



MWIA TRAINING MODULE ON VIOLENCE

Child Abuse

Definition of the type of abuse¹

According to the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), child abuse can be caused by an adult or child and includes physical, sexual or emotional abuse, as well as a lack of love, care and attention, which can be just as damaging to a child. Abused children will often encounter more than one type of abuse, and are likely to experience other difficulties throughout their lifetime. Typically such abuse will occur increasingly over a period of time, rather than being a one-off event. It can also occur online.

General facts/Prevalence rates

- The impact of abuse varies depending on the age and developmental status of the child, the frequency, duration, severity, and type of abuse, and the relationship between the victim and the abuser.²
- 5 children die of abuse/neglect each day.³
- Over half a million children are abused in the UK each year.¹
- 1 in 4 adults report having been physically abused as a child.⁴
- One fifth of women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused in childhood.⁴
- Rates of emotional abuse rose from 23% in 2006 to 35% in 2016 in children within the UK child protection system.¹
- Child trafficking reports have tripled from 2012 to 2016 in the UK.¹
- In 2016-17 over 12,000 Childline counselling sessions about online safety and abuse were conducted, representing a 9% increase from the previous year.¹
- In 2015-2016 almost 6% of 10- to 15-year-olds in England and Wales were victims of a violent crime.¹
- 1 in 8 young people have been bullied on social media.¹
- One quarter of children have experienced something upsetting on social media.¹

Types this form of abuse may take¹

- **Physical abuse**—the deliberate or non-accidental infliction of physical injury or pain, e.g. hitting, burning, slapping, suffocating, and shaking. It also includes administering unneeded medications or making the child ingest harmful substances.
- **Neglect**—ongoing failure to meet a child's needs is the most common form of abuse. Children can be left hungry, dirty, lacking clothes, shelter and medical care, or not be protected from physical or emotional harm.
- **Psychological/emotional abuse**—ongoing maltreatment of a child that may involve scaring, ignoring, humiliation, or isolation. This can lead to the child feeling valueless, unloved, and inadequate.
- **Witnessing domestic violence** is also a form of psychological abuse, and can lead to children becoming aggressive, withdrawn, anti-social, depressed, or anxious and effect school performance.
- **Sexual abuse**—forcing or persuading the child into sexual contact of any kind. This includes in-person contact with the child (e.g. masturbation, penetration, touching the child's genitals, and getting the child to undress), as well as non-contact abuses (e.g. grooming, getting the child to expose themselves online, and distributing/viewing indecent images). The child may not realise that such behaviours are wrong, or be afraid to speak about it.
- **Female genital mutilation/circumcision**—the partial or total removal of female external genitalia for non-medical reasons.
- **Child trafficking and modern slavery**—when children are sold for reasons including sexual exploitation, benefit fraud, forced marriage, forced labour in factories or farms or for criminal activities (e.g. drug mules).
- **Online Abuse**— refer to next section.

Cyber Abuse

- Cyber abuse occurs through the use of social technologies, including online games and social networks, as well as mobile phones.
- The abuse may be undertaken by people known to the child or by strangers.
- Children can feel that there is no escape from online abuse, which can be transmitted 24 hours a day and infiltrate private spaces, such as one's bedroom.
- Cyber bullying refers to the practise of sending unwanted messages, photos or videos to a victim, or to other people known to the victim, which may intentionally or unintentionally cause rumours about the victim, and/or cause embarrassment, shame or guilt.
- Hate sites can be set up about a particular child, sometimes encouraging the victim to self-harm.
- Explicit messages can be sent to children (i.e. sexting), and/or children can be pressured into taking part in sexual conversations or sending sexual images.

Risk Factors⁵

- Parents and Family
 - Living in a family where there is domestic violence
 - Mental health problems and drug and/or alcohol use
 - Lack of parenting skills
 - Characteristics: young, low income, low education, single parent, many children
 - Non-biological, transient guardians (e.g. mother's male partner)
 - Socially disadvantaged or isolated
 - Parental history of abuse
 - Both men and women abuse children.
- Child
 - Health issues (e.g. chronic illness, physical and developmental disability, behavioural issues)
 - Children under 4 years
 - Adolescents
 - Children age 11-12 begin to take risks online, increasing cyber abuse risk
- Social
 - High level of violence in the community
 - Neighbourhood disadvantage
 - Abuse can also occur in stable, affluent households with no apparent problems.

Protective Factors⁵

- Supportive family environment and social networks (e.g. role models and mentors)
- Support for child's basic needs
- Nurturing parental style
- Stable family unit
- Enforcing house rules and monitoring the child
- Parental employment and education
- Access to healthcare, social services and adequate housing
- Supportive communities that take responsibility for abuse prevention

Prevention⁶

- Provide support for parents and promote positive parenting and enhancement of parenting skills
- Have online support (e.g. Parentline, Childhelp) for parents, including help for crisis situations
- Identify at-risk children before abuse occurs and provide early intervention
- Always consider the children of people dealing with domestic violence
- Follow national policy including child protections plans and registers
- Encourage children to self-report child abuse (e.g. through sites like Childline and the NSPCC).
- Encourage adults to report suspected child abuse to statutory/charitable organizations
- Change public opinion and attitudes to one of zero tolerance for child abuse and neglect

References

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2. Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2013). *Long-Term Consequences of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Retrieved from: https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/long_term_consequences.pdf
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5. CDC. (2018). *Child Abuse and Neglect: Risk and Protective Factors*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>
6. NSPCC. (2018). *Preventing Abuse*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/>