

Keeping Children and Young People Safe

What to do if you think
a child or young person
is being harmed



How you can help if you think a child is being harmed

This guide will help you to understand about child abuse, and where you can get help if you think a child or young person is being harmed.

Although you may feel you do not want to get involved, **everyone** in Sheffield is responsible for keeping children and young people safe.

**Don't think "What if I'm wrong?" –
think "What if I'm right?"**

What is Child Abuse?

Abuse can happen to a child or young person of any age. Legally, a child is someone who is under 18 years old (Children Act 1989).

There are four categories of child abuse: physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect. A child or young person can suffer different kinds of abuse at the same time. It can happen to children and young people in well-off or poor families; it can happen at any age; from any ethnic, cultural or religious background; whether or not they have disabilities; whether or not they are lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual. Child abuse can be deliberate or un-intentional.

Abuse can happen because of the way adults, or other children and young people, behave towards a child or young person. It can also result from adults failing to provide proper care for the children they look after.

Why is it so important to prevent child abuse?

There are obvious risks to health and well-being for a child or young person who is abused or neglected. They are likely to suffer as a direct result of the abuse. In extreme cases a child or young person may die. But it may also cause long term or permanent physical and / or mental health problems, difficulty in achieving their potential at school or college, in friendships and relationships, in getting a job, and being a parent themselves.

Children or young people who are being abused or neglected may show their unhappiness in many ways including being nervous, anxious, withdrawn and isolated. They may be angry and aggressive, truant from school or run away from home. They may also use drugs or alcohol, deliberately cause serious harm to themselves or others, and even try to commit suicide.

If you have any doubt about reporting your concerns, please remember that services can only take action if they know that something is wrong.

Some families deliberately avoid contact with professionals who can help and support them and their children. Therefore we need family, friends and neighbours to tell us of any concerns.

Remember: it is not just adults who harm children and young people. Other children and young people can also be abusers, through bullying, being threatening with weapons, or other types of harmful behaviour. This can include those in gangs.

Physical Abuse

This is when someone physically harms a child or young person. Hitting, squeezing, biting, or twisting their arms or legs can cause injuries like bruises, grazes, cuts or broken bones, or burning - by holding something very hot against them, using a cigarette or scalding for example.

Shaking a baby can cause brain injuries, which can lead to permanent disability or even death. Poisoning a child or young person, perhaps by giving them alcohol or drugs and deliberately making them ill, is also physical abuse.

Signs may include:

- any injuries to young babies who are not yet able to move on their own
- bruises in places where you would not normally expect to find them
- bruises which have a distinctive shape or pattern, like handprints, grasp or finger marks, or belt marks
- burns or scalds with clear outlines
- bite marks including bruises like 'love bites'
- bruising in or around the mouth, especially in babies.

Neglect

Neglect can result when parents, carers or other adults fail to meet the physical or emotional needs of the children and young people they are responsible for. All children and young people need food, clothing, warmth, love and attention, in order to grow and develop properly.

Signs include a child or young person:

- who is often dirty and smelly
- who looks thin and ill, or is cold
- with illnesses that have not been treated
- who has inadequate or ill-fitting clothing
- who has repeated accidents
- who is not properly supervised
- who does not respond when given attention
- who craves attention and affection from any adult.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or encouraging a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not they are aware of what is happening. The abuser(s) may use different methods to persuade them to co-operate and not to tell anyone, like bribery, threats or physical force.

Sexual abuse can take many different forms from touching to intercourse. It may also include involving children or young people looking at, or being forced to take part in the production of pornographic material, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. This may happen via the Internet using web cams or photographs taken on mobile phones, which can be posted on websites or circulated to other phones. Grooming can also take place either online or face to face, when the abuser forms a 'friendship' with the child or young person with the aim of meeting them for the purposes of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse can occur within families. It can happen to boys as well as girls. Often there are no physical signs that the child or young person has been sexually abused.

Signs include a child or young person:

- who displays sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for their age
- with injuries or an unusual appearance to private areas of their body
- who is being encouraged into a secretive relationship with an adult
- who hints at sexual activity through words, play or drawings
- who is secretive about their online friends
- with a sexually transmitted infection

- who is pregnant, and there are concerns that the relationship with the baby's father is inappropriate or abusive.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child or young person's basic needs for love, security, and praise are left unmet. It may result in them becoming withdrawn, nervous, unhappy or lacking in confidence.

Emotional abuse may happen when a parent, carer or other adult constantly behaves in an uncaring and hostile way towards a child or young person. They may be inconsistent, bullying, rejecting, frightening, or criticising, or the abuse may be based on sexual or gender identity, disability or race.

In severe cases, children or young people may be subjected to cruel treatment and punishment like being locked up particularly in cold, dark surroundings. They may be in a situation where basic needs like food, drink and warmth may be withheld or have to be 'earned'.

Signs include a child or young person:

- who is constantly blamed for things that go wrong
- being made to carry out tasks inappropriate to their age
- who is not allowed out or not allowed to take part in usual activities
- is in a household where there are arguments and / or violence.

Children and young people can be emotionally harmed by being bullied, either face to face, online or by mobile phone (cyberbullying). They can be bullied by individuals, or by a group of young people.

What you can do to help

It is very important that you take action straight away if you think a child or young person is being abused. The longer the abuse goes on, the longer it will take for them to recover.

In the majority of cases, families may only need extra support to help them keep their children safe. Only in extreme circumstances do concerns reported to Children and Young People's Social Care result in children having to live apart from their families.

You can discuss your concerns by ringing Sheffield Children and Young People's Social Care on (0114) 273 4855 or you can call in person to First Point, Howden House. You will be able to speak in confidence to a social worker who will act on your concerns.

If you wish, they will let you know what action has been taken in response to your concerns.

**Contact us – Children and Young People's Social Care
24 hours a day, 7 days a week**

**First Point, Howden House, union Street
Sheffield, S1 2SH
Tel: (0114) 273 4855**

**You can also ring South Yorkshire Police
(0114) 220 2020**

In an emergency – do not delay – ring 999

**Or you can ring the NSPCC
on 0808 800 5000**

Sheffield City Council - Children and Young People's Social Care

Social workers have a major role in enquiring into child abuse and assessing the needs of families. When an allegation of child abuse is made, they carry out enquiries, with other agencies as appropriate, to decide what action is needed to ensure a child or young person is safe and protected, and their needs are met. In some cases, social workers and police officers work together to investigate allegations of child abuse.

South Yorkshire Police

The police become involved in some cases of child abuse because of their responsibility to prevent and investigate crime. It is important to remember that child abuse can be a criminal matter. In Sheffield there is a team of specially trained and experienced police officers who are skilled in working with children and families.

Children and Young People's Social Care

The child protection work of the police and the Children and Young People's service, together with that of all other professionals working with children and their parents, is conducted according to Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board procedures. These are based upon 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' guidance issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The child protection procedures can be found in Sheffield libraries and are available on our website.

For further information about keeping children and young people safe, contact the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board telephone (273 4450 / 5195), email sscb@sheffield.gov.uk or visit our website: www.safeguardingsheffieldchildren.org.uk



If you wish to comment about the information contained within this leaflet, or to order further copies, please contact:

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Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board
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