographic materials.
Physical

**Sexual Abuse**

**Physical Signs**
- Pain, itching, bruising, or bleeding in genitalia
- Difficulty sitting or walking
- Refusal to change for P.E. or participate in physical activities
- Pregnancy or venereal disease (especially if younger than age 14)

Behavioral

**Sexual Abuse**

- Has detailed and sophisticated knowledge of sexual behavior (inappropriate for age)
- Creates artwork with sexual themes or content
- Demonstrates inappropriately seductive behavior
- Perpetrates sexual activity with another child (especially a child who is younger or more vulnerable)
- Mentions that he/she has to “keep a secret” with an adult or older child
- Regression (e.g. speech loss, thumb-sucking, neediness)

**Check for Understanding**

*(Pick Many, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)*
Sexual Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

T  F  An eleven-year-old girl seems to “flirt” inappropriately with her fifth-grade teacher. This is a possible sign of abuse.

☐ ☐ ☑

A parent seems inappropriately protective of his child, and tries to limit his contact with others. This is a possible sign of abuse.

☐ ☐ ☐

A normally-outgoing 10th-grader begins to frequently sleep in class, and withdraw socially. The teacher should report a suspected case of sexual abuse.

☐ ☐ ☑

A teacher notices a seven-year-old girl fondle her genitals in class when she thinks that no one is watching. The teacher should report a suspected case of sexual abuse.

☐ ☐ ☑

Transcript:

Read each of the following statements. Based on the information you just learned, decide whether each one is true or false. When you are finished, click “Submit.”

Answers

Sexual Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

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**Optional: Commentary**

Sexual Abuse: Check & Extend Understanding

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Transcript:

If you’d like to hear an optional explanation of the correct answers, click “Commentary.” If you are ready to move on, click “Proceed.”

Let’s address each statement one at a time.

Whenever a child displays sexual knowledge or behavior that seems inappropriate for his or her age, it should be a red flag. Flirting with a teacher, or attempting to “seduce” other children or adults, could be signs that a child has experienced sexual abuse.

It is also a possible warning sign if a parent or caregiver attempts to socially isolate a child or limit his contact with others. In these cases, social isolation would be an attempt to keep the child from disclosing that the abuse is occurring.

Frequent sleeping and social withdrawal could be symptoms of abuse, but in the absence of other symptoms it might be premature to file a report. The teacher could, however, ask the student some questions and observe for other symptoms.

Similarly, in the final example it would be premature to file a report in the absence of additional evidence. Self-exploration is a developmentally normal sexual behavior, and not an indication that a child has been maltreated. If you ever have a question as to what is “developmentally appropriate,” consult your school psychologist or social worker.
Emotional Abuse

Any pattern of behavior that impairs or damages a child’s emotional development or sense of self-worth. May include constant or severe criticism, attempts to belittle or humiliate the child, or withholding love or affection. Usually occurs when other forms of maltreatment are also present.

Physical Signs

- Speech disorders
- Ulcers, asthma, or allergies; physical ailments that are exacerbated by stress
- Recurring somatic complaints (e.g. headache, stomachache)
- Delayed physical or emotional development
Check for Understanding

(Pick Many, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)

Emotional Abuse: Check and Extend Understanding

T  F
Emotional abuse usually occurs when other forms of abuse and maltreatment are also present.
If a parent yells at his or her child, it is a sign that he or she is emotionally abusive.
A student seems to have very low self-esteem, and you've heard his father describe him as “bad” and “worthless.” These are possible signs of emotional abuse.
A parent refuses to show affection to a child unless he meets academic and behavioral expectations that are inappropriately high. In class, the child seems terrified of doing something wrong. These are possible signs of emotional abuse.

Transcript:

Read each of the following statements. Based on the information you just learned, decide whether each one is true or false. When you are finished, click “Submit.”
Answers

Emotional Abuse: Check and Extend Understanding

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Optional: Commentary

Emotional Abuse: Check and Extend Understanding

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Transcript:

If you’d like to hear an optional explanation of the correct answers, click “Commentary.” If you are ready to move on, click “Proceed.”

Let’s address each statement one at a time.

First, teachers should be aware that if a child is being emotionally abused, it is quite possible that he or she is suffering other forms of abuse as well.
Yelling at or using strong language with a child is not inherently abusive. Emotional abuse is characterized by the effect on the child. In this example, the teacher should observe the student’s behavior before concluding that emotional abuse may be taking place.

Describing a child in strongly negative terms or blaming him for problems in the household are likely to affect his self-concept, and are signs of emotional abuse.

Finally, it can be emotionally abusive for a parent to hold a child to unrealistic expectations, then punish him for failing to meet them. In this case, the child might respond to the abuse by becoming constantly anxious about doing something wrong or making a mistake.

**Neglect**

The failure of a parent or caregiver to provide for a child’s basic needs. May include physical, medical, educational, or emotional needs.
Check for Understanding

(Pick Many, 10 points, 1 attempt permitted)
Neglect: Check and Extend Understanding

T  F  Most children who live in poverty experience some form of neglect.

☐  ☐  A parent leaves his children unsupervised for 24 hours, but they are fine when he returns home. This is not neglect, because the children suffered no harm.

☐  ☐  A child attends school for several days without having washed or bathed, and wearing the same set of clothes. These are possible signs of neglect.

Transcript:

Read each of the following statements. Based on the information you just learned, decide whether each one is true or false. When you are finished, click “Submit.”

Answers

Neglect: Check and Extend Understanding

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Optional: Commentary

Neglect: Check and Extend Understanding

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Transcript:

If you’d like to hear an optional explanation of the correct answers, click “Commentary.” If you are ready to move on, click “Proceed.”

Let’s address each statement, one at a time.

A teacher should never assume that a child is being neglected simply because he or she lives in poverty.

It must also be noted that a caregiver’s inability to provide for a child’s needs is not the same thing as a failure to provide. If a parent is unable to provide for a given need, he or she should be connected with information or resources that will provide help. However, if the caregiver has information and resources but fails to use them - and a child’s well-being is at risk - a report of neglect may be warranted (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Leaving a young child unsupervised for an extended period of time is a form of neglect, regardless of whether the child suffers physical harm or not.

Consistently poor hygiene and unwashed, ill-fitting clothing - especially if observed over a period of time, are possible signs of neglect.
Chapter 5: What to Look for

Optional: School Social Worker Interview

Transcript:

Now that you have reviewed common signs of abuse, take a moment to watch a brief interview with a school social worker.

In the video, the social worker describes the most common indications of abuse that she encounters in her work with students. She also highlights some important considerations to keep in mind as you observe for these signs. Click the video to play, then “Proceed” when you are ready to continue.
Chapter 6: What Should I Do?

What to Do

**What should I do if I observe one or more of these symptoms?**

1. Ask questions
2. Document your observations
3. Follow your school’s reporting procedures

Transcript:

You have become familiar with physical and behavioral signs associated with different forms of
abuse. The final question we must answer is: **What should I do if I observe one or more of these symptoms?**

There are three broad steps to take:

1. Ask questions
2. Document your observations
3. Follow your school’s reporting procedures

Let’s discuss each one.

**Ask Questions**

1. **Ask questions**

   **Transcript:**

   If you observe something concerning, you can share your observation and ask the student an open-ended question about it. For example, “I noticed you’ve been really quiet lately. How are things going for you?” or “That bruise on your arm looks like it hurt. What happened?”

   In some situations, especially those involving neglect, it may be helpful to speak to the caregiver. Once again, you should follow the pattern of sharing an objective observation, then asking an open-ended question. For example, “Recently, Sarah has been saying she’s hungry in class. How is she eating at home?” In cases of neglect, the problem is sometimes rooted in lack of information about - or access to - resources. For this reason, it may be wise to speak to the caregiver before making a report.

   There are other situations in which discussing concerns with a parent or caregiver may *not* be advisable. For example, if a child is being physically or sexually abused, questioning the parent may
actually place a child at greater risk of harm in the short-term. If you have a question about whether to discuss a symptom with a child’s parent or caregiver, privately consult with another professional at your school, such as the psychologist or social worker.

Document Observations

2 Document your observations

Transcript:

Whenever you observe a possible symptom of abuse, you should document the observation with dated Transcript. These Transcript should include physical signs you observed, concerning behaviors the child demonstrated, and things the child said.

Your Transcript should be objective, fact-based, and contain exact quotes. Record what you saw and heard with no additional elaboration, interpretation, or opinion.

As a mandatory reporter, your job is not to conduct an investigation, or “prove” that abuse has occurred. However, it is important to record information so that you can clearly explain your reasons for suspicion when making a report.
When it comes to suspected cases of child abuse, the question that is often foremost on teachers’ minds is: **When do I need to make a report?**

The sole legal criterion for reporting a suspected case of abuse is that you have a “reasonable belief” or suspicion that a child is being harmed or is at risk of being harmed (Sinanan, 2011).

No state requires you to be certain that abuse is taking place before filing a report. Rather, a teacher’s responsibility is to report as soon as a reasonable belief or suspicion develops.

If you observe an act of abuse directly, if a child discloses abuse to you, or if you believe that a child is in immediate danger, you obviously must report immediately.
Conclusion

Transcript:

Child abuse is a difficult topic. It is painful to think about children being harmed, especially by the people who are obliged to care for them.

There is reason to be hopeful, though. By being observant, and by identifying signs that a child is suffering harm, teachers can help break patterns of abuse and neglect and play an important role in helping both children and families to heal. This is because the first step in helping a child recover from abuse is getting the abuse to stop.
Chapter 7: Case Study

Case Study - Josh

Transcript:

You have a student in your class named Josh. Josh is polite and quiet. He enjoys participating in class activities, and can always be counted on to do his work. Despite his somewhat shy disposition, he has several friends in class and seems to get along well with everyone.

You and Josh have a good relationship. He always follows directions and rarely misbehaves. Josh is an avid basketball fan, and sometimes he’ll hang out in your classroom before or after school to chat about his favorite team and players.

One day you begin to notice some subtle changes in Josh’s demeanor. He hardly speaks during class, and when you ask him how he’s doing he merely grunts an acknowledgement.

He also occasionally puts his head down and goes to sleep in class, which - up until now - is something he’s never done before.

These changes have made you a little bit concerned, so you decide to observe his behavior more closely.
Observation Set 1

Observation | Oct. 26, 9:40am

Is this a sign of abuse?
Josh put his head down during independent practice and slept for approx. five minutes. I went over to his seat to wake him and get him started on the assignment. He said, “Leave me alone,” and put his head back down.

Yes  No

Transcript:

Here are some observations of Josh that you record on the first day. Each observation reflects proper documentation techniques: you record physical signs you observed, behaviors that were suspicious or out-of-character for Josh, and what he said.

Place a check next to each observation based on whether it is a possible sign of abuse, then click “Submit” when you are finished.
Correct

Observation Set 2

Observation | Oct. 27, 7:15am

Is this a sign of abuse?
Josh came into my room and asked if he could hang out here before class started. I said yes. He immediately went to his seat, dropped his book bag, and put his head down. Two of my other students were also in the room, having a conversation about a video game they both like. At one point Josh raised his head and said, “Can you two just shut up?”

Transcript:
Here are some observations of Josh that you record two days later. Place a check next to each observation based on whether it is a possible sign of abuse, then click “Submit” when you are finished.
Correct

Observation Set 2

Transcript:

Here are some observations of Josh that you record two days later.
Place a check next to each observation based on whether it is a possible sign of abuse, then click “Submit” when you are finished.
Correct

Observation Set 3

Transcript:

Here are some observations of Josh that you record two days later.
Place a check next to each observation based on whether it is a possible sign of abuse, then click “Submit” when you are finished.
Observation Set 1

Observation | Oct. 26, 9:55am

Is this a sign of abuse?
Josh physically shoved a student as he was leaving the classroom. I stopped him and asked, “Why did you do that?” Josh replied, “He was pissing me off.” I said, “What do you mean? What did he do?” Josh shrugged and did not respond.

Yes   No

Transcript:

Here are some observations of Josh that you record the next day. Place a check next to each observation based on whether it is a possible sign of abuse, then click “Submit” when you are finished.
Correct

Conclusion

Review

What we’ve learned:
• How abuse is defined.
• Common risk factors.
• Common signs and symptoms.

Transcript:
Let’s review what we’ve learned in this module. You’ve learned the definition of child abuse. You learned about common risk factors for child abuse, and the impact that abuse can have on children’s lives and development.
You learned about different *types* of abuse, and the symptoms associated with each. Finally, you learned what to *do* if you begin to observe signs of abuse in your students.

As teachers, it is our job to be vigilant. If something doesn’t seem right, or if a child is showing behaviors that are out of character for him, we should pay attention. Knowing common signs of abuse or neglect can help us protect students and ensure their safety - both in *and* outside the classroom.