

Child Abuse

Who might the abuser be?

It could be *anyone*:

- a parent, sibling, relative or friend
- a paid or volunteer carer
- a teacher, health, social care or other worker
- a stranger

The risk of child abuse can increase when there is:

- parental or carer drug or alcohol abuse
- parental or carer mental health disorders or disability of the mind
- intra-familial violence or history of violent offending
- previous child maltreatment in members of the family
- known maltreatment of animals by the parent or carer
- vulnerable and unsupported parents or carers
- pre-existing disability in the child, chronic or long term illness

How might you become aware of abuse?

- You may spot one of the signs listed in this leaflet or a child may tell you about apparent abuse. A friend, family member or somebody else may tell you something that causes you concern.
- You may see or hear something happen yourself.
- You may notice injuries or physical signs that cause you concern.
- You may notice either the victim or abuser behaving in a way that alerts you that something may be wrong.

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

If you ever feel that you or someone else may be in immediate danger, dial 999.

If you have concerns about child abuse and you want to talk to someone or ask someone to find out what is going on, you should contact the **Children's Services Department**:

During office hours (8.30am–5:00pm): **0845 603 5620**

Out-of-hours Service: **0845 600 4555**

If this line is engaged you will be put through to an answerphone. Leave your name and number and you will be called back as quickly as possible.

Why do we need to protect children?

Each child has the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

What is Child Abuse?

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger. An unborn child may suffer harm if his/her mother is subject to domestic abuse, is a tobacco, drug or alcohol abuser or fails to attend for antenatal care.

Who is a vulnerable child?

A "child" means any person under the age of 18 years (16 years if married).

Who is this guidance for?

Everyone! We are all in a position to spot signs of potential abuse. This leaflet aims to:

- help you recognise signs of possible child abuse
- make you aware of what you can do and who you can contact if you think a child is being or has been abused

What forms does abuse take?

There are four main types of child abuse or maltreatment (with a fifth recognised in Scotland-"organic failure to thrive") but they often overlap and it is not unusual for a child or young person to have symptoms or signs from several categories.

1 Physical Abuse: hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, suffocating, drowning, poisoning, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child, including by fabricating the symptoms of, or deliberately inducing, illness in a child.

Signs to watch for...

- Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them (by child and/or responsible adult).
- Injury explanations varying vastly between adult and child.
- Injuries in places which are not normally exposed to falls or rough games.
- Injuries which have not received medical attention.
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games, swimming or wearing too many clothes in warm weather (to hide injuries).
- Bruises, abrasions, bites (human), burns or scalds, fractures, which do not have a likely explanation.
- Cold injuries, hypothermia, skull, abdominal, oral or chest eye injuries.
- Cuts, ligature marks (rope burns), petechiae (bleeding under the skin).
- Scars, spinal injuries, strangulation.
- Child's demeanour becoming frozen and watchful.

2 Sexual Abuse: persuading/forcing a child to take part in sexual activities, or encouraging a child to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. This may involve inappropriate physical contact, the making of pornographic material, penetrative sex, including penetration of the mouth with an object or part of the body.

Signs to watch for...

- Child having an excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and inappropriate knowledge of adult sexual behaviour for their age.
- Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias. Vivid dreams or nightmares which sometimes have obvious or implied sexual meaning.
- Eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia.
- Child is sexually provocative or seductive with adults, inappropriate sexual display.
- Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home.
- Child regularly engages in sexual play inappropriate for their age.
- Sexual activity through words, play or drawing.
- Unexplained stomach pains, repeated urinary infections.
- Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse.
- Marked power differential in relationship.
- Secrecy, distrust of familiar adult, anxiety left alone with particular person.
- Behaviour changes, self-harm/mutilation/attempted suicide.
- Unexplained or concealed pregnancy.

3 Emotional Abuse: on-going ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent negative effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate, or valued only in their meeting the needs of another person. It could be inappropriate expectations being imposed, causing children to feel frequently frightened/in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Signs to watch for...

- Persistent harmful parent/carer-child interactions.
- Hiding or scavenging for food without medical explanation.
- Responsibilities which interfere with normal daily activities (such as school) or school refusal.
- Changes in behaviour or emotional state without explanation.
- Extremes of emotion, aggression or passivity.
- Secondary enuresis or encopresis (toileting accidents).
- Drug/solvent abuse. Self-harming/mutilation.
- Running away, low self-esteem
- Precocious or coercive sexualised behaviour.
- Physical/mental/emotional developmental delay.

4 Neglect: persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

Signs to watch for:

- Maternal substance abuse during pregnancy.
- Not providing adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment).
- Not consistently giving treatment for child's medical problems. Untreated tooth decay.
- Failing to: protect a child from physical and emotional harm/danger; ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers); or ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. Failing to attend for immunisations.
- Child has low self-esteem, lack of social relationships.
- Neglect of or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.
- Repeatedly not responding to child or young person.
- Repeated injuries suggesting inadequate supervision. (E.g. hot water burns, falls)
- Persistently smelly or dirty, poor state of clothing.
- Frequent severe infestations (scabies, head lice).
- Faltering growth (due to poor feeding).