

Appendix 15: Definitions of Abuse: Children – England

'Working together to safeguard children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children' (HMSO 2015) provides the following definitions for England.

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. 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.

Physical abuse

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

Emotional abuse

The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause 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 in so far 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 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. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may 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, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse

Involves 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 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 in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

Neglect

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. Neglect may occur during pregnancy 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);
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Domestic abuse

Domestic violence is the abuse of one partner within an intimate or family relationship. It is the repeated, random and habitual use of intimidation to control a partner. The abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, financial or sexual. There is a definition by Refuge at <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/>.

Spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse is using God's word or His name to justify human behaviour that is sexual, emotional or physical abuse or neglect. Spiritual abuse is most destructive because it gives children a distorted image of God.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM is the act of partially or totally removing the external genitalia of girls and young women for non-medical reasons. It is illegal within the United Kingdom. See also <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-genital-mutilation-guidelines>. In October 2015 it became mandatory for health and social care professionals and teachers in England and Wales to report known cases of FGM in individuals under 18 years old to the police.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

CSE is a type of sexual abuse in which children are sexually exploited for money, power or status. Children or young people may be tricked into believing they are in a loving, consensual relationship. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol. They may also be groomed online. Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs.

(A child may suffer more than one category of abuse).

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF ABUSE

- Physical: unexplained injuries and bruising, or injuries which have not received medical attention. Hidden injuries; bruising which is only discovered when clothes come off. Signs of neglect.
- Sexual: allegations made by the child or young person. Preoccupation with sexual matters. Being sexually explicit in words, play or drawing. Reported sleep disturbances with fears and phobias. Being sexually provocative with adults.
- Emotional: nervousness, sudden underachievement, regression in behaviour. Inappropriate relations with adults/peers, attention seeking, running away, stealing, lying, looking uncared for.
- Neglect: looking uncared for and unhappy; being withdrawn or aggressive. Having lingering health problems or injuries.

It should be remembered that many symptoms of distress can point to abuse but there may be other explanations. It is important that the above signs are not taken as absolute indicators that abuse has taken place. They should cause individuals to stop and think rather than jump to conclusions. Therefore, it is always important to discuss any concerns with the appropriate Responsible Person or Designated Safeguarding Person.