

# The First Step In Preventing Child Neglect Is To Recognize And Report Child Neglect

*The VIRTUS® Programs*

A woman is charged with “three counts of child abandonment, breach of probation, and mischief endangering life” after she neglected her children by leaving them at home unsupervised.

A neighbor found her three small children locked in the house alone after he heard them crying and saw one of the girls through a window. He knocked on the door, but no adult was present in the home. The three children range in age from nine months to three years.

Police, who had to climb through a balcony door to reach the children, found them in an unsafe condition. However, a medical examination did not reveal any signs of physical abuse other than the neglect.

The mother of the children has a record of previous encounters with the law. “Woman charged after alleged case of child neglect,” [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca) (Mar. 8, 2013).

Everyone has a moral responsibility to report signs of child neglect or abuse to the authorities. Do not assume that someone else will take action.

In this case, the neighbor made the right decision to investigate the cries he heard and immediately notifying the police after he determined that no adult was in the home. If he had not taken action to report the neglect, the lives of the children may have been endangered.

In addition, certain professionals and others who work with children are required by law in all 50 states to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the authorities. These groups include: school teachers, administrators and officials; clergy; health and mental health practitioners; law enforcement officials; attorneys; parents, stepparents and guardians; childcare and foster care workers; social workers; marriage and family counselors; commercial film and photographic film processors; and child advocates. Some state laws mandate any person who suspects child abuse to report it to the police.

Those who do report child abuse or neglect should trust law enforcement officials or child welfare agencies to manage the situation. Members of these organizations are well-trained in providing care for abused or neglected children.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides resources to combat child abuse, including a comprehensive list of numbers to report suspected abuse, at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov). If you suspect that a child is a victim of abuse or neglect, contact your local law enforcement agency or child protective services office.

According to the National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence, signs of possible neglect include:

- Child appears poorly nourished or inadequately clothed;
- Child appears listless or tired on a consistent basis;
- Child has inconsistent attendance at school;

- Child has a lack of proper hygiene or an obsession with cleanliness;
- Child experiences a lack of supervision over long periods of time and in dangerous situations;
- Child shows signs that medical needs are not met;
- Child has signs of physical injury; or
- Child is unable to relate to adults and has trouble making close friends.

Related Link:

[U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services: Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

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