

Henderson ISD

Plan for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse and other Maltreatment of Children

The Henderson Independent School District has established this plan for addressing child sexual abuse and other maltreatment of children. This plan may be accessed at the district website. A copy of this plan will also be kept in each principal's office, each school counselor's office and at the HISD Central Office.

This plan includes the legal definition of sexual abuse, methods for increasing awareness regarding sexual abuse of children, and the psychological, behavioral, and physical warning signs of abuse. Since the typical signs of child abuse may vary by age, we have also included signs more typical in younger children and adolescents. This plan addresses suspected physical abuse and suspected neglect. This plan addresses legal requirements, legal protections, a summary of Texas state law, instructions for making an online report, and the District Flow Chart on Child Abuse and Neglect.

What is Sexual Abuse of a Child?

Sexual abuse in the Texas Family Code is defined as any sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare as well as a failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct with a child.

Methods for Increasing Awareness Regarding Sexual Abuse of Children

Staff: Each year, all staff will review this plan and participate in a one hour online training published by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services entitled Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect of a Child Training for education professionals
<http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Reporting/default.asp> and Child Abuse Prevention Training at <http://www.D2L.org/TXEd>.

A copy of this plan will be available online at www.Hendersonisd.org and also available in each principal and counselor's office. Any questions regarding the plan should be directed to Dr. Raylene Conner at 903-655-5025.

Students: District staff will address issues to increase awareness regarding sexual abuse of children and anti-victimization programs with age appropriate conversation and materials no less than once per school year in classroom group lessons in grades Pre-K through 8. Awareness regarding sexual abuse of children will be addressed with students in grades 9 – 12 through biology or health classes at least once per school year.

Parents: Information concerning the district Plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children will be on each campus in the principal's and counselor's offices, at the HISD Administration Building, and on the HISD website.

As a parent, it is important for you to be aware of warning signs that could indicate a child may have been or is being sexually abused.

A child who is suspected of having been a victim of sexual abuse should be encouraged to seek out a trusted adult. Disclosures of sexual abuse may be more indirect than disclosures of physical abuse, and it is important to be calm and comforting if your child, or another child, confides in you. Reassure the child that he or she did the right thing by telling you.

If you knowingly permit your child to continually be in a situation where he or she may be injured, then you may be prosecuted for child abuse. The fact that the abuser is a parent or other family member does not remove your obligation to protect the child. If you are frightened for your own safety or that of your child, call 911 or 1-800-252-5400. You are legally responsible for the care of your child. You must provide your child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, protection, medical care and supervision, or else you must arrange for someone else to provide these things. Failure to do so may be considered neglect.

Warning Signs in Children and Adolescents of Possible Sexual Abuse

Of course, one particular sign doesn't necessarily indicate a child was sexually abused, but the presence of several signs should warrant the asking of questions and possibly seeking help. Keep in mind that some of these signs can emerge at other times of stress such as: during a divorce, death of a family member or pet, problems at school or with friends and other anxiety-inducing or traumatic events.

Possible Psychological and Behavioral Signs of Sexual Child Abuse

- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Bedwetting
- Nightmares or bad dreams
- Depression, irritability, or anger Low self-esteem, guilt, shame
- Avoidance of people or places
- Sexual advances or "touching" inappropriately
- Sexual drawings
- Changes in socialization (social withdrawal or social isolation)

Possible Physical Symptoms

- Becomes pregnant or contracts a venereal disease, particularly if under age 14
- Trauma to the mouth or genitals
- Rectal bleeding
- Pain around the genital area
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss or weight gain

Signs More Typical of Younger Children

- An older child behaving like a younger child (such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking)
- Uses new words for private body parts
- Resists removing clothes at appropriate times (bath, bed, toileting, diapering)
- Asks other children to behave sexually or play sexual games
- Mimics adult-like sexual behaviors with toys or stuffed animal
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

Signs You May See in a Child or Adolescent

- Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation
- Seems distracted or distant at odd times
- Has a sudden change in eating habits or refuses to eat
- Has trouble swallowing
- Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal
- Leaves "clues" that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues
- Writes, draws, plays or dreams of sexual or frightening images
- Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places
- Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or older child
- Talks about a new older friend
- Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge

Signs More Typical in Adolescents

- Self-injury (cutting, burning) Inadequate personal hygiene
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Sexual promiscuity
- Running away from home
- Depression, anxiety
- Suicide attempts
- Fear of intimacy or closeness
- Compulsive eating or dieting

Consider the Possibility of Sexual Abuse when the Parent or Other Adult Caregiver

- Is unduly protective of the child or severely limits the child's contact with other children, especially of the opposite sex
- Is secretive and isolated
- Is jealous or controlling with family members

Physical Warning Signs

Physical signs of sexual abuse are rare. If you see these signs, consider involving a doctor. Your doctor can help you understand what may be happening and test for sexually transmitted diseases.

- Pain, discoloration, bleeding or discharges in genitals, anus or mouth
- Persistent or recurring pain during urination and bowel movements
- Wetting and soiling accidents unrelated to toilet training

Suspect Physical Abuse When You See. . .

- Frequent injuries such as bruises, cuts, black eyes or burns, especially when the child cannot adequately explain their causes
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate the use of an instrument or a human bite; cigarette burns on any part of the body
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Aggressive, disruptive and destructive behavior
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Fear of going home or seeing parents
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Unseasonable clothes that may hide injuries to arms or legs

Suspect Neglect When You See in a Child:

- Obvious malnourishment Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn and/or dirty clothes
- Obvious fatigue and listlessness
- A child unattended for long periods of time
- Need for glasses, dental care or other medical attention
- Stealing or begging for food
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school

Educator Obligations and Procedures

Your Legal Obligation

Current law requires that professionals such as educators, doctors, nurses, or child daycare workers must make a verbal report within 48 hours. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect is a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment of up to 180 days and/or a fine of up to \$2,000 (Texas Family Code, Chapter 261). Failure to report child abuse or neglect violates the Educator's Code of Ethics and may result in sanctions against an educator's certificate, as addressed in 19 TAC 249.19 TAC 61.1051.

Reporting suspected child abuse to your principal, school counselor or superintendent will NOT satisfy your obligation under this law. HISD School Board Policy FFG(EXHIBIT) addresses the Notice of Employee Responsibilities for Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

Your Legal Protection

Your report of child abuse or neglect is confidential and immune from civil or criminal liability as long as the report is made in "good faith" and "without malice." In good faith means that the person making the report took reasonable steps to learn facts that were readily available and at hand. Without malice means that the person did not intend to injure or violate the rights of another person. Provided these two conditions are met, you will also be immune from liability if you are asked to participate in any judicial proceedings that might result from your report.

If You Suspect Abuse:

DON'T confront the abuser

DO report your reasonable suspicions

It is not up to you to determine whether your suspicions are true. A trained investigator will evaluate the child's situation. Even if your report does not bring decisive action, it may help establish a situation that will eventually help the child.

A Disclosure:

If you are the first person the child tells about alleged sexual abuse, your testimony as "outcry witness" may be especially important in future legal proceedings. What you indicate the child told you is not considered hearsay but is admissible evidence in a trial involving a sexual offense against a child. This exception applies only to the first person the child approaches.

Reports may be made to any of the following:

- Henderson Police Department-903.657.3512
- Child Protective Services-800.252.5400
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services- www.txabusehotline.org
- Chad Bradley—Henderson ISD Police liaison-903.655.5500 x 4598

The following websites might help you become more aware of child sexual abuse:

- Prevent Child Abuse America: www.preventchildabuse.org
- Prevent Child Abuse Texas: www.preventchildabusetexas.org

- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault: www.taasa.org
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: www.childwelfare.gov
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: www.dfps.state.tx.us

Available Counseling Options and Other Resources

National Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800-4-A-Child (800.422.4453)

ChildHelp:

Includes programs designed to serve children who are abused including their Good- Touch-Bad-Touch program, which is intended to help eliminate child abuse by bringing prevention education to children and adults everywhere.

Phone-1.480.922.8212

Website: www.childhelp.org

Stop It Now:

Provides a national helpline for supportive guidance, information, and resources. The Helpline is staffed by professionals who can provide assistance in how to deal with suspected child abuse situations. Additional resources are available on their website.

Phone: 1-888-PREVENT

Email: helpline@stopitnow.org

Website: www.stopitnow.org