

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is any action (or non-action) that hurts a child or puts a child in danger.

Sexual abuse

Occurs when a person uses power, force or authority to involve a child or young person or adult in any form of unwanted or illegal sexual activity. This can involve touching or no contact at all. This may take the form of taking sexual explicit photographs or videos of children, forcing children to watch or take part in sexual acts and forcing or coercing children to have sex or engage in sexual acts with other children or adults.

Physical abuse

Occurs when a child suffers significant harm from an injury. The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent consequence of physical punishment or physically aggressive treatment of a child. Some examples of physical abuse include hitting, punching, burning or shaking a child.

Emotional abuse

Affects a child's self-esteem and their psychological and emotional well-being. Emotional abuse can include being repeatedly isolated, rejected, continual coldness, excluding and distancing by a child, or putting down and calling a child demeaning names.

Neglect

The failure to provide for the child or young person's basic needs for life, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical attention, supervision or care to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, placed at risk.

Domestic violence

Exposure to domestic violence can include watching or hearing a family member assault or threaten another member of the family, direct involvement (for example, trying to intervene or calling the police), or experiencing the aftermath of family violence, such as seeing bruises or observing maternal depression.

It is important to remember that abuse is often multi-dimensional and many victims will experience more than one form of abuse. The risk of negative behaviour, physical and mental health outcomes increase with the number of adverse childhood experiences.

Abuse has serious effects on children and can result in long-term physical and psychological problems. The consequences of abuse also extend beyond the immediate victims, and affect families, communities and broader society.