

# School counselors and child abuse

[Society](#), [Child Abuse](#)



The objective of this research paper is to determine how well school counselors, who are human service providers and mandated reporters of child abuse, know how to detect abuse and whether or not this skill has an effect on them actually making a report. As mandated reporters, school counselors are not prepared to detect signs of child abuse and their lack of preparedness is directly correlated with their low levels of reporting.

Unfortunately, it is a cold fact that child abuse exists all over the world, but fortunately educators and individuals in human services are beginning to open the eyes of many individuals about the power they have in prevention, intervening and changing the lives of those affected by the horrid effect of child abuse. A group of individuals that can have a superb effect in empowering those affected by abuse are school counselors. Because of their interactions with children and their families, they can be influential in recognizing and reporting child abuse. With the right training and tools they can make a world of difference.

There is very little research on school counselors and their abilities in recognizing and reporting child abuse. The research that does exist shows a need in extensive training in recognition child abuse and what to do thereafter. School counselors reported knowledge that they are mandated by law to report suspicion of child abuse, but lacked confidence in their ability to detect and report child abuse. Training is necessary in undergraduate/graduate schooling and as a professional in order for a school counselor to be fully effective as a mandated reporters.

According to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, (NCANDS), which collects and analysis data from child protective services, 3.3 million  
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child abuse reports were made in 2009 of which three fifths of the reports were made by mandated reports such as doctors, teachers, daycare providers, counselor, etc. who because of the nature of their job have contact with these children. 3. 3 million reports were made in United States in the year 2009 and it is unfortunate to say that perhaps millions more abuses occurred but went on unreported.

To report or not to report, that is the question that many individuals ask themselves when in a possession were they might hold vital information. There are times when individuals who have vital information right in front of them but see right thought it because of the lack of knowledge and experience. An often happy and extrovert child might begin to show sudden signs of melancholy and introversion due to being sexually abused by a family member, but a professional who works with the child on a day to day basis, for example, a teacher or a school counselor may not be able to detect these changes in character and as a result make no reports.

The duration of time that children interact with school officials and administrators often times equal and even exceed the amount of time that they spend with family members. At times children and certain school officials form bonds that are fused together by trust and respect and due to the trust that has been formed, often times these officials gain insight about these children's lives. One school official that needs to build rapport with a child in order to best service that child, is a school counselor.

Since rapport is usually built between child and counselor, one would assume that the counselor would be able to detect child abuse right away, but it is evident through my readings that school counselors are in desperate need of <https://assignbuster.com/school-counselors-and-child-abuse/>

guidance themselves. Though they are there to guide others, school counselors lack the confidence and knowledge when it comes to detecting and reporting child abuse cases; whether it be neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or physical abuse. According to Bryant (2009), 86. % of the 193 participants in his study reported that they gained knowledge about child abuse reporting through experience at work and not necessarily through training. Goldman and Padayachi (2005) study looked at school counselors and their reporting behavior and whether or not they needed any further training. Just as Bryant (2009) study concluded that further education and training was necessary, Goldman and Padayachi (2005) study also reported that 95% of the participants in the study suggested that they needed more training in how to handle and deal with children and sexual abuse.

The latter researchers did their study in Australia, where child abuse laws differ from one state to another. For example in New South Wales, it is mandatory by law for school officials to report any suspicion of child abuse. It was not always the case in New South Wales though because reports by school personnel of child abuse greatly increased from 11. 4% to 24% once the new law took into action. In Queensland where the research study was conducted, school personnel were not mandated by law to report suspicion of child abuse.

According to Goldman and Padayachi (2005) school personnel in New South Wales were being trained more intensively about neglect and child abuse because of the mandatory reporting laws. So, could it be possible that school personnel are not trained as intensively and excessively because there is no

law indicating that suspicion of child abuse be reported? Would it be fair to say that people are reporting because it is mandated by law? Or are people reporting more because they have more training in dealing with child abuse? Is it an issue of law, ethics or knowledge?

In order to determine whether or not school counselors consider certain situations as abuse or not, Goldman and Padayachi (2005) created four hypothetical situations where a child is interacting with a counselor and in all four situations the degree of detail the child reveals is different, for example, in one situation a child “ draws a picture of a man and makes vague statements about a bad man, but does not make any specific statements about being sexually abused” (Goodman and Padayachi, 2005), and in another situation, a girl tells her school counselor and her grandmother that she is being sexually abused. School personnel are suppose to rate the degree of suspicion from “ substantial” to “ no reason.

According to the results, the degree of suspicion was from substantial to moderate, which indicates that the 122 participants were well aware of what signs to look for in sexual abuse. Majority of participants were able to detect child abuse, but were unlikely to report their suspicions when asked if they would report it if the child denied of being sexually abused. This can indicate that suspecting and reporting do not necessarily go hand in hand, especially in a state where reporting is not mandated by law. According to Bryant (2009), the number one reason the participants in his study indicated that they would report suspicion of child abuse was because of law; which goes back to, are people reporting because of law, knowledge, ethics?

It seems to me, to be more in favor of the law; but either way, if children's lives are being saved; would it matter if it's because of law or ethics? Probably the answer would be no, until people's perceptions are changed. Being able to recognize signs of abuse in a hypothetical situation can vary greatly with the degree of confidence that a person has of his or her skills in recognizing signs of abuse. In Bryans (2009) study, participants were confident in their ability to recognize signs of physical abuse but were not as certain in their abilities to recognize emotional abuse; perhaps because physical abuse is much more observable, which indicates that much more training is needed in recognizing the more discrete signs of abuse.

In Goodman and Padayachi (2005) study, the participants were asked about their confidence level of their knowledge of sexual abuse, and only " less than 10 per cent of the school counselors in Queensland were completely confident in their knowledge of symptoms to identify sexual abuse, while a considerable portion of them, 47 per cent, had little confidence, and 37 per cent had no confidence" (Goodman and Padayachi, 2005). The literature that was used in this research project proves that school counselors are not prepared to identify signs of child abuse; especially emotional abuse because signs of emotional abuse are a lot more discrete than physical abuse.

Some research shows that school counselors are able to detect signs of child abuse but are less likely to report child abuse if a child denies being abused. In order to facilitate better understanding of child abuse in terms of detecting signs of abuse whether it is emotional or physical, colleges need to better prepare students before they start working as school counselors.

School districts also need to have mandated training for incoming and ongoing school counselors. In order to help school counselor with becoming more assertive reporters of child abuse, school districts need to have mandatory training and colleges need to have courses that prepare students in how to report and the importance of reporting child abuse.