

Appendix 15: Definitions of Abuse – Children – Ireland

Certain children are more vulnerable to abuse than others. These include children with disabilities and children who, for one reason or another, are separated from parents or other family members and who depend on others for their care and protection. *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2004) provides the following definitions of abuse.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include the following: shaking, use of excessive force in handling, deliberate poisoning, suffocation, allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a care-giver and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Examples of emotional abuse are:

- persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;
- unresponsiveness;
- unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control himself in a certain way;
- under- or over-protection of the child;
- use of unreasonable or overly harsh disciplinary measures;
- exposure to domestic violence.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others. Examples of child sexual abuse include the following:

- exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of the child;
- intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
- sexual intercourse with the child whether oral, vaginal, or anal.

Sexual exploitation of a child includes inciting, requiring or permitting a child to solicit for, or to engage in, sexual acts. Sexual exploitation also occurs when a child is involved in the exhibition or posing (including digital recording or its manipulation) for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification.

Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, or medical care.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways over a period of time rather than at one specific point. For instance, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries is not having his or her needs met for supervision and safety.

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>.

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're 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. Pre-occupation 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 employees/volunteers 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.