Signs of Abuse and How Educators Can Intervene

Many elementary classroom teachers are unable to recognize signs of child abuse when they are not any physical indicators. There is also a misconception on the process by which a teacher is to inform the authorities and their liability if they were to report a suspected incident. It is these issues that are inhibiting teachers and other school personnel from reporting suspected instances of child abuse.

The article, “Child Abuse: What Teachers in the ‘90s Know, Think, and Do,” by Hinson and others reports the results of a survey taken of teachers in a Louisiana school. The results indicated that many teachers couldn’t identify the signs of child abuse. 75% of the teachers interviewed could not recognize signs of sexual abuse at any point (Hinson and others). There are 2.5 million children in the United states that are victims of child abuse each year,” (Lowenthal) the teachers are not able to step in and protect these children if they can not even identify the simplest signs of abuse.

The article also covers the fact that it is the responsibility of the teacher to report a suspected case of abuse to social services. The research revealed that many teachers do not report for a number of reasons. Some report to the principal and feel their obligation has been fulfilled. In reality, it is the responsibility of the teacher to report suspected abuse to social services, not the principal. This was found to be a large misconception within the population that was interviewed.

It is required to report abuse in all fifty states. The school personnel are obligated to report suspected abuse. The personnel of the school include janitors, lunch aides, secretarial staff, and anyone else who works in the school.
“Recognizing Emotion in Faces: Developmental Effects of Child abuse and Neglect,” by Pollak and others explained some of the symptoms a child can show if they were or are being neglected or physically abused. It explains some of the not so apparent signs of abuse a child might have. The researched showed that “Neglected children perceived less distinction between angry, san, and fearful expressions than did child who were not abused. Physically abused children perceived more distinction between anger and other negative expression than the neglected children” (Pollak and others).

The findings of the study that was conducted supported what the previously read articles defined as the symptoms of child abuse. These children that have experienced abuse at a young age have impaired reaction to different expressions of emotions. The neglected children, not being able to distinguish between happy and sad emotions tend to withdraw themselves from other students and seem to gravitate towards working alone and being sheltered. The abused children tent to associate with the expression of anger and seem to be able to understand this expression. They see this expression as being related to the neutral expression. This explains why physically abused children can become overly aggressive. They simply related aggression and anger to the neutral emotion of all people. Being angry for these children is their everyday, normal behavior. If teachers become aware of these reactions to emotions, they might be able to prevent the children form being traumatized any more than they have already been.

“39% of substantiated cases of sexual abuse involve children under 8 years of age” (Fieldman and Crespi). With the average age of children being between 6 and 12 years old when they are first abused, the teachers need to be able to recognize and help these children. In most cases of abuse at this age, the children end up forgetting about the
incident so they can protect themselves from the pain. These children might not remember for many years what had happened to them but by the time they realize what they went through, the damage has been done and the children are already scared. Most children who are abused will suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. These children are more likely to become perpetrators themselves if they do not receive the help they need.

These children are seen as vulnerable to the offenders and in many cases vulnerabilities like status conditions, emotional characteristics, and situational factors allow the perpetrator to gain control over the child and keep hold of them. The children that do experience abuse usually do not disclose to a parental figure. This is when the teacher needs to step in and inform authorities of her suspicion of abuse.

It is the responsibility of the school to educate the children of what abuse is and how they can avoid it. Parents teach their children about abuse but they do not know all of the facts. They might give the children inaccurate information. Together with the school though, parents and teachers will be able to educate the children of what to do in a situation and who to tell if something bad happens to them.

In the collection of articles that I read I found some common ideas. Every article identified child abuse the same way. They all listed similar symptoms of a child that has been abused and they all place responsibility on the teacher to be able to identify a situation and report it. We as teachers, in most cases, are with the student as much as if not more than the parents. We are the adult figure that is most likely to notice consistent bruises or changed behavior. It is the responsibility of the teacher to communicate with previous teachers to compare behavior or academic performance if there is an issue of
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concern with a child. We as teachers are the ones who can make a difference in a child’s life.

References


