

## **Threatened Abuse/Neglect**

There is no statutory definition for the phrase “threatened with abuse or neglect”, so common-sense definitions are applied. “Threatened abuse and neglect” refers to behaviors or conditions the child is exposed to that are dangerous to the child and likely to result in abuse or neglect. Remember when we were defining physical abuse - the example of the man beating his wife while their toddler hangs on to her leg? If the child is injured, it is physical abuse. If the child is not injured, it is threatened abuse, as a reasonable person could predict such behavior could result in serious injury to the child.

Threatened abuse or neglect also includes instances when someone verbally threatens to injure a child, if you believe he or she is serious about carrying out the threat.

### **Is threatened abuse or neglect less serious than actual abuse or neglect?**

Threatened abuse or neglect can be very serious. If a report includes information that indicates a vulnerable child is in immediate danger, CPS and law enforcement respond very quickly. The purpose of giving CPS and law enforcement agencies the authority to intervene in cases of threatened abuse or neglect is to prevent serious harm to a child, whenever possible.

### **What are some situations you may come across that are not threatened maltreatment?**

*Here are two examples:*

- Verbal “threats”, such as “You know, sometimes I could just throttle that kid”, where it is clear someone is just making an exaggerated comment and has no intention whatsoever of following through.
- Families going through a stressful situation, like divorce, if there is no reasonable cause to suspect that abuse or neglect will occur.