



Medium

Please Don't Look the Other Way! Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect by Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.

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On the news today is a horrific story about a three year-old girl who [died](#) from her injuries inflicted by her step father. He beat her because she soiled her pants. It seems every week we learn of another senseless tragic death that could have been prevented.

See something? Hear something? Please, do something! This is not an alert warning about a strange packag

e on a subway platform; it is an alert for another type of terror: the abuse and neglect of children. It's everyone's job to protect children, not just the local authorities. **April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month; make it your time to learn how to help a child who is at-risk.**

It's interesting to me that although the age of social media has dramatically lowered the threshold on privacy standards—many adults are still reticent about reporting their suspicions about child abuse and neglect. How many times do we hear on the news, “I knew something was wrong, but I never thought he'd hurt the baby.” Or, “They are always fighting in that house, but you are afraid to get involved, don't know if they could turn on you.” This type of “bystander” behavior is far too common.

So, alarmingly, significant numbers of child abuse and neglect incidents go unreported. I am encouraging you to take action. When a child is brought to the attention of the authorities, the children and their parents can get the help that they need to prevent future abuse and strengthen their family. It can mean

the difference between life and death for newborns and children under the age of four, when most fatalities occur.

I'm urging everyone to take the steps needed to protect children. Go with your gut, as we hear all the time about other types of dangerous situations. If something is making you suspicious or uneasy, it's worth reporting. I encourage everyone to learn how to recognize the signs and symptoms of child abuse and neglect. Our website www.nyspcc.org offers a guide.

Many people tell me that taking the step of reporting makes them anxious, and that is understandable. Perhaps you are not 100-percent sure about your concerns. Even if this is the case, you can and should take steps to help rescue the child. I counsel parents that if they have a "reasonable suspicion" that a child is at risk, that's enough to make a call to the state's child abuse hotline. Much child abuse occurs behind closed doors; therefore, it's important for concerned friends, family members and neighbors to be familiar with the signs. And children, particularly younger ones, who may not be in school yet, will probably not tell you that they've been hurt, so concerned adults need to be their advocates if they have suspicions.

Please learn the basic steps and take action.

First of all, if you see a child being abused, or hear a child screaming in pain, call 911. If you have suspicions that a child is at risk, every state has a hotline that you can call to make a report. They will ask for your name and number, but you can choose to remain anonymous. Even if you are not certain about all the specifics, *make the call*. It's then up to the investigators to follow through.

The Childhelp National Child Abuse [Hotline](http://www.nyspcc.org) (I-800-4-A-CHILD) serves the U.S. and Canada, the hotline is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with professional crisis counselors who—through interpreters—provide assistance in over 170 languages. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social service, and support resources. All calls are confidential. Please make the call!

Yes, taking action may be a bit upsetting. That's understandable, as it's such an important undertaking. Nevertheless, you'll rest easier knowing that due to your intervention, the child and their parent will be getting help and attention. Remember, child abuse is preventable. Everyone must be part of the solution.

For more information on keeping your child safe visit www.nyspcc.org.

The NYSPCC's Annual Spring Luncheon will be held on Tuesday, April 17, 2017 at the Pierre Hotel, featuring McKayla Maroney—Gold Medal Olympic Gymnast. She will speak for the first time since testifying against Larry Nassar, the U.S. Gymnastics team doctor who sexually abused over 150 children. For tickets click [here](#).