

Definitions of abuse and their signs and symptoms (children)

Type of abuse	Signs / symptoms
<p>Physical</p> <p>The physical abuse of children is defined as the intentional and non-accidental use of physical force and violence that result in injury.</p> <p>Physical abuse includes hitting, slapping, pushing, kicking, misuse of medication, restraint, inappropriate sanctions, rough handling, pinching, punching, shaking, burning, forced feeding, the use of force which results in pain, injury or change in individual's natural physical state.</p> <p>Giving alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison to children, the failure to prevent physical injury, or the imposing of harmful cultural practice such as female mutilation is also physical abuse.</p>	<p>Signs and symptoms of physical abuse include:</p> <p>Injuries on the face, neck or head – bruises, bald patches, cigarette burns, black eyes, torn frenulum (tongue attachment), fingertip bruising, fractures, fingernail scratches, scalds and burns, bite marks, weals (such as those from belts)</p> <p>Withdrawal from physical contact, withdrawal from close relationships with adults and children, improbable excuses to explain injuries, frightened of parents/carers, fear of returning home, deterioration in school work, being aggressive towards other children, fear of undressing for PE, fears medical help or assistance, constant watchfulness of adults' responses to them, displaying self-destructive behaviour</p>
<p>Factitious illness</p> <p>This was previously known as Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy. An adult, usually a primary carer, seeks medical opinion about physical or psychological symptoms in a child that is not actually sick. They try to deceive medical professionals that the child is ill. Often linked with physical abuse and sometimes with poisoning to make the child ill.</p>	<p>Signs and symptoms of factitious illness:</p> <p>Illness is unusual, prolonged and affects different parts of the body, symptoms are inappropriate and do not fit with the illness, parent is overly attached and 'clingly' towards the child, only one parent/carer is in attendance during hospitalisation, symptoms disappear when parent/carer is absent, child has multiple/excessive allergies</p>

Neglect or acts of omission

Neglect is the failure by parents or carers to provide appropriately for the safety, psychological and physical needs of their children. Neglect is difficult to diagnose as it often has to occur for a continued period of time before any effects are visible. Neglect is not just defined as the dirty, hungry child, but also includes leaving children alone or abandoning them for long periods of time, emotional neglect, educational neglect when the child's needs for education are not met, the denial of medical care and treatment, and not providing a safe environment.

Neglect also includes the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition, heating and undermining personal beliefs, being left with inappropriate carers, inadequate supervision and substance misuse during pregnancy to the unborn child.

Signs and symptoms of neglect include:

Poor language skills, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, not paying attention to a special educational need, child unfamiliar with books, stories, creative play and so on, limited experiences, difficulty in expressing feelings or thoughts, developmental delay, short concentration span, constant hunger, poor personal hygiene, constantly tired, inadequate clothing for seasons, untreated medical attention, stealing and scavenging, rocking, thumb sucking and hair twisting, social isolation, difficulty in forming relationships, fear of new situations, frequent lateness or non-attendance, frequently unwell, constantly tired, underweight for age, prone to accidents due to poor supervision

Failure to thrive

When a child fails to gain weight or to grow and achieve their expected weight and height, they are considered as failing to thrive. This is caused by the inadequate intake of calories through food and drink. Some children have a physical or medical reason for not developing at a normal rate, but when this is not the case, one reason is that they have a negative relationship with the parent or carer. Failure to thrive is most likely to be identified in younger age groups when children are monitored through health clinics and developmental checks.

Signs and symptoms of failure to thrive include:

Underweight, small for their age, will often start to gain weight and grow if removed from the family home for a period of time

Emotional abuse

There is a level of emotional abuse involved in all types of abuse. However, emotional abuse may also occur independently of the other types of abuse. It is defined as the persistent emotionally cruel treatment of a child so as to hinder the child's emotional development and mental health. Children who are exposed to constant criticism, hostility and a lack of warmth and affection or are isolated from their peer group or ignored by family members are suffering from emotional abuse. Children may be rejected by peers and their family or they may be overprotected. Children who have suffered emotional abuse often suffer from a lack of confidence and poor self-esteem. Emotional abuse includes 'bullying' from a number of sources, including phone texting, internet messaging, graffiti, being left out, deliberately getting children into trouble, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks, withholding affection, shouting, depriving the person of the right to choice, information and privacy. Behaviour that has a harmful effect on the child's emotional health and development

Signs and symptoms of emotional abuse include:

Fear of new situations, developmental delay, overreacts to mistakes, inappropriate emotional responses, attention seeking, poor social relationships, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, stealing, telling lies, poor concentration span, temper tantrums, inability to cope with making mistakes, passivity/aggression, wetting and soiling (non-age appropriate), speech disorders, compliance, fear of parents being contacted

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the use of children for sexual gratification. This may involve physical contact, including the touching of sex organs or non-contact activities such as looking at pornographic materials including films and photographs. Sexual abuse also includes encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. It can occur in any age group with both girls and boys and the perpetrators can be men or women. Sexual abuse usually involves either emotional manipulation or force. It can also involve observing inappropriate sexual behaviour, encouraging inappropriate sexual discussion, sexual exploitation, such as child prostitution, and having virtual sex through the internet or face-to-face meetings.

Sexual abuse includes rape and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the child has not consented, could not consent or was pressured into consenting. Inappropriate touching and fondling, indecent exposure, penetration (or attempted penetration) of vagina, anus or mouth by penis, fingers, or other objects. Can involve observing inappropriate sexual behaviour, encouraging inappropriate sexual discussion and sexual exploitation such as child prostitution.

Signs and symptoms of sexual abuse include:

Injuries such as bruises, bites and scratches to the genital and anal area, inappropriate sexual awareness, provocative sexual behaviour, fear of undressing for PE and so on, depression and withdrawal, tendency for crying, changes in behaviour, regression, love bites, tiredness and lethargy, frequent urinary infections, sexually transmitted infections, internal cuts to vagina/anus, bleeding in throat, vagina or anal regions, discomfort when walking or sitting, blood stains to underclothes, complains of pain in vaginal/anal areas, experiences pain when urinating, shows fear of a particular person, displays insecurity and may cling to parents, loss of appetite, poor concentration, change in sleeping habits, unpredictable behaviour, uses obscene language, bed wetting, may draw figures of sexual organs, such as erect penises.

NOTE:

The professional accommodation syndrome
The rule of optimism

Childcare professionals need to be aware of their own feelings in cases of abuse. It is natural for people to deny, retract or ignore that abuse is taking place but it is important to be aware that **anyone** could be an abuser.