

Signs of Abuse and Neglect

Abuse: 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. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult(s) or by another child or children (KCSIE, 2022).

Sexual Abuse

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also 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, or grooming a child.

Physical Abuse

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 the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

Emotional Abuse

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. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed. 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 from participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children.

High Risk Factors

- Families with complex needs
- Parental substance use
- Poor parental mental health
- Parents with learning difficulties
- Children with SEND
- Families with a past history of childhood abuse
- Families new to or isolated from a community

Neglect

Persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs. Neglect may occur during pregnancy, for example, as a result of maternal substance abuse. 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 unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Child-on-Child Abuse

This form of abuse is when there is any kind of physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse or coercive control exercised between children/young people both on and offline. It can be motivated by perceived differences, e.g. on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other differences. It can result in significant, long-lasting and traumatic isolation, intimidation or violence to the victim. Children or young people who harm others may have additional or complex needs e.g. significant disruption in their own lives, exposure to domestic abuse or witnessing or suffering abuse, educational under-achievement, being involved in crime. It should be recognised that child-on-child abuse is harmful to both the perpetrator and the victim.

Useful Links

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2

NSPCC

www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/

Safeguarding Network

www.safeguarding.network

Signs of Abuse and Neglect

Sexual Abuse

Signs of Sexual Abuse may include:

- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Pain, itching, bleeding, bruising, or unusual discharge to the genital area or anus
- Urinary infections or sexually transmitted infections
- Persistent sore throats
- Pregnancy
- Refusing to change for PE or participate in physical activities
- Avoids or is afraid of being left alone with people or a specific person
- Exhibits an inappropriate knowledge of sex for their age
- Uses inappropriate sexual language
- Exhibits sexualised behaviour in their play or with other children
- Bed-wetting
- Changes in eating habits or developing eating disorders
- Lack of peer relationships
- Sleep disturbances or nightmares
- Refusing to go to school
- Running away from home
- Alcohol or drug use
- Possible want to be online if grooming is taking place
- Anxiety
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide

Physical Abuse

Signs of physical abuse may include:

- Bruises (particularly indicative of abuse if observed in infants and immobile children)
- Bruises on atypical contact sites
- Broken or fractured bones, or evidence of old fractures
- Burns or scalds, particularly to the feet or the bottom
- Lacerations to the body or mouth
- Bite marks
- Scarring
- The effects of poisoning (e.g. vomiting, drowsiness, seizures)
- Breathing problems from drowning, suffocation, or poisoning
- Head injuries in children may be signalled by the following symptoms: swelling, bruising, fractures, being extremely sleepy, breathing problems, vomiting seizures, being irritable or not feeding properly
- Seeming frightened of parents, reluctant to return home after school
- Displays frozen watchfulness
- Constantly asking in words/actions what will happen next

Child-on-Child Abuse

- Signs of child-on-child abuse are often similar to those where there has been an adult perpetrator. See above for list of signs/indicators. **In school, vigilance is key to identifying the slightest changes to a child's usual/typical character. You know your children!**

Neglect

Signs of neglect may include:

- Being frequently absent from school
- Inappropriate clothing (e.g. shoes too small, clothes are ill-fitted or unsuitable for the weather conditions)
- Clothes are consistently dirty or smelly
- Being hungry
- Hands are cold, red and swollen
- Unkempt appearance and poor hygiene; hair quality is poor or is messy, teeth are dirty, skin dirty
- Lacking necessary medical or dental care, including immunisations or glasses
- Missing medical appointments
- Health problems, including anaemia, body issues, poor muscle tone or prominent joints, regular illness of infections, repeated accidental injuries (often cause by lack of supervision), skin issues (e.g. sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies, ringworm), thin or swollen tummy, weight or growth issues, untreated injuries
- Developmental problems, including poor language or social skills
- Being constantly underweight or considerably losing weight
- The parent or carer has failed to keep the child protected from physical harm or danger
- Begging or stealing things like money or food
- Living in an unsuitable environment (e.g. no heating, messy)
- Being left home alone for long periods of time
- Taking on the role of a carer for other family members
- Changes in behaviour, such as becoming clingy, aggressive, withdrawn, depressed or anxious, displaying obsessive behaviour
- Changes in eating habits
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide

Emotional Abuse

Signs of emotional abuse may include:

- Lack of confidence and self-esteem
- Difficulties controlling emotions
- Extreme behaviour, like becoming overly demanding, aggressive, having outbursts, or becoming passive
- Difficulties making and maintaining relationships
- Behaviour that is inappropriately infantile or adult-like
- Persistent running away from home or being missing from school
- Anxiety, unhappiness or withdrawal
- Having few or no friends
- Seeming to be isolated from parents/family
- Lack social skills
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide
- Might not have a close relationship or bond with their parent(s)
- Might be overly affectionate with other adults or strangers

If you are concerned about the safety or wellbeing of a child, ask to speak to a

Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) immediately.

If the child is in immediate danger, call the police on 999.