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# Safeguarding Children

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A child or young person can be harmed emotionally, physically, sexually or through neglect of their basic needs. The effects on a child of any of these types of harm can be severe and last into adulthood. It is essential that any abuse of a child is noticed and action is taken to prevent further harm.

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## What are the types of child abuse?

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is any behaviour of a parent or carer towards a child that is likely to cause severe and long-lasting bad effects on the child's emotions. There are many forms of emotional abuse, which include:

- Making a child feel that they are unloved or only valued if they do what the adult wants.
- Expectations of the child that are not appropriate for their age or stage of development.
- Not allowing the child to spend time with friends.
- The child sees or hears someone else being abused.
- Often causing the child to feel frightened or in danger.
- Bullying.

### Neglect

In this type of child maltreatment there is a failure to provide for a child's basic physical or emotional needs, which is likely to damage the child's health or development. Examples of neglect include:

- Not providing enough food, clothing and shelter.
- Not protecting the child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
- Not providing adequate supervision of a child, such as leaving the child with someone who is unable to look after them properly.
- Allowing a child to get sunburned, or to drink a harmful substance due to not supervising them properly.
- Not helping a child to have the medical care or treatment that they need. This includes having their normal routine immunisations and attending hospital appointments. It also includes not giving them medication which has been prescribed, or not taking them to see a dentist about tooth problems.
- Not providing a child with their basic emotional needs, such as feeling loved and safe.

### Physical abuse

Physical abuse is physically harming a child. Examples are:

- Hitting
- Shaking
- Throwing
- Poisoning
- Burning or scalding
- Drowning
- Suffocating
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)

## Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or encouraging the child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may include:

- Sexual contact including rape, or inappropriate touching.
- Non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the making of, sexual images, or making a child watch sexual activities.
- Encouraging a child to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.
- Prostitution.

## Fabricated or induced illness

This is a situation where a parent or carer makes up or exaggerates a child's symptoms, or interferes with the child or their medication to make the child ill.

## How common is child abuse?

Nobody knows exactly how common maltreatment of children is. It is thought there are many more cases than are known to social services. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) estimates that for each child on a child protection register, there are another eight children who are being maltreated. They estimate that one in twenty children have been abused sexually, and one in five children have been abused seriously or neglected.

Hundreds of thousands (650,000) children were referred to social services by concerned people between 2013 and 2014 in the UK.

In one year between 2012 and 2013, the police recorded 23,663 sexual offences committed against children.

Often people may be scared of getting involved but it is very important that anybody with any concerns does something about it. If everyone keeps quiet, just in case they are wrong or because they don't know what to do, or think it none of their business, those children keep on being abused.

## When should you suspect a child is being abused?

There are many different signs of possible child abuse and these include:

- Bruises or burns in unusual places.
- Changes in the behaviour of a child such as being aggressive or very withdrawn.
- Unexplained changes in their emotions such as being depressed or anxious.
- Looking as though they are not being properly looked after, such as being unusually dirty, smelly or hungry.
- Having sexual knowledge or behaviour that is not appropriate for their age.
- Being afraid of a particular adult or reluctant to be alone with them.
- Being left alone when not old enough to look after themselves. Or, being left with a person who is not suitable to look after them.

These are not the only signs of child abuse and these signs are not always due to child abuse. You must trust your judgement and discuss any concerns (see below).

## What should you do if you think a child is being abused?

Listen to the child. If they confide in you, make it clear to them you are taking them seriously and you are going to help them.

Help to support a friend or member of your family who is struggling to cope with the stresses of being a parent by:

- Listening to them to help relieve some of the stress.
- Providing help such as looking after the children or doing the shopping.
- Helping them to find other support and services in the community.

Trust your judgement. If you have serious concerns about the welfare of a child, contact the police, social services or the 24-hour NSPCC Child Protection Helpline (see below).

## How to report your concerns

### Police

- If you think it is an emergency (the child is at immediate risk of serious harm) then refer the child immediately to the police (call 999/112/911) and social services for immediate action. Don't put yourself in danger.
- Police may enter any premises and remove a child to a place of safety for 72 hours.
- Police have child abuse investigation units, which normally take responsibility for investigating child abuse cases.

### Social workers (local authority social services)

- All local authorities have a social services officer permanently on call (including out of hours) with access to the child protection register. This officer can take referrals if there are concerns about a child.
- The local authority has responsibility for the safety and welfare of children.

### The NSPCC

- Is a voluntary organisation authorised to initiate child protection proceedings.
- Has a national child protection helpline (freephone 0808 800 5000) and a children's helpline (Childline, freephone 0800 1111).

## Further help & information

### Childline

Tel: (Helpline) 0800 1111

Web: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### NAPAC - The National Association for People Abused in Childhood

P O Box 63632, London, SW9 1BF

Tel: (Admin) 0203 176 0560, (Support) 0800 085 3330 (10 am-9 pm Mon-Thurs, 10 am-6 pm Fri)

Web: [www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

### Kidscape

2 Grovesnor Gardens, London, SW1W 0DH

Tel: (Antibullying Helpline for Parents) 08451 205 204, (Admin) 020 7730 3300

Web: [www.kidscape.org.uk](http://www.kidscape.org.uk)

### NSPCC

Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London, EC2A 3NH

Tel: (Help and advice) 0808 800 5000, (Text) 88858

Web: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**MOSAC**

20 Egerton Drive, London, SE10 8JS

Tel: (Helplines) 0800 980 1958 and 020 8293 9990

Web: [www.mosac.org.uk](http://www.mosac.org.uk)

**Safe Network**

NSPCC National Training Centre, 3 Gilmour Close, Beaumont Leys, Leicester, LE4 1EZ, 0845 608 5404

Web: [www.safenetwork.org.uk/](http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/)

**Further reading & references**

- [When to suspect child maltreatment](#); NICE Clinical Guideline (July 2009)
- [Factsheets and briefings](#); National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- [Find out about what Local Safeguarding Children Boards \(LSCBs\) are](#); Safe Network
- [How safe are our children?](#); National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), 2014
- [Working together to safeguard children. A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children](#); GOV.UK, March 2015
- [Managing a child or young person with suspected maltreatment](#); NICE CKS, March 2014 (UK access only)

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