



**Keeping  
children  
safe is  
everyone's  
responsibility**

# What should you do if you are worried about a child?

The following information will help you to understand what child abuse and neglect is and how to get help if you think a child is being abused or harmed. Although you may understandably feel reluctant to get involved, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility.



## **What is child abuse?**

Abuse is a form 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 others (e.g. via the Internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

### **Abuse can happen to a child:**

- at any age, from pre-birth up to the age of 18
- in any family
- in any ethnic and cultural background
- with or without disabilities
- at home, at school, in leisure activities, in children's homes - in fact anywhere
- by someone the child knows and rarely by a stranger
- deliberately or unintentionally.

### **Why is it important to prevent child abuse and neglect?**

Child abuse and neglect poses a risk to the health and well-being of children immediately or in the future, and in some cases a child may die if concerns are not acted on.

The four main categories of abuse and warning signs are listed on the following pages.



# Physical abuse

Is a form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates (makes up) the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child. This is known as Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII).

Violently shaking a baby can cause brain injuries, which can lead to permanent disability or even death.

All children have accidents like bumps and falls. Injuries which are normal for children include:

- bruising on the shins, knees, elbows, and backs of the hands
- bruising on children who are crawling or walking (especially older children)
- bruising on the forehead (for toddlers)
- scalds from hot liquid spills on the upper body.





### **Warning signs:**

The harm caused to children by physical abuse can range from minor injuries to major trauma. These can include:

- bruising
  - on the cheeks, ears, palms, arms, feet, on the back, buttocks, tummy, hips and backs of legs
  - on babies who are not yet crawling or walking
  - a history of bruising incidents
  - multiple bruises in clusters, usually on the upper arms or outer thighs
  - bruises which look like they have been caused by fingers, a hand, or an object
- burns or scalds
  - burns of the backs of the hands, feet, legs, genitals or buttocks
  - burns which have a clear shape, like a circular cigarette burn
- large oval shaped bite marks
- fractures
- poisoning
- drowning or suffocating
- head injuries caused by a blow or by shaking
- fabricated or induced illness
- as well as the physical signs of abuse, children may also suffer mental ill health or behavioural problems.

# Emotional abuse

Is a form of abuse where there is persistent emotional maltreatment of a child thus causing severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may:

- involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person
- include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate
- feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction
- involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another
- involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child although it may occur alone.

## Emotional abuse signs - indicators:

- low self-confidence/poor self-image
- unable to trust/fearful
- domestic abuse within the home
- dependent/withdrawn
- anxious/depressed
- over-compliant/hyper-vigilant
- detached
- has difficulty forming relationships
- little enthusiasm
- low perseverance
- social, emotional and/or academic delays
- unusual fears
- lack of empathy
- failure to thrive
- feelings of shame and guilt.



### **Warning signs:**

Emotional abuse can affect a child from childhood into adulthood.

Signs (observable behaviours) that a child may be suffering emotional abuse include:

- rocking, sucking on clothes, hands, hair, biting self or others
- crying
- avoids eye contact
- overly aggressive, destructive or cruel to others
- suffers from sleep, speech disorders
- restricts play activities or experiences
- demonstrates compulsions, obsessions, phobias, hysterical outbursts
- alcohol or drug abuse
- negative statements about self
- shy, passive or compliant
- physical, mental and emotional developmental delays
- self-destructive behaviour
- overly demanding
- bed-wetting.

The long term impact of emotional abuse can hold back a child's mental development, and affect their intelligence and memory. It can also increase the risk of a child developing mental health problems, such as eating disorders and self-harming, as well as being at greater risk of developing one or more behavioural problems.

# Neglect

Is a form of abuse where there is 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.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse or failing to receive appropriate antenatal care. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers) or
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or not being responsive to, a child's basic emotional needs.







### **Warning signs:**

When a parent or carer fails to meet the needs of their child resulting in a lack of:

- clean, warm clothing
- enough food
- a safe place to live
- protection from dangerous situations
- love and affection
- attention when children are very upset
- proper supervision
- enough attention given to health and diet
- enough attention given to education.

# Sexual abuse

Is a form of abuse which can involve forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing.

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Sexual abuse may include non-contact activities such as:

- involving children in looking at, or in the production of sexual images
- watching sexual activities
- encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways
- grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of sexual abuse. Victims are manipulated or forced into taking part in a sexual act, either as part of a seemingly consensual relationship, or in return for attention, gifts, money, alcohol, drugs or somewhere to stay.





## **Warning signs:**

- being secretive or withdrawn
- being hostile or physically aggressive in their relationship with parents/carers and other family members
- associating/developing relationships of a sexual nature with a significantly older man or a woman
- having money, mobile phones, clothes, jewellery or other items not given by parents/carers
- changing physical appearance - new clothes, more make-up
- staying out late and/or going missing; returning home after long intervals but appearing to be well cared for
- being defensive about where they have been and what they've been doing
- having marks or scars on their body which they try to conceal by refusing to undress or uncover parts of their body
- expressions of despair (self-harm, overdose, eating disorder, challenging behaviour, aggression, appearing drunk or under the influence of drugs, suicidal thoughts or feelings, looking tired or ill, sleeping during the day)
- disclosure of sexual or physical assault followed by withdrawal of allegation
- sexually transmitted infections/become pregnant
- use of the internet that causes concern
- isolated from peers and social networks; not mixing with their usual friends
- lack of positive relationship with a protective, nurturing adult
- exclusion and/or unexplained absences from school or not engaged in education or training.

# What should you do?

If you think a child is being abused or harmed, take action straight away. The longer abuse or harm goes on, the longer it will take for a child to recover.

If you have concerns about a child, help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Contact:

## **Leicester City Council**

0116 454 1004

DAS.Team@leicester.gov.uk

## **Leicestershire County Council**

0116 305 0005

childrensduty@leics.gov.uk

## **Rutland County Council**

01572 758407

dutyteam@rutland.gcsx.gov.uk

## **Police**

Non emergencies, call 101

In emergencies, always dial 999

## **ChildLine**

0800 1111

www.childline.org.uk

## **NSPCC**

0808 800 5000

help@nspcc.org.uk

The Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures are available from:

**[www.lrsb.org.uk](http://www.lrsb.org.uk)** and **[www.lcitylscb.org](http://www.lcitylscb.org)**

For the production of this leaflet information has been used from 'Working Together 2013' and the NSPCC.