

## **Safeguarding children (Abuse and safeguarding policy)**

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 taken to prevent further harm.

### **What is a child safeguarding policy?**

This is a statement which gives details of what an organisation or group will do to keep children safe and how it will respond to concerns. It will list the procedures needed to support this policy.

#### **The difference between child safeguarding and child protection**

Child protection is part of child safeguarding. Child protection means keeping safe children who are being abused or who are in danger of abuse. Child safeguarding is a much wider approach. It means actively promoting the safety and welfare of all children.

#### **The responsibilities of safeguarding**

All professionals employed by agencies who work with children and all adults who have parental duties have a commitment to safeguard children and promote their welfare. In many organisations these responsibilities are legally binding.

### **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 badly, 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. Surveys of self-reported abuse also indicate that the official figures are a considerable underestimation.

UK statistics are no longer recorded but data are available for each nation.

Between 2018 and 2019, the police recorded 52,339 sexual offences committed against children under 16 years old in England. This rate has increased in recent years, possibly due to more cases being reported, but it is also thought that use of social media has given abusers more opportunity to contact children.

In recent years, the issue of online abuse and sexual grooming has become the focus of attention in the UK. In April 2017, a new offence of Sexual Communication with a Child came into force. There were 4,373 cases in England and Wales in 2019.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) reports that there were 15,204 recorded offences of cruelty and neglect against children aged under 16 years between 2018 and 2019. This figure was an increase over the preceding years, probably due to an increase in reporting.

Government statistics show that in 2018-19 in England there were 650,900 referrals, a decrease of 1% from the previous year which reversed the upward trend seen between 2016 and 2018. The number of re-referrals continued to increase however and was at the highest level since 2015

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

## **Signs a child is being abused or neglected**

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 in the UK 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) 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).

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## **Further reading**

- [When to suspect child maltreatment](#); NICE Clinical Guideline (July 2009 – last updated October 2017)
- [Factsheets and briefings](#); National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)
- [How safe are our children?](#); NSPCC, 2018
- [Various online resources concerning child abuse](#); GOV.UK, 2021
- [Child maltreatment – recognition and management](#); NICE CKS, January 2019 (UK access only)

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Authored by:	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Colin Tidy, MRCGP	
Originally Published: 19/11/2023	Next review date: 24/11/2021	Document ID: doc_13917

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