

Somerville ISD Plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children and Other Maltreatment of Children As Required by HB 1041 and SB 471

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

Teachers: Teachers will be trained annually in all content areas addressed in the Somerville ISD ISD Plan for Addressing Sexual Abuse of Children. Training may be provided through campus staff, district staff, or outside agencies as appropriate at the discretion of the campus administration. Training will include contents of the adopted board policy FFG (LEGAL) and pertinent FFG exhibits.

Students: District counseling 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 posted in the schools, on the CCISD website, and in the student handbook. The student handbook (which is available both in printed format and online at the district website) will include the following information:

The district has established a plan for addressing child sexual abuse, which may be accessed at the district 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 has experienced sexual abuse 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 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 permit your child to 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 safe and 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.

As a parent, if your child is a victim of sexual abuse, the campus 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 also manage early intervention counseling programs. The Austin location may be contacted at 1-512-556-8269.

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). Reports may be made by contacting one of the following:

- Texas Abuse Hotline, 1-800-252-5400, <http://www.txabusehotline.org>
- Somerville Police Department, 596-1633
- Call 911 for emergency situations

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

Warning Signs in Children and Adolescents of Possible Child Sexual Abuse

Any one sign doesn't mean that a child was sexually abused, but the presence of several 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
- 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

Behavior 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
- Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad
- Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge

Signs More Typical of Younger Children

- An older child behaving like a younger child (such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking)
- Has 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 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

Available Counseling Options and Other Resources

Crisis Care Hotline: 1-800-421-TEEN (8336)

Sexual Assault Legal Hotline: 1-888-296-SAFE (Statewide) 1-512-225-9290 (Austin)

Family Violence Legal Line: 1-800-374-HOPE (Statewide) 1-512-476-5770 (Austin)

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.

Helpline 1-888-PREVENT

Email helpline@stopitnow.org

Website www.stopitnow.org