

What is emotional neglect?

We all know that broken bones can hurt. We all know that bruises can hurt. But there are other kinds of hurt, as well.

Emotional neglect or abuse can hurt as much as physical abuse. But it can be harder to see because words don't leave marks on the outside of kids. Words leave marks on the inside.

Emotional neglect happens when kids do not get the love and attention they need to feel good about themselves. Their parents will not tell them how much they are loved. Their parents will not show them affection, like hugs and kisses. Their parents will not tell them how important they are. Their parents will not say "Good job!" when they do something right.

A child who is physically neglected can be emotionally neglected. But emotional neglect can exist by itself. Children may be cared for in every other way, but not receive the love and attention they need.

Adapted from "Emotional Neglect: Being Hurt by What is Not There" by Jon Korfmacher, Ph.D. ©1998 Prevent Child Abuse America

Information courtesy of



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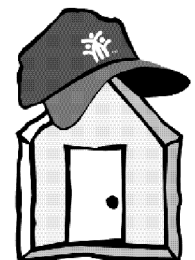


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Being Hurt

...by what is not there

Teaming up to keep kids...



Safe at Home™

Impact of Emotional Neglect

Studies that have looked at emotionally neglected children as they grow up show that these kids have many different problems. Some research has shown that emotionally neglected toddlers and preschoolers tend to be angry, refusing to follow directions, giving up easily when asked to do something and showing little joy or happiness.

Later in elementary school, research shows that neglected children tend to have a hard time making friends and paying attention in class, resulting in poor academic performance. These children tend to be angry and fight a lot.

When children show these sorts of problems, it becomes even more difficult for others to give children the warm and positive messages they need to feel better about themselves. So the problems continue and can get worse over time.

When children are emotionally neglected, it is as if a part of them dies inside. If you are a parent or another important person in a child's life, that child will look to you to help him or her feel good about himself or herself. When kids go through life without love and attention, they think they don't deserve it. They don't know how valuable they really are.

Possible signs of emotional neglect

... babies who spend long periods of time in their crib without a parent checking on them.

... babies who do not respond or show happiness when you pay attention to them.

... toddlers or preschoolers who look sad or withdrawn, or who frequently fight with other children.

... children who seem to have no friends.

... parents who seem depressed or unhappy, or who never show joy in being a parent.

... families that seem to have few visitors or close friends.



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What to do if you suspect a child is being emotionally neglected . . .

Be a friend to the child.

Offer extra warmth and attention. Deep down, every child wants to be loved.

Be a friend to the parent.

Find ways to help him or her. Offer a break from the child for, say, an afternoon or evening.

Let other people know.

A school counselor, for example, may be able to spend time with the child and find ways to talk to the parent in a way that will not be ignored.

If you have concerns that serious emotional or physical neglect is occurring, you should call the police or child protective services in your community.

You may not want to make these calls. Some people think that the child will automatically be taken from the home. This does not happen. Child protection workers only remove a child if there is a serious threat to the child's health or well-being.