

Mercer County Child Abuse Prevention Guidebook

First things first! Keep our children safe. Prevent child abuse.



Report Child Abuse
Call 1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877- 652-2873
24-hour toll-free telephone reporting system
DYFS Hotline - Statewide Central Registry (SCR)



**Families and Children/Child Care Planning Committee
Mercer County Human Services Advisory Council**

One of the first steps in helping abused or neglected children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child maltreatment.

This Guidebook is designed to:

- Give Direction
- Answer questions
- Provide practical tools to recognize and report suspected child abuse.

The safety and well-being of the children and families in Mercer County depends on you...

Four Steps to Decreasing Child Abuse

- 1) Be aware - Aware of the risk factors and indicators of child abuse.
- 2) Consider abuse – Act on your uneasy feelings and with your concerns
- 3) Make the call - Report incidents of suspected abuse and neglect.
- 4) Be involved – Be watchful and available to give information

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse often develops into life-long physical and psychological consequences including....

Death	Sexual dysfunction
Damaging adult relationships	Low self-esteem
Permanent disability	Promiscuity
Substance abuse	Depression
Cognitive impairment	Eating disturbances
Self-destructive behaviors	Re-victimization
School problems	Criminal activity

Without proper intervention, abused children are hurt and can become adult perpetrators or victims of family violence.

A child's happiness is a phone call away...have the courage to do the right thing.

Introduction

Each year hundreds of Mercer County children are victims of child abuse and neglect; the repetitive and habitual patterns of caretaker behavior that disregard the safety, needs and rights of our children. **Awareness, Identification and Reporting** are the actions through which the prevention of child maltreatment begins.

The Children and Families/Child Care Planning Committee of the Mercer County Human Services Advisory Council (HSAC) has developed this guidebook that will provide practical tools for the recognition and reporting of suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect, as well as answering questions to ease concerns about suspected child abuse and/or neglect.

The target audience for the guidebook is educators, child care providers and police personnel; with subsequent distribution to private agencies that serve children and families such as the faith based community, hospitals, healthcare providers, parents and legal services in Mercer County.

The Children and Families/Child Care Planning Committee is responding to the implementation of Mercer County's Priority Populations Plan, a comprehensive, five year plan required by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, which outlines the strengths and needs of the County's most vulnerable citizens. The Mercer County plan recommends the development of a campaign of community awareness to identify and report child abuse and neglect.

The format of this guidebook is adapted from the Child Abuse Guidebook for Primary Care Physicians in New Jersey with the permission of the Pediatric Council on Research & Education, Inc. (PCORE). The guidebook will highlight the use of Division of Youth and Family Services' 24-hour hotline (1-877-NJABUSE) for reporting incidents of child abuse and neglect (Statewide Central Registry (SCR)), and includes an explanation of the use of New Jersey's 2-1-1, the information and referral line for specific service needs.

***A person who cares can prevent child abuse.
Make a difference in the life of a child. Become involved.***

The Law

Legal Responsibility

Every person must make a report if he/she has reasonable cause to suspect a child has been abused or neglected, according to the Child Protective Services Law.

Call 1-877-NJABUSE (652-2873) to make a report to the 24-hour DYFS hotline, the Statewide Central Registry (SCR).

(NJ Statute 9:6-8.10)

“Any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to DYFS by telephone or otherwise”

Penalties for Not Reporting

(NJ Statute 9:6-8.14)

“Any person knowingly violating the provisions of this act including the failure to report an act of child abuse having reasonable cause to believe that an act of child abuse has been committed, is a disorderly person”

Protection from Liability

When a report is investigated and determined to be unfounded you are acting in good faith and are immune from civil and criminal liability when...

- Making a report
- Cooperating with an investigation
- Testifying in a child abuse proceeding if required (NJ Statute 9:6-8.13)

Reporter Confidentiality

Names of people who make reports of suspected child abuse are kept confidential. However, when the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) refers a case of suspected child abuse to law enforcement officials for criminal investigation, they are required to provide the name of the reporter to law enforcement. In addition, in the event that DYFS files for court action; the names of reporters may be revealed in discovery.

Take time to do the right thing....

Families at Risk for Abuse

Everyone is at risk of abusing children. The most common perpetrators of child abuse are mothers, fathers, relatives, babysitters, and non-related household members. Child abuse occurs in all types of families, regardless of economic level, race, ethnic heritage or religious faith.

Characteristics of a Child Vulnerable to Abuse:

- Premature birth
- Colic
- Physical disabilities
- Developmental disabilities
- Chronic illness
- Emotional/behavioral difficulties
- Unwanted child

Characteristics of a Parent Who Might Abuse a Child:

- Low self-esteem
- Poor impulse control
- Substance abuse
- Abused as a child
- Teenage parent
- Unrealistic expectations of child's behavior
- Negative view of themselves and their children
- Punitive childrearing style
- Maternal depression

Social/Situational Stresses – Family Factors that might impact abuse of a child

- Isolation
- Family/domestic violence
- Nonbiologically-related male or female in the home
- Poverty
- Unemployment/financial problems
- Single parent

Situations that might trigger abuse of a child

- Crying baby
- Child's misbehavior
- Discipline gone awry
- Argument/family conflict
- Toilet training
- Major life transitions

Positive family life gives children a strong sense of self...

Definition of Child Abuse

NJ Statute 9:6-8.21

Child abuse is the non-accidental physical, mental or emotional injury, sexual abuse, or negligent treatment of a child by a person responsible for a child's welfare.

An "abused child" means a child under the age of 18 years whose parent or caregiver acts or fails to act and:

- Inflicts, or allows to be inflicted, physical injury and/or severe mental injury
- Creates, or allows to be created, substantial risk of injury
- Commits, or allows to be committed, an act of sexual abuse
- Fails to supply adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, medical or surgical care though financially able
- Inflicts, or allows to be inflicted, excessive corporal punishment or excessive physical restraint
- Willfully abandons

Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse is involvement of children in sexual activities that...

- They cannot understand
- They are not developmentally prepared for
- They cannot give informed consent for
- Violate societal taboos

Neglect

- Failure to adequately supply basic needs though financially able
- Lack of supervision

NJ Statute NJSA 9:6-8.9 defines neglect as a child whose physical, mental, or emotional condition has been impaired or is in imminent danger of becoming impaired as a result of the failure of his parent or guardian to exercise a minimum degree of care.

Every child deserves to be safe and happy!

Types of Physical Abuse

Head Injury

Head injury is the leading cause of death from child physical abuse. The results of head injury may include altered mental status, hemorrhages, and skull fractures. Subtle bruises or other injuries may be obvious, but many babies have NO external injury.

Abdominal Trauma

Abdominal injury is the second leading cause of death from physical child abuse. Half of all children with serious abdominal injury do NOT have bruising, because the internal organs, and not the skin, are being crushed between the abuser's fist/foot, etc. and the rib cage or back of the child.

Fractures

Certain fractures may indicate abuse. Examination by a physician is necessary for a specific determination. If the explanation of the injury seems suspicious, you should report the incident.

Bruises

Children, especially toddlers, tend to get some mild to moderate bruises on their shins, knees, and elbows. However, bruises that should make you suspicious are those that are:

- Patterned: rope, belt or electric cord marks, hand or finger patterns, etc.
- Unusually distributed over non-bony surfaces of the body
- Centrally located
- Seen in non-ambulatory infants
- New and old

Age is an important factor when considering the cause of a fracture or bruise. Ask yourself "Is this infant/child capable of inflicting this injury by him/herself?" Infants who are not yet mobile CANNOT self inflict serious injuries.

Burns

Burns related to child abuse include:

- Immersion burns – from lowering a child into hot liquid
- Patterned contact burns – cigarette burns or burns from an iron

Listen to your inner voice. Report child abuse...

Child Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse can be violent or non-violent, isolated or ongoing, and can involve non-contact activities as well as physical contact with the child. Most often, the abuse has gone on for a long period of time by the time it is disclosed.

Child sexual abuse is the involvement of children in sexual activities that...

- They cannot understand
- They are not developmentally prepared for
- They cannot give informed consent for
- Violate societal taboos

Perpetrators are typically relatives or other individuals who...

- Are known to the child
- Have no intention to physically injure the child
- Strive to maintain secrecy

A specific disclosure of inappropriate sexual contact is key to the investigation of child sexual abuse. Disclosures need to be taken seriously because most sexually abused children have no physical indicators.

Behavioral Indicators of Abuse

There are no specific behaviors that can say definitively whether or not a child has been abused. The following behavioral problems should alert you to the need to make a report:

- Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem
- Excessive/inappropriate fears
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Behavioral extremes
- Developmental regression
- Habit disorders (excessive nail biting, rocking)
- Poor peer relationships
- Poor school performance
- School avoidance/truancy
- Self-mutilation
- Running away

For sexual abuse:

- Sexually acting out behaviors
- Knowledge of sexual acts that exceed expectations for age group

Every child has the right to high hopes and great dreams. Report child abuse!

How to Recognize Child Abuse and Know When to Make a Report

“Could this be abuse?”

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I think that the child was harmed by the actions or the inactions of the child's caregiver?
- If I do not make a report, will I be putting this child at significant risk of further harm?

If the answer is “yes”, you must report the suspected child abuse.

You do not need to be certain that abuse occurred. You only need to have a reasonable cause to suspect that abuse could have occurred.

If you suspect abuse or if a child tells you about abuse – making a report is very important.

Anyone can make a report. Whether you are a neighbor, friend, relative, etc., you have a right to report suspected abuse.

It is the responsibility of everyone in New Jersey and is required by law to report suspected abuse.

Every reasonable suspicion should be reported, for example:

- **A child telling you about abuse**
- **Witnessing the abuse**
- **A parent's statement of abuse**
- **Any physical or behavioral signs of abuse or neglect**

**Don't delay! Never assume someone else will report the abuse.
The sooner it's reported, the sooner the child and family can be helped.**

**To make a report, call toll free:
1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services
State Central Registry (SCR) Hotline**

What To Do When You Suspect Child Abuse

Call 1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873 to make a report.

This is the 24-hour telephone reporting system operated by the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). You should provide the following information (as much as you know):

- Name and address of child
- Age of child
- The child's present location
- Name and address of parent/caregiver and siblings
- The child's household composition
- Where the suspected abuse occurred
- Why you suspect the child is being abused
- Nature of the child's condition, including information about previous injuries or disabilities
- Risk of immediate danger to child

All reports, regardless of the time of day, are to be reported to 1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873, the Statewide Central Registry (SCR).

Only DYFS, law enforcement and hospitals have statutory authority to take children into emergency protective custody.

Call the police when...

- The child is in immediate danger
- The child was injured by means of a weapon, whether by himself or someone else
- The child was sexually abused (This also should be reported to the Statewide Central Registry – SCR)
- Integrity of the evidence must be maintained for future court proceedings
- The child was injured by a person who is NOT a caregiver

Children are the heart of the matter. Report child abuse.

What to Report

If you make a report, provide as much information as you can:

About The Child

- Name (if you don't know the child's name, provide a description of the child)
- Age (if you don't know, give an approximate age range)
- Address (where can the child be found)

About the Suspected Abuser

- Name
- Relationship to the child (parent, neighbor, baby sitter, etc.)
- Description (describe the person if you do not know his or her name, get a license plate number)

About the Type of Suspected Abuse

- A description of the suspected abuse and when it happened
- Your concern for the child's immediate safety

About the Child's Parents or Guardians

- Names, addresses, contact information
- If they are suspected abusers, describe their behavior toward the child

About Your Knowledge of Past Abuse

- If you know or suspect any past abuse, include a description in your report

About Other Witnesses

- If known, provide names and contact information of other people who may have witnessed the abuse

About Your Relationship to the Child

- Are you a family friend?
- Are you a teacher?
- Are you a neighbor?

You will be asked to explain any actions you have taken (such as talking to the child's parents or guardians). The screener at the call center will ask your name and phone number so that you can be reached if they have more questions. **But, you do not have to give your name. You can remain anonymous. Even if you give your name, the screener will not tell the family you made the report.**

You don't need to know all of the above information to make a report. The important thing is to call as soon as you can.

Be observant. Report what you see.

What Happens After a Report is Made

The Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) begins an investigation of the report to assess the risk of harm to children in the household; to determine if the children were abused or neglected, and to determine what services are needed by the children and family. The initial investigation is completed within 60 days.

A letter is sent by the local office in the county the child resides in to the person who made the referral. The letter will state that an assessment had been completed and DYFS will be terminating the investigation or DYFS has determined that the family will require further services.

The following are legal definitions of what is determined by DYFS for reported incidences of abuse/neglect:

Substantiated

The child has been harmed or placed at risk of harm by a parent or caregiver.

Unfounded

There is no evidence of conduct that would pose risk to the child.

There is no evidence that a parent or caregiver of the child was involved.

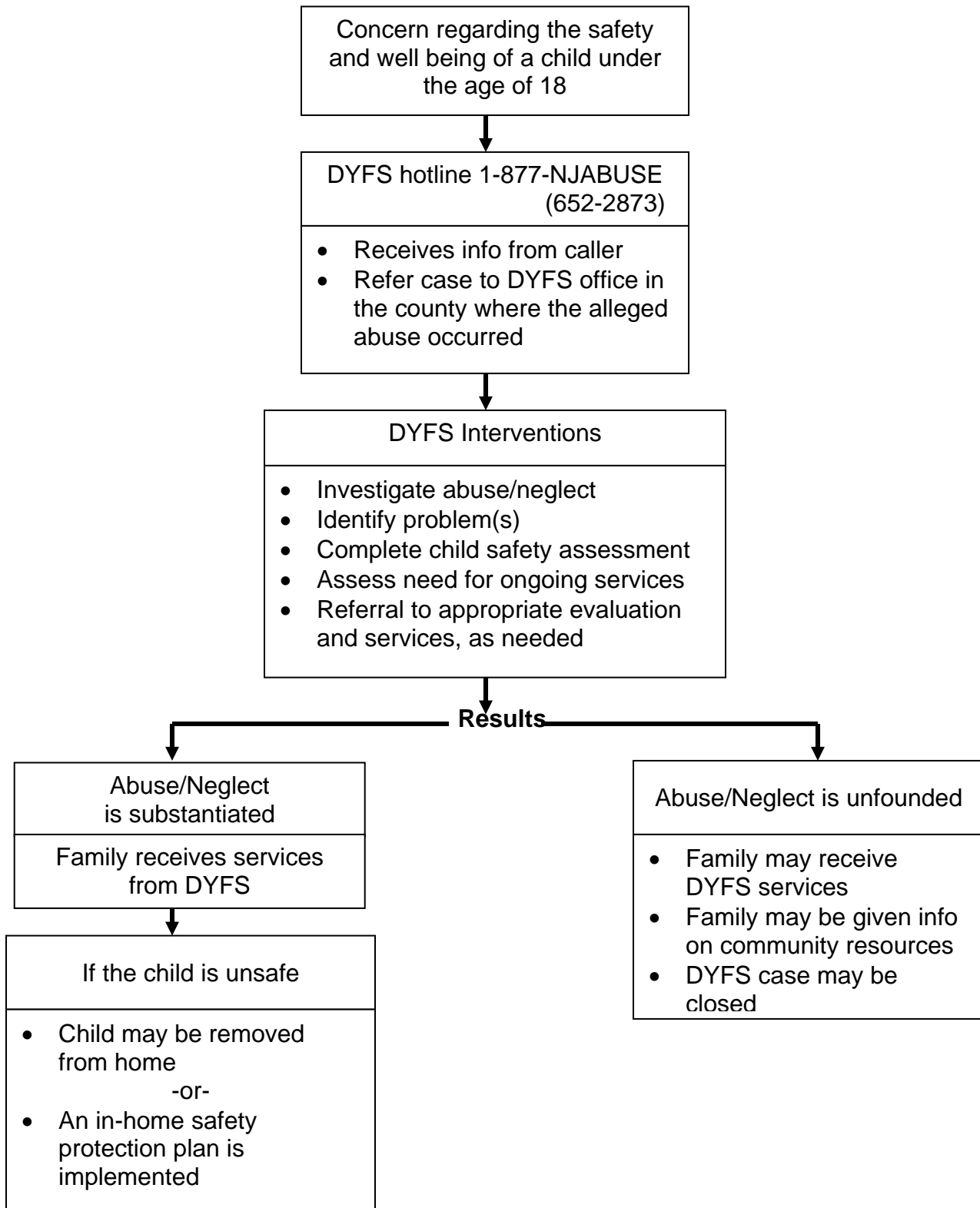
The available information indicates that the actions of the parent or caregiver were necessary and reasonable and the incident was an accident.

DYFS will work with families where abuse or neglect has been substantiated to decrease risk factors by providing them with counseling, education, and other supportive services. Call the hotline **(1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873)** if you have concerns about a family and are unsure whether services can be provided.

The paramount focus for children involved with DYFS includes safety, permanency and well-being. Ideally, the family is preserved whenever possible. However, if the child's safety cannot be maintained in the home, DYFS may place the child outside the home. In instances when it is necessary to remove the child from the home, efforts are made to place the child with relatives or people the child knows. When these resources are not available, the child may be placed in other settings.

Positive people do positive things. Report child abuse.

Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS)
Assessment and Intervention



Why Should I Be Concerned with Domestic Violence?

When a parent is assaulted in a domestic violence incident, the children may also be at risk of child abuse.

Children may be:

- Accidentally caught in the middle of an incident
- Intentionally or unintentionally injured while protecting their parent
- Abused by their father's or mother's significant partner
- Over-disciplined or abused by stressed, anxious, and depressed parents

Psychological effects of Domestic Violence on children

Even if children are not physically injured, there may be long-term psychological effects from witnessing family violence:

- Depression and anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Eating disturbances
- Sleeping problems
- Wanting to be alone
- Cognitive difficulties
- School problems
- Aggression, hostility and delinquency
- Damaging adult relationships

Exposure to domestic violence includes:

- Seeing the adult being injured
- Seeing the adult's injuries
- Seeing the destruction of property
- Hearing the abuser's threats
- Hearing the act
- Hearing the adult's screams and cries
- Hearing the destruction of property

What to do if you suspect Domestic Violence

Ask direct questions

- Are you afraid of anyone at home?
- Has anyone at home ever hurt you or treated you badly?
- Has anyone threatened or abused you or your children?
- For safety reasons, do not talk to the parent in presence of a known or suspected batterer.

***Our children in Mercer County are depending on you
for their safety and well-being***

Assess safety of parent and children

- Ask if parent is afraid to go home
- Ask if there has been an increase in frequency or severity of violence
- Ask if there have been threats to her or her children
- Ask if there are weapons in the home
- Ask if the children are currently being abused or are in immediate danger
- You might say: "Tell me what happens."

Refer parents to the New Jersey Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-572-SAFE (1-800-572-7233) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Or visit the website at www.womanspace.org where they can receive crisis assistance and information about local shelters, legal advocacy, health care centers, and counseling.

If you feel the child or children are at risk, call the hotline
(1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873)

Although the majority of cases of domestic violence are perpetrated by men against women, it should be noted that domestic violence is also perpetrated by women against men. Domestic Violence also occurs in same sex relationships.

Remember:

- You are not alone
- You must acknowledge that violence is unacceptable
- You have a right to be safe
- The violence is not your fault...

CALL 1-877-NJ-ABUSE or 1-877-652-2873

A child's fun should never end...

Child Abuse Prevention Resources and Phone Numbers

General Help Lines

Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey: 1-800-Children (800-244-5373)

A private, non-profit organization committed to preventing child abuse, it leads statewide efforts to eliminate child abuse in all its forms. PCA-NJ's programs are implemented in collaboration with schools, health care organizations and community-based agencies in every county. PCA-NJ operates many programs, including a Parenting Education Resource Center (PERC), which is a statewide information center for professionals, paraprofessionals, educators, parents, health care, child care and social service providers, and employers. Brochures describing parenting tips, ideas for discipline, child development, stress reduction and other topics may be ordered for a nominal fee; some are free. Many materials are available for loan; classes are available, as are speakers for events.

Family Help-Line: 1-800-THE-KIDS (800-843-5437)

A toll-free 24 hour hotline established by the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect to answer questions on child abuse and its prevention and to make referrals to other agencies that can help with parenting needs.

Parents Anonymous: 1-800-THE-KIDS (800-843-5437)

Parents Anonymous provides free, weekly, community-based parent support groups for parents under stress and in need of information and support. The sessions are focused on helping parents learn new skills, transform their attitudes and behaviors, and create long-term positive changes in their lives. A call to the state office will provide information about the group in closest proximity to a family.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233)

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides 24-hour, free and confidential services to victims of domestic violence and those calling on their behalf with crisis intervention to help the caller identify the problem and possible solutions, making plans for safety in an emergency, referrals to local service providers, referrals to social service agencies, legal programs, etc., information about domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, intervention programs for batterers, working through the criminal justice system, and related issues.

New Jersey Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-572-SAFE (800-572-7233)

The New Jersey Domestic Violence Hotline is a 24-hour information and referral service. Callers are provided with general information about domestic violence, and may request literature on the general topic of domestic violence. The hotline refers callers with specific questions to the county domestic violence services.

Adapted from Educating Physicians In their Communities – Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (EPIC-SCAN) is a free on-site continuing medical education program designed for primary care providers and staff throughout New Jersey. . Special thanks to PA Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, EPIC-SCAN Program for allowing duplication of their guidebook format.