

Child Psychological Abuse Protection: Legislative Changes Needed to Child Abuse Reporting Laws

Minor changes to the wording of child abuse protection laws can have a big impact on solving the attachment-related pathology of “parental alienation” surrounding divorce. The wording change that is needed would be to add a definition of **child psychological abuse** to the "definitions" section of the mandated child abuse reporting laws. This simple change to the mandated child abuse reporting laws would provide clear directive guidance to all mental health professionals regarding their professional obligation to assess for and diagnose the attachment-related pathology of "parental alienation."

These changes to the child abuse reporting laws are justified by the inclusion of Child Psychological Abuse as a recognized diagnostic entity in the DSM-5 (a diagnostic code of V995.51; p. 719). The inclusion into the DSM-5 of a recognized diagnostic entity of Child Psychological Abuse warrants the review of child abuse protection statutes to ensure that we are protecting all children from all forms of child abuse, physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological.

The current reporting laws typically address “emotional abuse” or “emotional damage,” as defined by a list of emotions; severe anxiety, depression, and aggression. Emotional abuse, however, is a different entity than psychological child abuse. Emotional abuse is parenting that severely damages the child's emotional well-being. Psychological child abuse, on the other hand, is parenting that severely damages the child's deeper psychological development and functioning.

Psychological child abuse involves the creation of severe developmental and psychiatric psychopathology in the child as a result of distorted parenting practices, called pathogenic parenting (patho=pathology; genic=genesis, creation). Pathogenic parenting that is creating significant **developmental pathology** in the child, **personality disorder pathology** in the child, and **delusional-psychiatric pathology** in the child in order to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the parent represents a DSM-5 diagnosis of V995.51 Child Psychological Abuse, Confirmed.

The inclusion of Child Psychological Abuse as a diagnostic entity in the DSM-5 justifies a legislative review of mandated child abuse reporting laws regarding the construct of psychological abuse to ensure that our mandated child abuse reporting laws are adequately protecting all children from all forms of child abuse. The addition of a psychological child abuse definition to mandated child abuse reporting laws will ensure children’s protection from this form of child abuse in addition to the protections from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Psychological child abuse is a recognized diagnostic entity in the DSM-5 diagnostic system (V995.51; p. 719) and our child abuse reporting laws should include psychological child abuse among the definitions of child abuse. I would recommend something like the following:

Psychological Abuse Definition: Creates serious psychological damage to the juvenile; serious psychological damage is evidenced by significant developmental pathology, personality disorder pathology, or delusional-psychiatric pathology in the child as diagnosed by a mental health professional.

By defining the construct of psychological child abuse solely through standard and established symptom constructs of professional psychology, this definition and the surrounding legislative efforts to amend the child abuse reporting laws will avoid being distracted by arguments about the term "parental alienation." The construct of child psychological abuse is fully recognized by the DSM-5 diagnostic system of the American Psychiatric Association, and this proposed definition of child psychological abuse for mandated child abuse reporting purposes relies entirely on standard and established psychiatric symptoms as diagnosed by a mental health professional.

The specific recognition of Child Psychological Abuse (V995.51) by the American Psychiatric Association in the DSM-5 warrants a review and updating of mandated child abuse reporting laws to ensure that these laws are protecting all children from all forms of child abuse. A simple definitional sentence identifying "the creation of severe developmental pathology in the child, personality disorder in the child, or delusional-psychiatric pathology in the child as diagnosed by a mental health professional" as psychological child abuse will provide clear directive guidance to all mental health professionals regarding their professional obligation to protect all children from all forms of child abuse, physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological.

Our goal is to protect all children - 100% of children - from all forms of child abuse, including psychological child abuse (DSM-5; V995.51)



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