Signs of child abuse and neglect

SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities including non-contact activities.

Key features

There are few physical signs, more likely to be emotional and behavioural factors.

- Aggression
- Withdrawn
- Self harming, including eating disorders
- Drawings of sexually explicit behaviours
- Promiscuity/ precociousness
- Inappropriate sexualised conduct
- Sexually explicit behaviour
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE

Sexual abuse can be very difficult to recognise and reporting sexual abuse can be an extremely traumatic experience for a child. Whilst the media often focuses on 'stranger danger', studies indicate that between 80 and 90% of cases involve a known adult.
The internet has increased the risk of non-contact sexual abuse and children must be alert to these dangers when online.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child.

Key features

- Development delay
- Abnormal attachment to parent/ carer
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of confidence
- Inappropriate emotional response

NEGLECT

Neglect is the failure to meet a child's physical and or psychological needs.

Key features

Inadequate clothing for the child's size, weather or time of year
Underweight for age
Frequent school absences
Poor health
Emotionally needy
Persistently dirty with a body odour

NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

PEER ON PEER ABUSE

Peer on peer abuse occurs when a young person is exploited, bullied and / or harmed by their peers who are the same or similar age

Key Areas Where Peer on Peer Abuse Occurs

- **Cyberbullying:** involves sending inappropriate or hurtful text messages, emails or instant messages, posting malicious material online (e.g. on social networking websites) or sending or posting offensive or degrading images and videos;
- **Racist and Religious Bullying:** A range of hurtful behaviour, both physical and psychological, that makes a person feel unwelcome, marginalised, excluded, powerless or worthless because of their colour, ethnicity, culture, faith community, national origin or national status;
- **Sexual, Sexist and Transphobic Bullying:** includes any behaviour, whether physical or non-physical, where sexuality is used as a weapon by boys or girls;
- **Homophobic Bullying:** targets someone because of their sexual orientation (or perceived sexual orientation);
- **Disablist Bullying:** targets a young person solely based on their disability, this can include manipulative bullying where a perpetrator forces the victim to act in a certain way, or exploiting a certain aspect of the victims disability .

High Risk Factors

- Families with complex needs
- Parental substance use
- Poor parental mental health
- Parents with learning difficulties
- Children with disabilities
- Families with past history of childhood abuse

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse involves any action that causes physical harm to a child including fabricating the symptoms of or deliberately inducing illnesses.

Key features

- Bruising of various ages
- Bite marks
- Burns and scalds
- Fractures in non- mobile children
- Injuries in unusual areas or with well-defined edges
- Old injuries or scars
- Refusal to discuss injuries
- Inconsistent explanations
- Talk of punishment which seems excessive
- Arms and legs kept covered
- Reluctance to remove clothing for swimming or PE
- The parents are uninterested or undisturbed by an accident or injury

FURTHER INFORMATION

The statutory guidance for schools is set out in the following documents:

Keeping Children Safe in Education (2018)
What to do if you're worried a child is being abused (2015) (non-statutory)
Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015)