



nsw commission for  
children & young people

# Child protection is everyone's business

*All children deserve to be raised in a nurturing and loving environment. Bringing up children can be rewarding however it is not easy and most parents or carers will feel stressed at some stage. While parents can learn skills to help them raise children it's important the whole community understands how to care for and protect children.*

## Why does child abuse happen?

**STRESS** – from work, not enough money, poor health or ongoing relationship problems

**UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** – some parents demand that children behave well all of the time or they don't understand children's development and so ask too much or too little of them

**PARENTING SKILLS** – some parents have no empathy for their child which means they can't put themselves in the child's shoes and understand them. This leaves children feeling very alone inside themselves and misunderstood.

**EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS** – parents may have emotional troubles of their own and so can't put the child's most important needs before their own

**ISOLATION** – no help or little support makes caring for children much harder

## Neglect and abuse: its effect on a child

Child abuse and neglect can have serious effects on children and their later life experiences.

At other times, child abuse is less serious in its impact. An accumulation of risk factors places children at greater risk of harm.

**AGE OF THE CHILD** – babies, infants and children with a disability are at greater risk because they are more vulnerable.

## What is child abuse?

- sexual abuse: rape, fondling or other sexual activity
- physical abuse: hitting, beating, shaking or burning
- neglect: not meeting basic needs such as love, food and medical care
- emotional abuse: depriving a child of love and attention, constant yelling or bullying a child, witnessing domestic violence

## What is neglect?

Neglect happens when adults don't meet a child's emotional, health and educational needs and this can cause serious and long term damage.

Neglect can happen when parents own needs take priority over the really important needs of children such as food, clothing or treatment for a medical condition or when a parent or carer fails to keep the child safe and well.

Emotional care by a parent or carer is also important to a child's healthy growth, development and to help them form strong emotional bonds.

**SEVERITY AND FREQUENCY** – the more frequent and the more serious, the more damaging it will be for the child.

**RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS** – abuse by parents is more damaging because then the child often has no one to turn to for support and comfort.

**COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE** – if the family is isolated from the community or the community does not speak out against child abuse and neglect this increases the risk to the child.

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information

## What is physical abuse?

Physical abuse is when a child is deliberately injured includes shaking a baby or hitting, beating, burning or scalding a child or young person.

Most physical abuse of children happens in the home

## What to do if a child tells you he or she has been abused

- Listen to the child's story
- Comfort the child if they are distressed
- Let the child know you are glad they told you
- Let the child know you are going to get some help about what to do

## Domestic violence also harms children

Domestic violence can involve emotional, sexual and physical abuse by one or more adult members of a family towards another adult in the family.

Children are affected when they live with violent behaviour in their home. They feel frightened for their abused parent and their own safety. At other times the children get caught up in the physical violence and can be injured.

Some children may learn harmful ways of responding to problems. This can lead to problems when they mix with other children and further isolate them from possible sources of help and support.

## Reporting child abuse

Reporting child abuse is the first step in stopping the abuse and protecting children from harm. Sometimes, children are being hurt because:

- Their families do not have adequate support
- Their carers are experiencing a lot of stress such as unemployment, illness, isolation or loneliness
- Their parents may not have experienced good parenting themselves

by a parent or carer who is angry, loses control or uses excessive physical punishment.

Physical abuse is always dangerous to children and can lead to serious physical injury. Babies and infants are especially vulnerable as they are so little and a blow to them has a greater physical impact.

## What is emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse is when adults deprive a child of love, affection and attention or when an adult continually speaks to a child in a negative or hurtful way and makes them feel worthless.

Emotional abuse hurts because it happens over a long time by someone who is important to a child.

Children see themselves as others see them. If someone continually tells the child they are not lovable and are hopeless, then the child begins to see themselves as hopeless and unlovable and can develop emotional problems.

## What is child sexual abuse?

Child sexual abuse doesn't just mean sexual intercourse although it is involved. Child sexual abuse involves a range of sexual activity including touching a child on their breasts or penis, masturbating in front of children, flashing or oral sex.

Child sexual abuse occurs when an adult or someone bigger than the child uses his or her authority or power over the child, or takes advantage of the child's trust and respect, to involve the child in sexual activity.

The offender often uses tricks, bribes, threats, guilt and sometimes physical force to make the child take part and to stop the child from telling anyone about it.

## Getting help

Parent Line	13 20 55
Tresillian (for babies)	02 9787 5255 1800 637 357 (freecall outside Sydney)
Karitane (for babies)	02 9794 1852 1800 677 961 (freecall outside Sydney)
Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800
DoCS Help Line	13 21 11
Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463/ 1800 671 442 TTY
Website	parenting.nsw.gov.au