What is Child Abuse under Iowa Law?
In Iowa law to constitute child abuse there are three variables, you must have a child under 18, you must have a caretaker and there must be abuse.

Child Abuse Categories under Iowa Law:
- Physical abuse
- Mental injury
- Sexual abuse
- Bestiality in the presence of a child
- Child prostitution
- Manufacturing or possession of dangerous substance
- Denial of critical care
- Presence of illegal drugs in a child’s body
- Allows access to a registered sex offender
- Allows access to obscene materials

Note: Denial of Critical Care Category is predominantly the category with the highest percentage of abuse. Denial of critical care factors may be but not limited to: lack of appropriate supervision, failure to provide proper medical care, and housing, etc. Illegal use of drugs by parent may fall into this category as well.

There are many possible indicators of abuse: Volunteers & staff should be aware of some that may be more likely to be apparent. These may include but are not limited to:
- Bruises & welts on face, torso, back or thighs in various stages of healing and/or unusual patterns of bruising
- Unexplained bruising, burns, fractures, etc.
- Consistent hunger
- Lack of supervision
- Substance abuse by parent, youth afraid to go home or frightened of parents
- Constant fatigue, wary of adult contact, lack of trust, etc.
- Behavioral extremes
- Poor peer relationships

Mandatory Reporter
- Persons required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse.
- Professionals in the fields of medicine, child care, education, law enforcement, social work, etc.

Permissive Reporter
- May report child abuse but are not required to by law, persons who are not mandatory reports. May remain anonymous.
- Reports may be made to the Department of Human Services, law enforcement, or county attorney.

4-H volunteers are not legally required to report, but can and should view reporting as a moral responsibility in order to assure youth a safe environment to learn and grow.

If you suspect a child under 18 is being abused call 911 immediately. DHS abuse hotline 24 hours a day: 1-800-362-2178. For more information access the Iowa Department of Human Services website at http://dhs.iowa.gov/
Why are 4-H volunteers & staff being asked to learn about child abuse?

- 4-H staff, leaders, & volunteers work with youth in one-on-one and small group settings, holding special trust with youth.
- Deciding to get involved in a situation of suspected abuse and neglect can be difficult, but may be crucial to a child not only today but in the future.
- 4-H volunteers may be the first to observe signs of a problem or suspect that a child needs help.
- 4-H volunteers are not legally required to report, but can and should view reporting as a moral responsibility in order to assure youth a safe environment to learn and grow.

Precautions are designed to protect youth, adults, families and the organization and prevent misinterpretation.

4-H volunteers and adults can help prevent situations where abuse can occur by:

- Working with young people in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter. Volunteers should not be alone with youth without written permission from the parent.
- Encouraging and welcoming parents and guardians to attend meetings and events, encourage the "unannounced parent visit."
- Respecting the privacy of the youth.
- One unrelated adult should not room with one youth during an overnight stay, such as a camping trip.
- Never using physical punishment or deny basic necessities such as food, shelter, or medical care.
- Being alert to the physical and emotional health of the young people you work with.
- Reporting signs of injury or neglect.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has in place several precautions to assure child protection and safety.

1. Recruitment of 4-H volunteers and application process
2. Checking identified references
3. Process background screening which includes criminal check and sex offender registry
4. Staff recommendation and council approval of volunteers
5. Volunteer reviews and signs the Code of Conduct for Iowa 4-H Volunteers
6. Volunteer receives orientation to the 4-H volunteer role and training
7. Volunteers attend on-going 4-H training and training related to child abuse awareness and reporting

“As a positive youth development organization, 4-H has a moral and legal obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of young people entrusted to its care.” 4-H National Headquarters, NIFA/USDA Fact Sheet

Competent, caring adult volunteers are an essential element of the Iowa 4-H program. 4-H has the responsibility to provide them with the positive youth development knowledge and skills they need to effectively work with youth.

For more information contact your local county extension office.

Resources:

Iowa Department of Human Services
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children’s Bureau
Law.drake.edu

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

... and justice for all

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