

THE NORTH WEST CHILDREN'S SUPPORT GROUP



Founded 1976

Registered Charity No 1141826

Company Limited by Guarantee 07205677

CHILD PROTECTION (Guidelines to Safeguarding)

The North West Children's Support Group recognises the vulnerability of children and believes that the welfare of the child is paramount. The NWCSG further recognises that disabled children are at increased risk of abuse. The charity has both a legal and moral responsibility to safeguard the children in our care and to ensure that all volunteers across the organisation are aware of what to do if they suspect that a child is being abused.

What is Safeguarding?

Safeguarding means much more than protecting children from abuse, it includes providing children with a safe environment, allowing children to achieve success and satisfaction, making sure children's rights and needs are met, making sure children are treated with dignity and respect and allowing children to learn, play and develop free from harm

What is Child Abuse?

The term *child abuse and neglect* describes a range of ways in which people, often known and trusted by children, harm them knowingly or by failing to act to prevent harm.

A recent large scale survey of young adults by the NSPCC showed that 7% had suffered serious physical abuse as children at the hands of their parents or carers

It also revealed that 1% had been sexually abused by a parent and 3% by another relative

There are four main categories of Child Abuse.

Physical Abuse

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 feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes ill health to a child whom they are looking after.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or develop mentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve 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 ill-treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape or buggery) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect

Neglect is the 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. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, failing to protect a child from physical harm or danger, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

The Impact of Abuse and Neglect

The sustained abuse or neglect of children physically, emotionally or sexually can have major long-term effects on all aspects of a child's health, development and well-being. Sustained abuse is likely to have a deep impact on the child's self-image and self-esteem, and on his or her future life. Difficulties may extend into adulthood: the experience of long-term abuse may lead to difficulties in forming or sustaining close relationships, establishing oneself in the workforce, and to extra difficulties in developing the attitudes and skills needed to be an effective parent. It is not only the stressful events of abuse that have an impact, but also the context in which they take place. Many survivors say the emotional consequences of abuse are far more severe than the physical effects of abuse.

For every child and family, there may be factors that aggravate the harm caused to the child, and those that protect against harm. Relevant factors include the individual child's means of coping and adapting, support from a family and social network, and the impact of any interventions. The effects on a child are also influenced by the quality of the family environment at the time of abuse, and subsequent life events.

Impact of Physical Abuse

Physical abuse can lead directly to neurological damage, physical injuries, and disability or - at the extreme - death. Harm may be caused to children both by the abuse itself, and by the abuse taking place in a wider family or institutional context of conflict and aggression. Physical abuse has been linked to aggressive behaviour in children, emotional and behavioural problems, and educational difficulties.

Impact of Emotional Abuse

There is increasing evidence of the adverse long-term consequences for children's development where they have been subject to sustained emotional abuse. Emotional abuse has an important impact on a developing child's mental health, behaviour and self-esteem. It can be especially damaging in infancy. Underlying emotional abuse may be as important, if not more so, than other more visible forms of abuse in terms of its impact on the child. Domestic violence, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may be features in families where children are exposed to such abuse.

Impact of Sexual Abuse

Disturbed behaviour including self-harm, inappropriate sexualised behaviour, sadness, depression and a loss of self-esteem, have all been linked to sexual abuse. Its adverse effects may endure into adulthood. The severity of impact on a child is believed to increase the longer abuse continues, the more extensive the abuse, and the older the child. A number of features of sexual abuse have also been linked with severity of impact, including the extent of premeditation, the degree of threat and coercion, sadism, and bizarre or unusual elements. A child's ability to cope with the experience of sexual abuse, once recognised or disclosed, is strengthened by the support of a non-abusive adult carer who believes the child, helps the child understand the abuse, and is able to offer help and protection.

A proportion of adults who sexually abuse children have themselves been sexually abused as children. They may also have been exposed as children to domestic violence and discontinuity of

care. However, it would be quite wrong to suggest that most children who are abused will inevitably go on to become abusers themselves.

Impact of Neglect

Severe neglect of young children is associated with major impairment of growth and intellectual development. Persistent neglect can lead to serious impairment of health and development, and long-term difficulties with social functioning, relationships and educational progress. Neglect can also result, in extreme cases, in death.

Recognising Child Abuse

Remember that it is not your responsibility to decide whether or not child abuse has taken place or if a child is at significant risk. You do, however, have a responsibility to act if you have a concern.

The indicators of abuse in disabled or learning disabled children, or those on the autistic continuum, may be confused, open to misinterpretation, or masked by the disability. For example, self-harm, or some neurotic behaviours, would be strong indicators of abuse in most children, but they can be non-abuse related facets of behaviour in a child with autism. It is important, however, that you do not use the child's disability to "explain away" possible indicators of abuse.

The following information is not designed to turn you into an expert but it will help you to be more alert to the signs of possible abuse

1. PHYSICAL ABUSE

Most children will collect cuts and bruises in their daily life. These are likely to be in places where there are bony parts of their body, like elbows, knees and shins.

Some children, however, will have bruising which can almost only have been caused non accidentally. An important indicator of physical abuse is where bruises or injuries are unexplained or the explanation does not fit the injury, or when it appears on parts of the body where accidental injuries are unlikely, e.g. on the cheeks or thighs. A delay in seeking medical treatment when it is obviously necessary is also a cause for concern. Bruising may be more or less noticeable on children with different skin tones or from different racial groups you should always consult child protection professionals.

The physical signs of abuse may include:

- unexplained bruising, marks or injuries on any part of the body
- bruises which reflect hand marks or fingertips (from slapping or pinching)
- cigarette burns
- bite marks
- broken bones
- scalds

Changes in behaviour, which can also indicate physical abuse:

- fear of parents being approached for an explanation
- aggressive behaviour or severe temper outburst
- flinching when approached or touched
- reluctance to get changed, for example wearing long sleeves in hot weather
- depression
- withdrawn behaviour
- running away from home

2. EMOTIONAL ABUSE Emotional abuse can be difficult to measure, and often children who appear well cared for may be emotionally abused by being taunted, put down or belittled. They may receive little or no love, affection or attention from their parents or carers. Emotional abuse can also take the form of children not being allowed to mix/play with other children

The physical signs of emotional abuse may include:

- A failure to thrive or grow, particularly if the child puts on weight in other circumstances, e.g. in hospital or away from their parents' care.
- Sudden speech disorders.
- Developmental delay, either in terms of physical or emotional progress.

Changes in behaviour, which can also indicate emotional abuse:

- Neurotic behaviour, e.g. hair twisting, rocking.
- Being unable to play.
- Fear of making mistakes.
- Self-harm.
- Fear of parent being approached regarding their behaviour.

3. SEXUAL ABUSE

Adults who use children to meet their own sexual needs abuse both girls and boys of all ages, including infants and toddlers. Usually, in cases of sexual abuse it is the child's behaviour which may cause you to become concerned, although physical signs can also be present. In all cases, children who talk about sexual abuse do so because they want it to stop. It is important, therefore, that they are listened to and taken seriously.

The physical signs of sexual abuse may include:

- Pain or itching in the genital/anal areas.
- Bruising or bleeding near genital/anal areas.
- Sexually transmitted disease. • Vaginal discharge or infection.
- Stomach pains.
- Discomfort when walking or sitting down.
- Pregnancy.

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate sexual abuse include:

- Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour, e.g. becoming aggressive or withdrawn.
- Fear of being left with a specific person or group of people.
- Having nightmares.
- Running away from home.
- Sexual knowledge which is beyond their age or developmental level.
- Sexual drawings or language.
- Bedwetting.
- Eating problems such as overeating or anorexia.
- Self-harm or mutilation, sometimes leading to suicide attempt.
- Saying they have secrets they cannot tell anyone about
- Substance or drug abuse.
- Suddenly having unexplained sources of money.
- Not allowed to have friends (particularly in adolescence).
- Acting in a sexually explicit way towards adults

4. NEGLECT

Neglect can be a difficult form of abuse to recognise, yet have some of the most lasting and damaging effects on children.

The physical signs of neglect may include:

- Constant hunger, sometimes stealing food from other children.
- Constantly dirty or 'smelly'.
- Loss of weight, or being constantly underweight.
- Inappropriate dress for the conditions.

Changes in behaviour which can also indicate neglect may include:

- Complaining of being tired all the time.
- Not requesting medical assistance and/or failing to attend appointments.
- Having few friends.
- Mentioning being left alone or unsupervised

What should you do if you suspect a child in your care is being or has been abused?

- Report your concerns to the holiday leaders or to the NWCSG designated Child Protection Officer
- When asked to do so you must write down what you observed or were told
- Professionals trained in identifying child abuse will make many more checks
- No one will blame you if it turns out abuse has not taken place
- It is better to be alerted unnecessarily than to fail to protect a child

Myths about Child Abuse

Only adult males abuse children

FACT although the majority of child abusers are men, in up to 5% of cases the abuser is female. And a third of reported sexual assaults are committed by young people

Some cultures believe that child abuse is acceptable

FACT There are different understandings as to what constitutes abuse but all children have the right to protection from harm

Disabled children are less likely to be abused

FACT Disabled children are *more* likely to be abused because they are more vulnerable, dependent on others for intimate care and may be less able to communicate what has happened to them

Children often lie about abuse

FACT Children rarely lie about abuse, and their great fear is that they will not be believed. Abusers often tell their victims that no one will believe them if they report what has happened

Child abusers have deprived backgrounds and are of below average intelligence

FACT Abusers come from a very wide range of social and intellectual backgrounds and may be well liked and respected members of society

Children are always safe in groups

FACT This is not always true, young children have for example been sexually assaulted in nurseries while other adults and children were present

Children abused by their parents are always taken into care

FACT Child protection professionals recognise that there are many benefits to keeping a child with their birth family, so they try to protect the child within the home whenever possible

How to respond if a child confides in you

- DO remain calm
- DO listen carefully
- DO be aware of non verbal messages including facial expressions
- DO make it clear you are taking them seriously
- DO acknowledge their courage and reassure them they are right to tell
- DO tell them they have no reason to feel guilty
- DO tell them you are going to do all you can to help them and what may happen as a result
- DO record what was said using the child's actual words and who was present

How not to respond

- DO NOT show shock or distaste
- DO NOT probe for more information than is offered
- DO NOT speculate or make assumptions
- DO NOT make negative comments about the abuser
- DO NOT make promises you cannot keep eg "everything will be alright"
- DO NOT agree not to tell anyone

What should you do next?

- Report your concerns to the holiday leaders or to the NWCSG designated Child Protection Officer
- When asked to do so you must write down what you observed or were told
- Professionals trained in identifying child abuse will make many more checks
- No one will blame you if it turns out abuse has not taken place
- It is better to be alerted unnecessarily than to fail to protect a child

What will the holiday leaders or child protection officer do?

- Decide whether it is appropriate to discuss the concerns with the child's parents
- If it is not appropriate to talk to the parents or if after doing so we are still concerned we will contact social services or the NSPCC
- Social services will then take responsibility for further action

What should you do if an allegation is made against yourself or another helper?

- Report your concerns to the holiday leaders or to the NWCSG designated Child Protection Officer
- When asked to do so you must write down what you observed or were told
- Professionals trained in identifying child abuse will make many more checks
- No one will blame you if it turns out abuse has not taken place
- It is better to be alerted unnecessarily than to fail to protect a child

Why should we act?

One of the worst things we can do is nothing
Many child abuse inquiries have shown that failure to act has resulted in serious injury or death
The safety and wellbeing of children is of paramount importance, all concerns must be taken seriously

Child protection overrides confidentiality

Good Practice

All NWCSG Trustees, holiday leaders and volunteer helpers should:-

- Ensure that the child's welfare is paramount
- Respect the rights of all our children whatever their age, ability, culture, gender or sexual orientation
- Respect each child as an individual and respond to their individual needs
- Be aware of the relative powerlessness of children, especially disabled children, compared to adults
- Be committed to actively preventing the exploitation and abuse of children
- Be familiar with the charity's Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct and follow the Guidelines to Safeguarding at all times