Child Abuse and Shelter in Place for COVID-19 Health Crisis

Child abuse reporting is down, but that may not be a good thing. April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, but this year, raising awareness is even more critical. Schools are closed, people are out of work, some are getting sick, and many are stressed and anxious. Before the shelter-in-place directive, kids were going to school, participating in after school activities, and attending community and religious activities. Mandated reporters like teachers, mental health professionals, medical providers, coaches and childcare providers were able to see and interact with kids and assess if they were in any danger or experiencing abuse. Now these children are isolated, at home with parents and having very little interaction with outside people. Other family dysfunctions like violence, substance abuse and mental health issues can exacerbate and fuel child abuse.

Here’s what we can do to help kids who might be experiencing abuse or exploitation during the COVID-19 health crisis.

1. Be Aware. Know what abuse is and how to help a child.
2. Check on families with children to see if they need support and resources or someone to talk to. Develop a plan with a secret word in case they need to reach out to you.
3. Help parents and children manage stress and anxiety. Offer to watch kids in-person or virtually if possible.
4. Know the emergency services available in your community for children and families and how to refer them.
5. If you think a child is experiencing physical, emotional, sexual abuse or exploitation report to child protective services at 800-856-5553 or call/text 9-1-1 if it is an emergency.
6. Donate to organizations that provide support to children and families in San Francisco.

Awareness
- Child abuse is any intended physical injury, cruel or inhuman treatment or punishment and negligence or maltreatment of child by a parent or caregiver.
- Sexual abuse is perpetration or use of a child for sexual gratification of an adult or older adolescent including intimidating or grooming a child, coercing or manipulation and child pornography.
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) is sexual activity with a child in exchange for something of value (food, shelter, money, goods, safety) including survival sex.

Support and Resources
San Francisco 311 Resource Information Line
Parenting Support and Resources
SFUSD free lunches during school closures
Apply for CalFresh
San Francisco Food Pantries

Manage Stress and Anxiety

1. Remember it is normal, ok and predicted that stress will increase during a crisis of this magnitude. Worrying about what could/will happen particularly in a new and developing issue like COVID-19 increases our anxiety and decreases are sense of personal agency.
   a. Set one goal each day and achieve it.
   b. Journal about things you are grateful for.

2. Isolation is counterproductive to good mental health. We are social beings and connection is a protective factor against poor mood and stress. Just because we are physical distancing does not mean we cannot have connection.
   a. Call, text and video with family and friends. Check in share both challenges and successes.
   b. Make sure children and adolescents connect with their friends. Social engagement is important to children, make sure they can see/talk to friends and family regularly.

3. Manage your anxiety by calming your stress response. Our bodies are responding to the stress going on in the world, our county, our community and our homes. We can use mindfulness and calming techniques to manage and quiet our stress and worries.
   a. Relaxation breathing - breath in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, breath out for 8 seconds.
   b. Progressive muscle relaxation - tense a group of muscles as you breath in and relax them as you bring out. Start with your toes and work your way up to your head.
   c. Guided imagery helps you to use safe and positive mental images to help you relax and de-stress as your body responds.

4. Taking care of others, doing something to contribute to the big problem or helping someone in need can all be protective against stress and anxiety. Donating, volunteering or working on an issue can all help us both feel useful and valued.
   a. Make masks and donate to first responders.
   b. Donate or help raise money for food banks, personal protective equipment, or housing for those in need.
   c. Check in on someone who is alone or isolated and help them get food, essential items if needed.
   d. Raise awareness about issues that are important to you on social media.

5. Distraction helps us temporarily manage stress and change our mood. Distraction is accessible, easy to do and requires little or no resources. It can also be done alone or with others and help divert focus from the stressful event while helping the body to calm down.
   a. Listening to music.
   b. Watching a movie.
   c. Playing with pets.
   d. Taking a walk.
e. Talking with friends and family.
f. Cooking.
g. Exercise.
h. Reading.
i. Journaling or writing.
j. Drawing or coloring.
k. Video games.
l. Social media.
m. Nap.
n. Cleaning

**Emergency Services**
To Report Suspected Child Abuse to Family and Children’s Services (FCS)
24-hour Hotline 800-856-5553 or email FCS.Hotline@sfgov.org

National Child Abuse Hotline
24-hour Hotline 800-422-4453

SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline
24-hour Hotline 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs @ 66746

RAINN Sexual Abuse
24-hour Hotline 800-656-HOPE (4673)

**Local Emergency Resources**
Safe & Sound
24-hour TALK Line 415-441-KIDS (5437)

Huckleberry Youth Services
24-hour Teen Hotline for youth and families 415-621-2929

Larkin Street Youth Services
24-hour Young Adult Shelter 18-24 years 1-800-447-8223
24-hour Youth Shelter 17 years and under 1-800-669-6196

Child and Adolescent Support, Advocacy & Resource Center
24-hour Hotline 415-206-8386

Parents Place Virtual Counseling for Children and Remote Parenting Consultations & Coaching
415-359-2443 or [online](#)

**Donate**
[Safe & Sound](#)
[SF/Marin Food Bank](#)
[Homeless Prenatal Program](#)