



## Ferris ISD

# Plan for Addressing Child Sexual Abuse and other Maltreatment of Children

As required by TEC 38.0041

The Ferris Independent School District, in the collaboration with the School Health Advisory Council has established this plan for addressing child sexual abuse and other maltreatment of children. This plan may be accessed at the district website and in the FISD District Improvement Plan. A copy of this plan is available in each campus principal's office, each school counselor's office, and at the Ferris ISD Administration Building.

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 also adolescents. This plan addresses when to suspect physical abuse and when to suspect neglect. Facts on your legal obligation and your legal protection can be found in this plan along with a summary of Texas state law and instructions for making an online report.

## **What is Sexual Abuse of a Child?**

Sexual abuse is defined in the Texas Family Code 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 participate in an online training entitled Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse, and Maltreatment of Children, provided by Region 10 ESC's Online Learning Center. Staff must successfully complete an online assessment to receive credit for the training. A copy of this plan will be available on the Fisd website as well as in each campus administrator and counselor's office. Any questions regarding the plan should be directed to the Assistant Superintendent for Student Support at Extension 1326 or [mddomain@ferrisisd.org](mailto:mddomain@ferrisisd.org).

**Students:** School counselors 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 PK through 12.

**Parents:** Information concerning the district plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children will be posted in school newsletters, on the Fisd website, and in the student handbook. The student handbook includes the following information:

The district has established a plan for addressing child sexual abuse and other maltreatment of children, which may be accessed at [www.ferrisisd.org](http://www.ferrisisd.org). 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. 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. A person who compels or encourages a child to engage in sexual conduct commits abuse. It is illegal to make or possess child pornography or to display such material to a child. Anyone who suspects that a child has been or may be abused or neglected has a legal responsibility, under state law, for reporting the suspected abuse or neglect to law enforcement or to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Possible physical warning signs of sexual abuse could be difficulty sitting or walking, pain in the genital areas, and claims of stomachaches and headaches. Behavioral indicators may include verbal references or pretend games of sexual activity between adults and children, fear of being alone with adults of a particular gender, or sexually suggestive behavior. Emotional warning signs to be aware of include withdrawal, depression, sleeping and eating disorders, and problems in school.

A child who has experienced sexual abuse or any other type of abuse or neglect should be encouraged to seek out a trusted adult. Be aware as a parent or other trusted adult that disclosures of sexual abuse may be more indirect than

disclosures of physical abuse and neglect, 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.

Parents, if your child is a victim of sexual abuse or other maltreatment, the school counselor or principal will provide information regarding counseling options for you and your child available in your area. The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) also manages early intervention counseling programs. [To find out what services may be available in your county, see Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Programs Available in Your County.]

Be aware that children and adolescents who have experienced dating violence may show similar physical, behavioral, and emotional warning signs. [See Dating Violence, Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (All Grade Levels) on page 58.]

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

- [Child Welfare Information Gateway Factsheet](#)
- [KidsHealth, For Parents, Child Abuse](#)
- [Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, Resources](#)
- [Texas Attorney General, What We Can Do About Child Abuse Part One](#)
- [Texas Attorney General, What We Can Do About Child Abuse Part Two](#)

Reports of abuse or neglect may be made to:

The CPS division of the DFPS (1-800-252-5400 or on the web at Texas Abuse Hotline Website).

## **Warning Signs in Children and Adolescents of Possible Child Sexual Abuse**

Any one sign does not mean that a child was sexually abused, but the presence of several signs suggests that you begin asking questions and consider 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 when 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 Refuses to eat
- Loses or drastically increases appetite
- 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, bring your child to 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
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Fear of going home or seeing parents
- 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 . . .**

- 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

### **Your Legal Obligation**

Current law requires that professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses, or child daycare workers 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). Reporting suspected child abuse to your principal, school counselor, or superintendent will NOT satisfy your obligation under this law. FISD School Board

Policy FFG(EXHIBIT) states 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 try to investigate.

DON'T confront the abuser.

DO report your reasonable suspicions.

It is not up 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 pattern that will eventually be clear enough to help the child.

### **Disclosure**

If you are the first person the child tells about sexual abuse, your testimony as "outcry witness" may be especially important in future legal proceedings. What you say 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:**

Ferris ISD Police Department: 972-544-2349

Ferris Police Department: 972-544-2225

Child Protective Services 800-252-5400

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org)

### **The following Ellis County Agencies are available:**

CASA: 972-937-1455

Ellis County Children's Advocacy Center: 972-937-1870  
(The Gingerbread House)

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

Prevent Child Abuse America: [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org)

Prevent Child Abuse Texas: [www.preventchildabusetexas.org](http://www.preventchildabusetexas.org)

Child Welfare Information Gateway: [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services: [www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://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 hopes to eliminate child abuse by bringing prevention education to children and adults everywhere.
  - Phone: 1-480-922-8212
  - Website: [www.childhelp.org](http://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](mailto:helpline@stopitnow.org)
  - Website: [www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)