

Washita Valley Community Action Council Head Start
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT POLICY

It is the policy of the Washita Valley Head Start Program to promote child abuse awareness and prevention and to protect the children enrolled.

Head Start employees having reason to suspect child abuse or neglect are required to:

1. Report the suspected child abuse or neglect to the Department of Human Services, and
2. Report the suspected child abuse or neglect to the Family Services Manager.

Washita Valley Head Start will cooperate fully with the child welfare agencies which deal with abuse and neglect. Head Start is not a treatment program nor shall we undertake treatment on our own.

Washita Valley Head Start staff will not investigate any suspected abuse or neglect. Staff will not interview or interrogate any child or family member regarding any suspected abuse or neglect. Attempting to do so could jeopardize an official investigation by alarming, confusing, or leading the child or family member. Our position is strictly to report any suspected abuse or neglect.

Failure to report, preventing or obstructing a report or investigation of child abuse or neglect could result in legal prosecution and/or disciplinary action being brought against a staff member.

Oklahoma State Law Mandated Reporting:

Every person having a reason to believe that a child is being harmed or in danger of being harmed is required to report the matter promptly to the Department of Human Services in the county where the abuse is suspected or to the statewide hotline number:

1-800-522-3511

Failure to report, preventing or obstructing a report or investigation of child abuse or neglect could result in legal prosecution.

Child Abuse Defined:

Oklahoma statutes define child abuse as harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child. This includes non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or neglect.

- Physical abuse is non-accidental physical injury to a child.
- Mental injury is an injury to a child's psychological growth and development. It is caused by a chronic pattern of behaviors, such as belittling, humiliating and ridiculing a child.
- Sexual abuse, in general terms, includes any sexual activity between an adult and a child for the purpose of sexually stimulating the adult, the child or others. Sexual abuse may also be committed by a person under the age of 18 when that person is either significantly older than the victim or is in a position of power or control over the child.
- Neglect is the failure of the parent or caretaker to provide a child with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, protection and supervision.
- Threatened harm means a substantial risk of harm to the child. It may include acts or expressions of intent to inflict actual harm presently or in the future.

Staff and Parent Training

Washita Valley Head Start will provide staff training on Identifying and Reporting Child Abuse. It is the responsibility of every staff person to read the materials provided and become familiar with the indicators of abuse and neglect.

Parent training on the subject of child abuse and neglect will be offered at parent committee meetings at all centers each year.

Caregiver Abuse

Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation records are obtained on all employees of Washita Valley Head Start. No person who has been convicted of child abuse or neglect will be employed by the agency. Conviction while employed will result in termination of employment.

Remember, staff are not exempt from the law. Physical or emotional abuse of a child by a staff member will not be tolerated.