

Child Abuse in the Time of COVID-19

We are undergoing a once-in-a-century (for most of us, a once-in-a-lifetime) pandemic, an international health crisis that has caused unprecedented fear and pain for many people and nations.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

Since children are not attending school because of the pandemic, the mandated reporters of domestic violence including teachers, counselors. It is important that members of a community know that there are confidential hotlines to report suspected child abuse.

[Child Abuse Hotline \(FL\): 1-800-962-4453](#)

[Child Abuse Hotline \(National\): 1-800-4-A-CHILD \(4-22-4453\)](#)

How can we protect children from abuse, sexual slavery, and domestic violence when they and we are sequestered at home?

Beneath the dark cloud of COVID-19 that has encircled the world, there is an **underlying crisis that is bleak and heartbreaking: child maltreatment**. Child welfare organizations warn that lockdown measures will increase cases of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse against children.¹ The world's lockdown measures, while essential for (and successful in) curbing the rapid spread of the virus, are revealing some unfortunate "side effect" consequences.

Stay-at-home policies and lockdown orders can result in happy memories and family-bonding opportunities for healthy families. However, in dysfunctional households, these same policies and orders can translate into a nightmare. If a family member or home perpetrator is abusive toward a child, the child is now stuck at home with an abuser. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received 4.2 million reports of child abuse in April 2020 (an increase in 3 million compared to April 2019).²

¹ <https://voxeu.org/article/potential-impact-covid-19-child-abuse-and-neglect>

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/05/09/online-child-abuse-complaints-surpass-4-million-in-april-this-is-how-cops-are-coping-despite-covid-19/#2779545d48db>

In dysfunctional households, lockdown policies can translate into a nightmare; a child may be stuck at home with an abuser.

Teachers, therapists, guidance counselors, and medical encounters (from dentist appointments to ER visits) provide mandatory reporting: they can notice and report if a child is injured or malnourished. With schools and nurseries shut down in most states, **children now lack this extremely vital support system.** With doctor or dentist visits postponed, another source of reporting is also lost. Caring individuals who may have been able to otherwise comfort, support, or provide help are unable to witness the child's current situation. There are children in America who live in a constant state of fear; today, it is harder than ever for them to gain help or relief by being around (or confiding in) peers and safe adults.

Unemployment—another repercussion of the pandemic—can cause great stress, toxic thoughts and behaviors, and economic strain. Economic hardship is considered a strong predictor of child abuse and neglect.³ One 2018 study showed that **a 1% increase in unemployment leads to a 20% increase in child neglect** (failure to provide for a child's basic health and wellbeing needs), along with a decrease in basic goods (e.g. grocery) expenses.⁴ Dysfunctional parents (e.g. who prioritize drinking, doing drugs, or pursuing other vices) won't really care about attaining food for their kids—and they probably won't get in a car, drive, and wait in a line to bring home the bread.

Some children only get to eat one substantial meal per day, and that breakfast or lunch is provided by their school or local community center. **Malnutrition significantly affects the development of a child's brain**, and can actually stunt his or her emotional, physical, and mental growth with long-term consequences.⁵

Child **traffickers and online predators appear to be shifting their business models** to evolve with the current situation. And given that forensic labs are all but shut down in some states, child exploitation stories are taking a backseat to murder and shooting cases.⁶

So what can be done?

If you're a victim of abuse, contact a hotline and you will receive immediate help.

Do not stay quarantined with your abuser. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that, of the young people who reached out in March 2020, 67% identified their perpetrator as a family member and 79% were in lockdown with

³ <https://voxeu.org/article/potential-impact-covid-19-child-abuse-and-neglect>

⁴ <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ese/iserwp/2018-04.html>

⁵ <https://www.alliedacademies.org/articles/causes-sign-and-symptoms-of-malnutrition-among-the-children.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2020/05/09/online-child-abuse-complaints-surpass-4-million-in-april-this-is-how-cops-are-coping-despite-covid-19/#415f940948db>

that person. In 1 out of 5 cases where the minor lived with the abuser, RAINN helped the minor to immediately contact the police.⁷

Here are some valuable resources:

- [Child Abuse Hotline \(FL\): 1-800-962-4453](#)
- [Child Abuse Hotline \(National\): 1-800-4-A-CHILD \(4-22-4453\)](#)
- [Child Helpline International](#)
- [National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#) Hotline and Resources.
Phone Number: **1-800-843-5678**
- [Create a safety plan on LovelsRespect.org](#)
- Child Protection Resources from [the International Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#)

Children need their family and neighbors to **be their safety net**. A secure hotline means that your identity will remain anonymous. Social workers want children to stay with their parents, but they will place the child in a foster home if their life or wellbeing is in danger; if the parent becomes accountable, the situation is re-evaluated and the child may return home.

Keep children safe online by setting up strict parental controls and privacy settings, involve your children in creating healthy and safe online habits. Be alert to signs of distress, and encourage your child to share anything that makes them uncomfortable or afraid.⁸

This is a stressful time for everyone, but children are particularly vulnerable during this crisis.

ABOUT [DR. LINDA MILES](#)

⁷ <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/28/847251985/child-sexual-abuse-reports-are-on-the-rise-amid-lockdown-orders>

⁸ https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/English_COVID-19%20Keeping%20children%20safe%20online_FINAL.pdf

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