



## Advice and information for parents

# Abuse

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### What is abuse?

Abuse is an incredibly difficult and sensitive subject for any parent to deal with, regardless of the nature of the abuse or who the perpetrator is. It has a huge impact on families and has repercussions that can surface in both the long- and short-term.

The Children Act 1989 states that abuse should be considered to have happened when someone's actions have caused a child to suffer 'significant harm' to their health or development. Significant harm to a child means: Punishing too much. Hitting or shaking. Constantly criticising, threatening or rejecting. Sexually interfering with, or assaulting. Not providing enough to eat, ignoring, not playing or talking with them, not making sure they are safe.

Sexual activity with children, including making children watch or take part in pornography, is abuse. The age of consent is 16 years; 13-15 year olds are deemed to have partial consent but sexual intercourse with a child under the age of 13 is classed as statutory rape, as the child is legally unable to consent.

### Who abuses?

Abuse of children is usually carried out by family members or familiar adults, such as a relative, family friend, neighbour, lodger, babysitter, someone at school or in a group. It is less usual for strangers to be involved, but the internet has undoubtedly given rise to increased opportunities and incidents of grooming and child sexual exploitation.

Vulnerable children, including those with disabilities and additional needs, are more prone to abuse, as they may have communication difficulties and be less able to speak out, or be seen as less credible witnesses.

It is also important to recognise that some vulnerable adults – those with a physical or mental impairment or difficulty – are also abused. This abuse can be carried out by both adults and children.

### Types of abuse

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Neglect

## How can you tell?

Abused children can show signs of distress in many ways, some of them obvious and dramatic, some of them subtle and difficult to detect:

Signs of physical abuse include:

Being wary of adults, unable to play, being aggressive or abusive, bullied by other children or the bully themselves, unable to concentrate or achieve at school, lying and stealing

Signs of sexual abuse include:

Behaving differently all of a sudden, thinking badly of themselves, not looking after themselves, using sexual ideas or talk in their play, starting to wet or soil, underachieving at school, behaving flirtatiously, being fearful of physical contact, becoming depressed, self-harming, running away

Signs of emotional abuse or neglect include:

Being slow to learn to walk and talk, being very passive, having feeding problems, having difficulty in developing close relationships, getting on badly with peers, being unable to play imaginatively, having a poor self-image, doing badly at school

## Other types of abuse

- Discriminatory abuse – harassment for an individual’s gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or age
- Financial/material abuse (mainly adults) – theft, internet scams, financial coercion, fraud
- Domestic abuse (adults) – all types of abuse in the home
- Organisational/institutional abuse – poor care or neglect within an institution or provided in the home
- Modern slavery – human trafficking, forced marriage, forced labour and inhumane treatment  
Modern Slavery helpline: 0800 0121 700 Website: <https://modernslavery.co.uk/>
- FGM – female genital mutilation. Although considered to be common in certain cultures and parts of the world, it is classified as a form of abuse and it is illegal for children living in the UK to be subjected to these practices.

# What can help? What to do.

These are things that may really make a difference:

1. First and foremost, the child must be protected from further abuse. Listen to the child and accept what they are telling you. Do not let assumptions or prejudices prevent you from accepting a child's account as truthful.
2. If you know, or suspect that a child is being abused, there are three important reasons why you should get help:
  - To stop the abuse
  - To enable the child or young person being abused to start to get over what has happened
  - To protect other children and young people
3. Social Services will need to be involved to find out what has happened, if it is likely to happen again and what steps are needed to protect the child. Speak to your local Social Services Child Protection Adviser for advice. Anyone can contact Social Services with a concern; it does not need to be a professional.
4. After investigation, Social Services will arrange a child protection case conference if they are concerned that a child is being harmed. A plan will be made to ensure there is no further harm.
5. Within a family, the person involved in the abuse will sometimes own up and seek help. They can then be helped to look after their child better.
6. Occasionally the child may have to be taken away from the abusing adult because the risks of physical or emotional harm are too great. This can be for a short time until things become safer, or permanently.
7. Many children will need specialist treatment due to the abuse they have endured. Help may be provided through Social Service family centres or the local CAMHS, and may involve working with the whole family, with the child/young person alone or in groups.
8. Individual therapy can be especially helpful for children who have been sexually abused or who have suffered severe trauma.
9. Children who have suffered serious abuse or neglect can be difficult to care for and parents/carers may need additional support

# Finding support

All references listed on this sheet are for information only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations.

## NSPCC

[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

Information and advice for adults concerned about the safety of a child.

Open Monday to Friday 8am-10pm, and 9am-6pm at weekends.

Phone: 0808 800 5000

Email: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

Online form:

<https://forms.nspcc.org.uk/content/nspcc---report-abuse-form>

If you are deaf or hard of hearing and have a webcam, you can contact them via SignVideo using British Sign Language.

Online information about protecting your child and preventing abuse:  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse)

## Pace

[www.paceuk.info](http://www.paceuk.info)

Pace supports parents and carers of children who are – or are at risk of being – sexually exploited by perpetrators external to the family.

They provide 1:1 support over the phone, run online and face-to-face peer-support for parents and have a befriending scheme.

Phone (open Monday-Friday office hours):  
0113 240 5226

Online enquiry form:

[www.paceuk.info/about-pace/contact-us](http://www.paceuk.info/about-pace/contact-us)

Parent Network Days: [www.paceuk.info/for-parents/parent-network-days](http://www.paceuk.info/for-parents/parent-network-days)

Online parent forum: [www.paceuk.info/for-parents/parent-forum](http://www.paceuk.info/for-parents/parent-forum)

## MOSAC

[www.mosac.org.uk](http://www.mosac.org.uk)

Supports non-abusing parents and carers whose children have been sexually abused. They offer therapeutic sessions, advocacy, training, support groups and advice sessions.

Freephone (from landlines) helpline: 0800 980 1958

If you can afford to pay for the call, MOSAC asks you to ring 020 8293 9990

Email: [enquiries@mosac.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@mosac.org.uk)

Interpreter services are available.

## Stop it Now!

[www.stopitnow.org.uk](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk)

Helpline for adults unsure or worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children, or the behaviour of someone they know (adults or children). Advice also available for professionals.

Open Monday–Thursday 9am-9pm and Fridays 9am-5pm.

Freephone helpline: 0808 1000 900

Email: [help@stopitnow.org.uk](mailto:help@stopitnow.org.uk)

## Stop it Now Scotland

[www.stopitnow.org.uk/scotland](http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/scotland)

Open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm.

Helpline: 0131 5563 535

Email: [scotland@stopitnow.org](mailto:scotland@stopitnow.org)

## Family Rights Group

[www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

Advice for families whose children are involved with, or need, children's services because of welfare needs or concerns.

	<p>Open Monday-Friday 9.30am-3pm.</p> <p>Freephone helpline: 0808 801 0366</p> <p>Textphone: 18001 0808 801 0366</p> <p>Interpreters can be arranged.</p>
<p><b>Women's Aid</b>  <a href="http://www.womensaid.org.uk">www.womensaid.org.uk</a>  National charity working to end domestic violence against women and children.</p> <p>Freephone helpline (open 24/7):  0808 2000 247</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk">helpline@womensaid.org.uk</a></p> <p>Live chat service with trained female support worker (open Monday to Friday 10am-12pm):  <a href="http://chat.womensaid.org.uk">chat.womensaid.org.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Child Law Advice</b>  <a href="http://www.childlawadvice.org.uk">www.childlawadvice.org.uk</a>  Provides free legal advice and information on child, family and education law to parents, carers and young people.</p> <p>Open Monday-Friday 8am-6pm.</p> <p>If you are calling about family or child law the number is 0300 330 5480.</p> <p>Online information about child protection:  <a href="http://www.childlawadvice.org.uk/family/child-protection">www.childlawadvice.org.uk/family/child-protection</a></p>
<p><b>Rape Crisis</b>  <a href="http://www.rapecrisis.org.uk">www.rapecrisis.org.uk</a>  Support for girls and women who have experienced rape, sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse.</p> <p>Freephone helpline for girls and women aged 13+ (open daily 12-2.30pm and 7-9.30pm):  0808 802 9999</p> <p>Live chat service open daily during varied hours, for women aged 16+:  <a href="https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/live-chat-helpline/about-the-live-chat-helpline">https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/live-chat-helpline/about-the-live-chat-helpline</a></p> <p>Find your local Rape Crisis Centre:  <a href="https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/find-a-rape-crisis-centre">https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/find-a-rape-crisis-centre</a></p>	<p><b>Victim Support</b>  <a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk">www.victimsupport.org.uk</a>  Free and confidential support for anyone affected by a crime, including victims and witnesses and their family and friends.</p> <p>Open 24/7, every day of the year, including Christmas.</p> <p>Support line: 0808 1689 111</p> <p>Online contact form:  <a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/supportline/email-supportline">www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/supportline/email-supportline</a></p>
<p><b>Men's Advice Line</b>  <a href="http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk">www.mensadviceline.org.uk</a>  Advice and support for men who have been victims of domestic abuse. Open Monday-Friday 9am-5pm.</p> <p>Helpline (free from landlines and most mobiles): 0808 801 0327</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:info@mensadviceline.org.uk">info@mensadviceline.org.uk</a></p>	<p><b>Barnardo's</b>  <a href="http://www.barnados.org.uk">www.barnados.org.uk</a>  Provides a range of services to children, young people and families across the UK, a list of which can be found on their website. Services support with issues including sexual exploitation, substance misuse and homelessness.</p>

## The Mix

[www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service.

Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994

Email: [www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us](http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us)

Webchat open daily 4-11pm:  
[www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team](http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team)

Counselling service: [www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service](http://www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service)

## Childline

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.

24/7 helpline: 0800 1111

Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor:  
[www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat](http://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat)

To email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at  
[www.childline.org.uk/registration](http://www.childline.org.uk/registration)

## Youth Access

[www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)

Offers information about advice and counselling services for young people aged 12-25 years.

## Youth Wellbeing Directory

[www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing](http://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing)

Lists local services for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

## YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Text YM to 85258

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

## YoungMinds

### Parents Lounge

[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge)

Our Parents Helpline experts answer questions on having difficult conversations with your child.

### #Take20

[www.youngminds.org.uk/take20](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/take20)

Ideas and suggestions to help parents find 20 minutes to do something together with their child to support confidence, self-esteem and resilience.

### Top Tips

Supporting a child through a time of difficulty or change

[www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/top-tips-for-you-and-your-child](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/take20/top-tips-for-you-and-your-child)