

Types of maltreatment

What is child maltreatment?

Child maltreatment is the abuse and neglect of children. It encompasses all forms of ill-treatment, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Child maltreatment can seriously impair a child's health, dignity and development.

What is abuse?

Abuse is where a child is treated cruelly, violently or forcefully by an adult or another child, causing harm or distress. Abuse is a form of maltreatment. Children can be at risk of abuse in the home, in social situations and online.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is intentionally causing bodily injury. Examples include hitting, shaking, poisoning and burning. It can also involve the fabrication of a child's illness by their parents or carers.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is forcing or enticing a child to engage in sexual activities. The abuse may not involve violence and the child might not be aware of what is happening. Sexual abuse includes physical contact and/or non-contact acts – such as involving children in the production of sexual images.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the ongoing emotional maltreatment of a child. Examples include being unable to express opinions, overprotection and serious bullying. Emotional abuse can have a hugely adverse impact on a child's emotional and social development.

Neglect

Neglect is where someone fails to prevent harm from happening to a child. Examples of neglect include failing to provide adequate supervision for a child or being unresponsive to a child's basic needs.

You can find the full definitions of the main categories of abuse, as stated in *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, at the end of this document.

Below are some other specific types of safeguarding/child protection issues that all staff should be aware of:

Child on child abuse

Child on child abuse is when children abuse other children. It can involve bullying, physical abuse, sexual violence or harassment, the consensual and non-consensual sharing of images and videos and causing someone to engage in sexual activity without consent. Child on child abuse can happen online and in person. A further example of child on child abuse includes initiation or hazing. These are activities involving abuse, harassment and/or humiliation as a way of initiating a child into a group.

The Department of Health defines bullying as 'behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.'

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is when a child sees, hears or experiences the impact of abuse in their own home. It can be an isolated event or a pattern of incidents. A child might also experience domestic abuse in their own relationship. (This is sometimes referred to as teenage relationship abuse.)

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Online abuse

Online abuse is any type of abuse that happens over the internet or a mobile network. For example, exposure to harmful content and interactions on social networks or online gaming. Online abuse may be committed by people the child knows (including other children) or by strangers and it can occur alongside offline abuse.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

CSE is when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child into sexual activity. It is a form of child sexual abuse, although it can sometimes appear as if the activity is consensual.

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

CCE is where drug networks or gangs groom and exploit children to carry drugs, guns, money and other items that are used in criminal activity. County lines is a form of CCE – here, criminal groups exploit children to supply or move the items mentioned above from one geographical area to another – for example, drugs from a city to coastal towns.

Grooming

Grooming is when somebody builds an emotional connection with a child either online or face to face – gaining their trust for the purpose of sexual abuse, exploitation, radicalisation or trafficking.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

HSB is when children display developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age. It is seen as a continuum, from behaviour which is deemed to be inappropriate to that which is abusive and violent. It can happen in person or online (or both).

Studies have found that children who display harmful sexual behaviour have usually experienced maltreatment themselves, such as neglect, domestic abuse, parental substance misuse and, sometimes, sexual abuse.

Forced marriage

In a forced marriage, one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage (due to age or disability), duress may have been used and actions may have been taken to coerce one or both of the people into the marriage. Since the introduction of The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022, it is illegal for 16 and 17 year-olds to marry in England and Wales, even with parental consent, and a penalty of up to seven years in prison can be given to anyone arranging child marriages (without the need to prove coercion, which was previously required). Forced marriage also includes non-legally binding ceremonies viewed as marriage by the parties and their families.

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So-called 'honour-based' abuse

So-called 'honour-based' abuse is a crime or incident committed to protect or defend the 'honour' of a family or community. Examples include:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - FGM involves intentionally altering or injuring the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is a criminal offence in the UK.

Breast ironing - Breast ironing or flattening is when a girl's breasts are flattened over time to prevent them from growing. This can involve using heated or heavy objects, as well as elastic belts or binders.

Radicalisation and extremism

Radicalisation is the process by which someone comes to believe or support extremist ideologies that are associated with terrorist groups. Extremist views can be political, religious or ideological. In some cases, radicalisation can lead to involvement in terrorist groups or acts.

Terrorism is the use or threat of action designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation, or to intimidate the public.

Modern slavery

Modern slavery is a type of abuse that is more likely to be associated with adults, but children can also be victims of modern slavery. It encompasses slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude. It can also be linked to exploitation, such as CSE and CCE.

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is when children are recruited, moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for many reasons, including sexual abuse, benefit fraud, forced marriage, domestic servitude, forced labour in factories or agriculture, criminal activity and low-wage labour. It is important to note that trafficking is not about distance. A child can be trafficked from one end of the street to another.

Safeguarding/child protection issues rarely happen in isolation and therefore it can be difficult to use a single label to define a child's experience. Safeguarding/child protection issues may well encompass several different elements of maltreatment. There is very often overlap in the different types of maltreatment.



Speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for further information and support

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Full definitions taken from *Working Together to Safeguard Children*:

Abuse	A form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.
Physical abuse	A form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.
Sexual abuse	Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.
Emotional abuse	The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may include not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond a child's developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.
Neglect	The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to: a. provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment) b. protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger c. ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate caregivers) d. ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.