



**OLGA DE SAMPER**  
Caseworker, Catholic Family Center

We work closely with Monroe County Social Services. We actually get our cases from them. They consist mostly of abuse cases or potential abuse cases. But we conduct a program here, and the family must agree to participate in it. Some are reluctant to accept our help, but as our service is basically for the most serious cases, they need our help. What we do first is determine the causes of stress, both internal and external. Internal stresses would be problems such as suicidal tendencies, alcoholism, or physically incapacitated or sickly parents. Examples of external stresses would be the dealings of the family with the welfare department, or the child's school. We consider whether the parents

require therapy, lessons on parenting skills, or psychiatric care for the parent or child. We can visit the home more often, in a more personal manner, than the county agency, so we have more time to help. We have no legal authority to take the child from the home, or even to threaten such action — only the county has that power. In a way that's good, because the parents don't consider us as a threat, so they accept us more readily, and once we establish this relationship, we can help them more effectively. When we enter these homes, we see the pain, but understand why it's going on. We think of the parent and say to ourselves, "I hate your actions, but I understand why you do it, and I want to help you."

In order to understand the child abuse problem, it is necessary to talk with people who deal with it. Thus, two child protective services workers, a pediatrician, and a woman who has abused her child, were interviewed. For a well-rounded view of the situation as it stands at the present time, the reader is referred to these conversations.



**ANONYMOUS**  
*A parent who has abused her child*

I was never hit much as a child. I could count the number of times on one hand. Anyway, my parents never abused me. So why did I beat my child? Well, sometimes I would be tired or lonely. My husband works two jobs. The stresses of everyday life would overwhelm me. On some really depressing days, just about anything would set me off. I had to take it out on somebody, so I'd go after my daughter. I'd run through the house looking for her, so I could hit her. I hit her a lot. I would also yell and scream and swear at her. I hit her hard enough to give her bruises that lasted a long time. But I never hit her hard enough that I had to take her to the hospital. She never had any broken bones, but maybe she was lucky. Maybe I was lucky.

One day I was running after her, and she hid behind a chair. She was really scared. She hadn't even done anything. That's when I told myself it had to stop. No one reported me. I went on my own.

I remembered seeing an ad for "Parents Anonymous", and I called them. I went to their next meeting. Within about six months I could control myself. I could handle most situations.

In the meetings, we all discuss our problems, and the others try to help us find solutions. They told me about ways to take out my anger. Things like breaking old dishes, or tearing up old newspapers. When a crisis seems to be getting close, we call each other up.

I had thought about putting her in a foster home, but it scared me. She could go from a bad environment to a worse one. So, I would ease off and relax for a few weeks.

The hardest thing is, you can't change overnight. It takes quite awhile. Sometimes I couldn't bear to look at her. But even though she was angry, and I was angry, I had to go to her, and tell her "I love you."

People always assume it's the parents that are bad. But no one knows what we go through. A lot of us are scared. It's hard for people to take the first step to get help.

What I do now is to take things slowly, day-by-day. I try not to do anything to upset myself.

I discovered that you have to spend time with your children everyday. Sometimes they need your undivided attention. I can't really give any advice to parents, though. All people are different. So are situations they find themselves in. Some people can't be helped, I think. But most can. It takes time. There must be so many people with this problem. Maybe they just don't see it yet. People should really look at what they are doing. Things may look hopeless, but really, they're not. I wasn't afraid to go get help. If I need it again, I'll go back. I'd like to help others the way I was helped.



**BARBARA ABRAHAM**  
Caseworker, Monroe County Department of Social Services

We get calls here on a twenty-four hour basis. If the situation sounds serious, we get to the home as quickly as possible. A caseworker must adapt rapidly to the crisis situation in the home. Usually we can talk to the parents, unless they are "high or drunk."

If it isn't a serious matter, we have a 24 hour period to respond. We then send the parents a letter, and a 90-day period ensues where we assess the results of our visit.

If problems continue, there are many avenues for us to take. We might refer the parents to a marriage counselor, or the child to a convalescent home. Also, we work in close co-operation with Strong Memorial, Genesee Mental Health Center, and other hospitals as well. So we do a lot of referral work, including working closely with the Catholic Family Center.

We do have the power to take the child from the home, but this is quite rare. We have to explain our reason to the court — the child would have to be in imminent risk of physical, or sometimes, emotional danger. "Kids are human beings and should not be yanked around."

We are a little more aggressive

when it come to babies. After all, "Babies can't fight back," as can the older children.

The number of cases being reported is on the increase, because the community is becoming more concerned. Child abuse can occur in any family, regardless of economic, geographic, or any other number of factors. I personally believe that if children get whatever they require up to the age of 12 or so, they have a good chance. Parents should give their children whatever is necessary. City kids seem to be more "street-wise" than the suburban kids, so the city life enables them to handle problems a little better.

The problems of emotional neglect and sexual abuse seem to be gaining prominence. In the past physical abuse was our main problem. But every parent eventually yells or hits his or her children. We understand that — it's part of being a parent. There are abused parents as well as abused children.

We try to treat people as individuals. We don't blame anyone. Since the child's main relationships are with his parents, we try to keep the family together. This is our ultimate hope.

**TO REPORT CHILD ABUSE AND MALTREATMENT CALL:**

**In Monroe County:**  
461-5690; 24 hrs. a day.

**In other counties, contact your local child protective agency.**

**ALSO, FROM ANYWHERE IN NEW YORK STATE,**

**call this toll-free number anytime of the day or night:**

**1-800-342-3720**

**OR**

For more information, write:

New York State Child Abuse and Maltreatment Register  
1450 Western Avenue,  
Albany, N.Y. 12203