

# Teaching Educators About Signs of Child Abuse

**Walhalla Middle School**

Diane England, WMS Principal

Mary Schulenburg, WMS Guidance Counselor

Cynthia Gilster, AHEC Student Coordinator

Dr. Erin Presnell, Head of Pathology, MUSC

MUSC Student: Kristi Vissage

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# Abstract

**Purpose:** Recognizing signs of child abuse and making a decision to report a suspected case are serious concerns to faculty at Walhalla Middle School. No faculty educational instrument currently exists to address these needs. A survey of teachers provided the foundation for the preparation of a lecture on child abuse recognition and reporting.

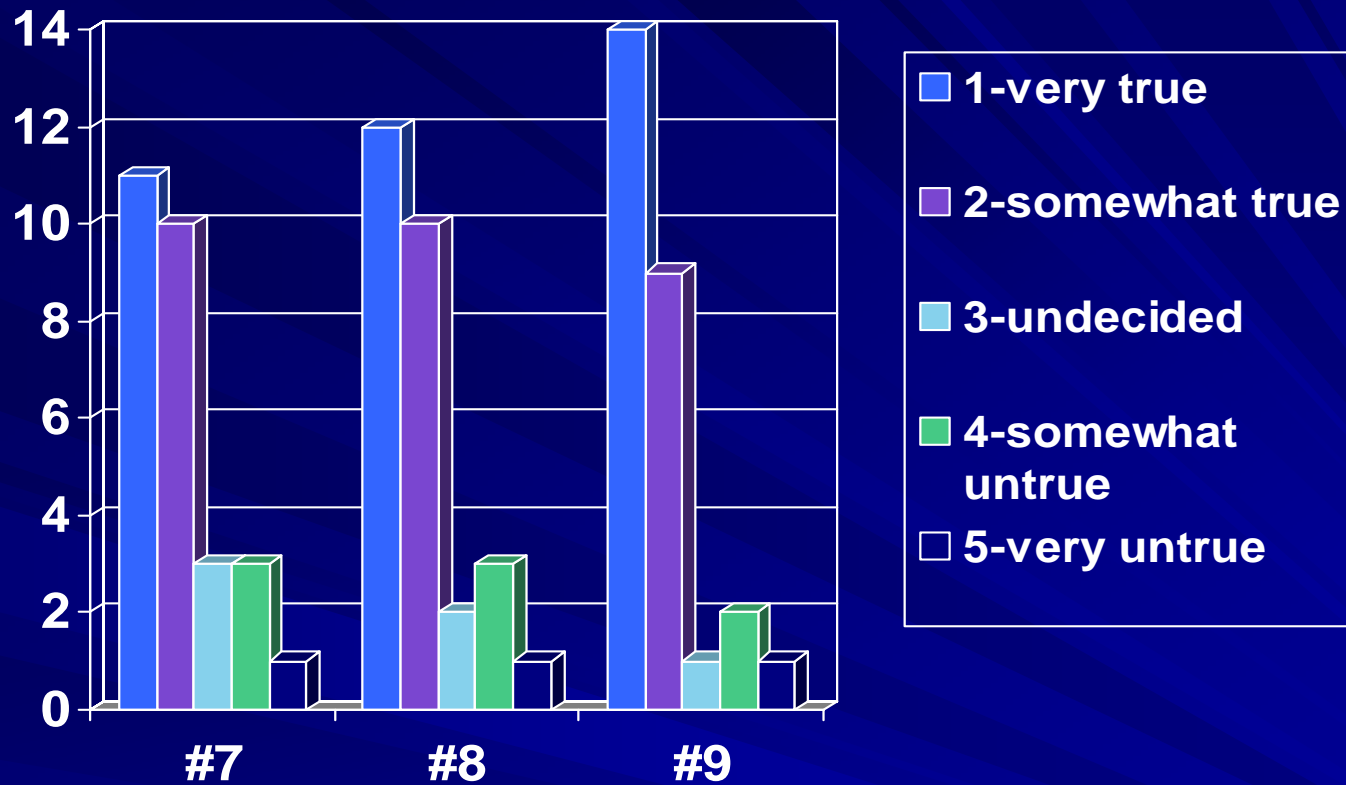
**Plan:** With enthusiastic support from school administration, a lecture was designed to help faculty obtain a greater knowledge of the subject and a higher comfort level with taking action. Before-lecture and after-lecture quizzes measured effectiveness. An after-lecture survey provided suggestions for future steps.

**Results:** Teachers exhibited a basic knowledge regarding signs of child abuse , but knowledge was not comprehensive, nor was it equal among the faculty; appeared to be from personal experience. Survey results indicated teachers highly valued the lecture and would like to see more education on this topic.

**Recommendations:** Consider an annual presentation, provide printed handouts, create a checklist or flow chart to standardize the reporting, and include other schools in the educational endeavor.

# The Need

- On speaking with teachers in the area, I found that there is no formal education on how to recognize that a child is a victim of child abuse.
- The administration at WMS welcomes a lecture that will inform the teachers about this important topic.
- A survey was submitted evaluating the faculty's comfort level with recognizing and reporting child abuse. Results show a need and desire for faculty education in this area.
- Educating people about uncomfortable subjects such as domestic violence is known to reduce apprehension and reinforce the importance of intervention.
- Dr. Evans (preceptor) and Mrs. Gilster (community coordinator) both agree that domestic violence is an important subject that is not addressed often enough in the community.
- October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



7. I wish that we had more training on our responsibilities about reporting suspected child abuse.

8. I wish that we had more training on how to tell between possible child abuse and normal childhood injuries.

9. I wish that we had more training on how to recognize ways that a child might “act out” if he or she is suffering from abuse at home.

# The Need (cont.)

- Nationally, possible child abuse is reported for 39.1/1000 children, and substantiated in 1.2% (1/3 reports)
- In SC, the incidence of referrals is lower (25.9/1000), as is the incidence of substantiated cases (0.6%)
- However, the number is still very significant, as is the number of unsubstantiated referrals in SC

# Aims

- The teachers will demonstrate a greater knowledge about the types of injuries typical of child abuse (vs. normal childhood injuries). Teachers will also recognize changes in behavior that may be typical in a victim of domestic violence.
- Teachers will demonstrate an increase in their overall comfort level with regard to recognizing and dealing with potential cases of child abuse.
- Teachers will make more appropriate referrals for evaluation of possible child abuse to the guidance office.

# Measures

- Teachers completed a quiz before the seminar to evaluate their knowledge of signs of child abuse. A survey submitted after the lecture evaluated knowledge gained from the talk.
- Teachers completed a survey before and after the lecture to evaluate their level of comfort recognizing potential cases of child abuse and making the appropriate referrals.
- School-wide statistics were not obtained because of confidentiality issues.

# Changes for Improvement

**Driver:** Provide teachers with education on subject of child abuse.

**Barrier:** Teachers may forget information after a period of time.

**Solution:** Teachers could be encouraged to share personal experiences at faculty meetings. There could also be an annual lecture to remind faculty of the topics covered in this presentation.

**Driver:** Administrative support and encouragement regarding child abuse recognition and reporting.

**Barrier:** The issue can be intimidating, especially if teachers have limited personal experience.

**Solution:** Teachers could be provided with a protocol or decision tree for evaluating possible child abuse.

**Driver:** Reminders posted about the school's policy on reporting.

**Barrier:** Teachers don't want to disrupt their classrooms and cause distress by making referrals to the guidance office.

**Solution:** Teachers should be reminded that child abuse is serious and that they are required by law to make referrals if they suspect any type of violence in the home. Good faith is assumed, and teachers are protected from prosecution if the suspicion turns out to be false.

# PDSA

## ■ PLAN:

- Prepared lecture on Recognizing Signs of Child Abuse to present to faculty at Walhalla Middle School
- Set up a time to deliver the lecture (during a faculty meeting Oct. 4)
- Gain community support by getting donations from various restaurants for the day of the event
- Prepare quiz and before & after surveys to evaluate effect of the lecture

# PDSA

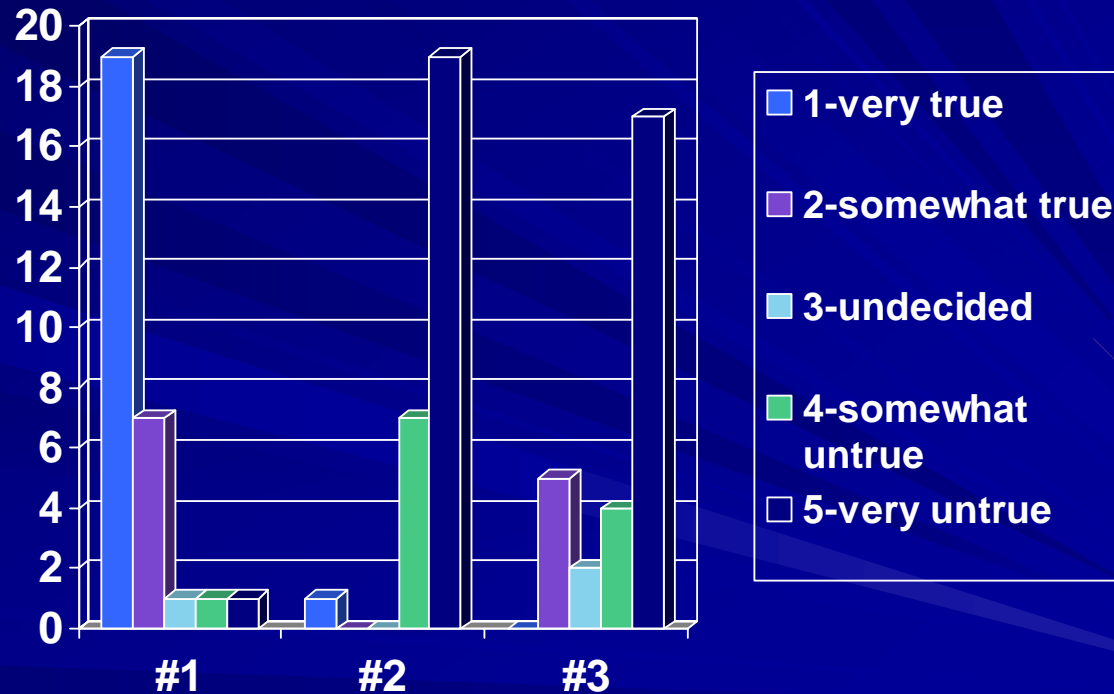
## ■ DO:

- Submitted quiz and “before” survey and studied results before the day of the lecture
- Delivered lecture designed for teachers on how to recognize physical and behavioral signs of child abuse
- Submitted “after” survey

# PDSA

## STUDY: “Before” Survey Results

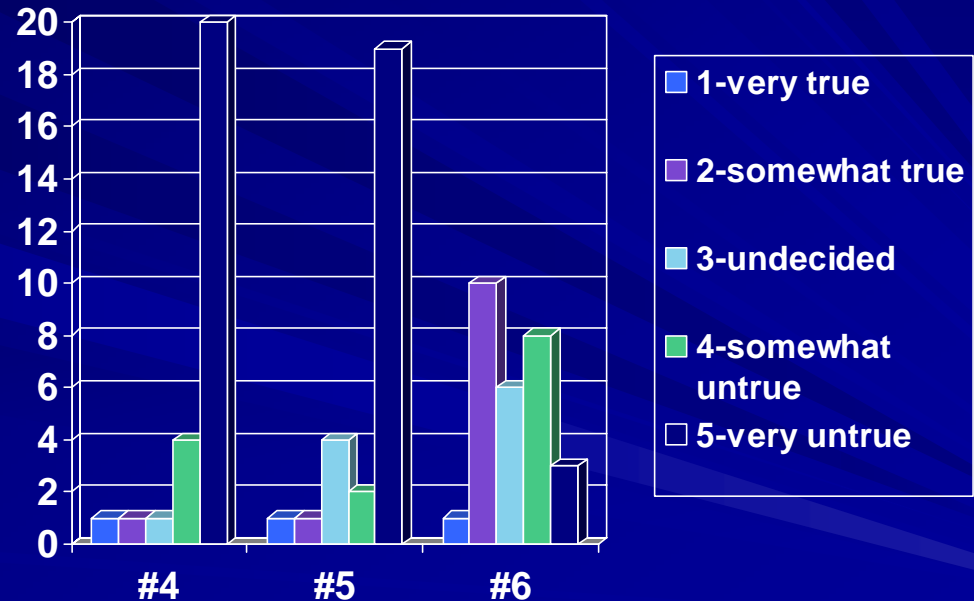
1. I feel comfortable referring a child to the guidance counselor or DSS if I suspect child abuse.
2. I feel that referring a child to the guidance counselor or DSS is a last resort.
3. Unless a child chooses to confide in me, I do not feel that their home life is my business



# PDSA

## STUDY: “Before” Survey Results

4. I have chosen not to refer a child I suspected was a victim of child abuse because I wasn't sure about my suspicions.
5. I have made a referral for suspected child abuse that turned out to be a false alarm.
6. Within the classroom, I just don't see enough to tell whether a student might be a victim of child abuse.



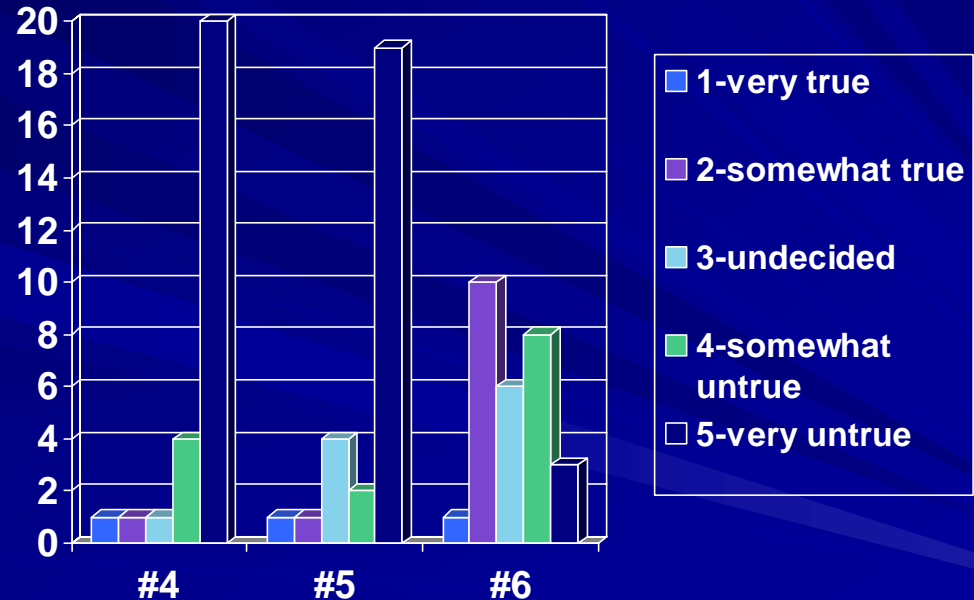
# PDSA

## STUDY: “Before” Survey Results

10. I don't feel that child abuse is an issue in this area

11. I don't feel that child abuse is an issue in this school.

12. I don't feel that child abuse is something teachers or other faculty should be worried about.



# PDSA

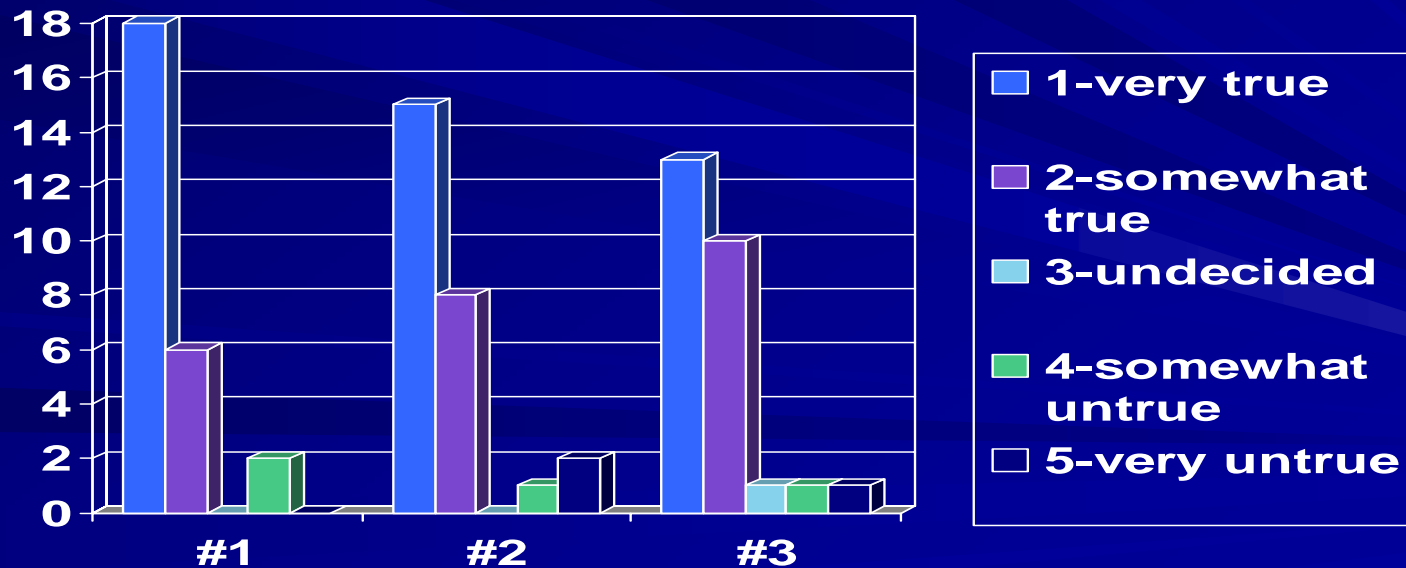
## ■ STUDY: Quiz Results

- Teachers exhibited a basic knowledge regarding signs of child abuse
- Teachers could name some typical childhood injuries, worrisome spots for injuries, behavioral signs, etc.
- Knowledge was not comprehensive, nor was it equal among the faculty; appeared to be from personal experience

# PDSA

## STUDY: “After” Survey Results

1. I thought the lecture was helpful
2. I learned some things I didn't know about child abuse
3. I would like to see more education on this topic in the school system



# PDSA

## ■ ACT:

- Information on recognizing child abuse should be provided to other schools in the area
- An annual presentation should be considered in order to maintain teachers' knowledge of the subject and train new teachers on recognizing child abuse
- Teachers should be provided with a handout summarizing the topics covered in the lecture

# Lessons Learned & Future Steps

- Teachers take their responsibility for mandatory reporting seriously and appreciate an opportunity to be formally educated on the signs of child abuse
- An important next step might be to prepare a checklist or flow chart to standardize the reporting within schools
- The lecture could be repeated at elementary schools in the area, as well as other middle schools

# References

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families. *Child Maltreatment 2003* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005).
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. Summary of SC State Law Regarding Child Abuse. (Washington, DC; updated June 2005).