

The Professional School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

(Adopted 1981; revised 1985, 1993, 1999, 2003)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

It is the professional school counselor's legal, ethical and moral responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse/neglect to the proper authorities. Recognizing that the abuse of children is not limited to the home and that corporal punishment by school authorities might well be considered child abuse, ASCA supports any legislation that specifically bans the use of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tool within the schools.

The Rationale

The incidence of reported child abuse and child neglect has increased significantly during the past several years. Although there are societal beliefs and values that parents have the right to discipline their children as they choose, it becomes a public issue of child protection when that discipline becomes abusive. Research shows that a large percentage of abusive parents were abused children, perpetuating the cycle of abuse. The consequences of abuse and neglect may range from immediate physical and/or emotional harm, the inability to build healthy relationships, increased likelihood of being abused by another perpetrator or becoming an abuser and lowered self-worth.

The Professional School Counselor's Role

Generally, state laws require people in the helping professions who have reasonable cause to believe a child is suffering physical or emotional injury to report this situation as directed by state law to the appropriate authorities. Professional school counselors are mandated reporters and need policies, referral procedures and essential knowledge. It is a legal, moral and ethical responsibility to report child abuse. Some states additionally require the reporting of domestic violence.

ASCA recognizes it is the absolute responsibility of professional school counselors to report suspected cases of child abuse/neglect to the proper authorities. Responsible action by the professional counselor can be achieved through the recognition and understanding of the problem, knowing the reporting procedures and participating in available child abuse information programs. Professional school counselors are instrumental in early detection of abuse. The association also recognizes that the abuse of children is not limited to the home and that corporal punishment by school authorities can be considered child abuse.

Professional school counselors commit themselves to providing strategies to help break the cycle of child abuse. Professional school counselors can help children and adults cope with abusive behavior, facilitate behavioral changes and develop positive interpersonal relationships, which may reinforce appropriate parenting skills. Professional school counselors coordinate team efforts on behalf of the child, provide support to staff and other school personnel, work to re-establish trust and provide follow-up counseling or to refer to ongoing counseling services outside of the school community, provide developmental workshops and/or support groups enhancing parenting skills, and coordinate or provide programs and in-services designed to help prevent child abuse.

Summary

Professional school counselors are a key link in the child abuse prevention network. It is their responsibility to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. The professional school counselor must be able to guide and help abused and neglected students by providing appropriate services during crisis situations. By providing up-to-date information and intervention, the professional school counselor can sometimes facilitate a turning point in the life and behavior of an abusive family.