

Child abuse

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet tells you what you can do about child abuse, who you can report it to, and what might happen if you do.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse is when someone is ill-treating a child, causing damage to the child's health or personal development. A child can be suffering abuse if they:

- have been physically injured
- are suffering from sexual abuse
- are suffering from emotional abuse
- are being neglected.

Neglecting a child

You are neglecting a child if you fail to take care of them properly, for example, by failing to protect them from danger, cold or starvation. This does not have to be deliberate. You can also be neglecting a child if you give them very little affection or attention. A child who fails to grow properly might also be seen as having been neglected.

You might be neglecting a child if you leave them alone at home. This does not depend on the age of a child but on the circumstances and whether the child is at risk of being badly harmed.

Reporting child abuse

If you are worried that a child is being abused and want to report it to someone, there are lots of people you can talk to.

Reporting child abuse to the local authority's children's services

When you report child abuse to the local authority's children's services, they must look into it if they think there is a real risk to the safety or well-being of the child. Children's services will decide if the child needs protection and what needs to be done to protect them. If, after initial enquiries, they decide that the child is not at risk, no further action may be taken.

Their enquiries could last several weeks, and may involve several interviews, family visits or medical examinations. Children's services will interview the child, and may also interview anyone the child has come into contact with. Usually, children's services will tell a child's parents that they are making

enquiries. However, in some cases, they may start making their enquiries before they let the parents know.

In cases of serious abuse, and in all cases of sexual abuse, children's services will tell the police. Occasionally, children's services will take urgent action to have the child removed from the family home and placed under police protection.

Once they have made enquiries and consulted with others, children's services may decide further action is needed. There are a number of recommendations they can make, including:

- police investigation
- applying for a court order for permission to place the child in care
- applying for a court order to place the child under the supervision of the local authority or a probation officer. This means the family will get help and support for the child to stay at home
- making a child protection plan for a child.

Children's services don't often recommend court action or criminal prosecution, but this will depend on the circumstances.

Child protection plans

Following a Child Protection Conference attended by social workers, other professionals and the child's parents or guardians, a child protection plan may be drawn up to protect the child and provide support to the child's family.

Reporting child abuse to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)

You can report child abuse to the NSPCC. The NSPCC runs a confidential freephone helpline for anyone who wants to report child abuse (see under Further help for contact details). When you speak to the helpline, you do not have to give your personal details if you don't want to. If you do give your details, the NSPCC may have to pass these on to children's services, or the police, but will ask them not to pass your details onto the person or family you have concerns about.

If you report concerns about child abuse to the NSPCC, they must do something about it.

Reporting child abuse to the police

If you report child abuse to the police, they must, by law, investigate. If the child is under 16, they will usually involve children's services.

In some emergency circumstances, the police can remove a child from home and take them into 'police protection' for up to 72 hours. They don't have to go to court to get permission for this.

As a result of police investigations, legal action may be taken against the child abuser. If the abuser is taken to court and found guilty, they will be punished and may be prevented from abusing others in the future. However, there is no guarantee that they will be found guilty.

The abuse victim may have to give evidence in court, which could be extremely upsetting. However, support is available for witnesses and, in some circumstances, the victim may not have to appear in court in person but will be able to give evidence via video or live television links.

Other people you can report child abuse to

You can also report concerns about child abuse to a number of other people including: health visitors; doctors and hospital staff; youth and community workers; probation officers; teachers and other school staff; nursery staff; education welfare officers; educational psychologists.

You should be aware that these people may have to pass on your concerns to children's services or the police.

Rehousing because of child abuse

If you are looking after a child who is being abused, you could ask your local authority housing department to help with rehousing. However, if you do this, the local authority may make enquiries about the abuse, even if you don't want them to. Depending on the circumstances your local authority may be able to rehouse your family, rehouse the abuser, or rehouse the abuse victim.

There are also a number of legal measures you could take to prevent the abuser from staying in their home. If you want to do this, you should get legal advice.

If you are the parent of a child who is being abused, and you are suffering from **domestic violence**, you may be able to move to a refuge or get emergency accommodation from the local authority. If you are in this situation, you should get help from an advice agency - see under Further help at the end of this fact sheet.

Children suffering abuse

If you are a child suffering from abuse, you can get help by talking to the NSPCC or Childline (see under Further help).

You may also need to get urgent medical help, for example, to deal with injuries, pregnancy testing, emergency contraception or HIV tests. You can get medical help from your GP, the accident and emergency department of your local hospital or a family planning clinic such as the Brook Advisory Centre – see under Further help.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

If you are under 16 and a health professional suspects you are being abused, they must report it to the police, children's services or NSPCC, even if you don't want them to.

In some cases, it may be possible to claim financial compensation for being abused. You can get advice from an advice agency about this – see below.

Asking for a police check

You may be worried about someone you know who has contact with your child, for example, a new partner. Under a Scheme called the Child Sex Offender Scheme (also known as Sarah's Law) you can ask your local police to check to see if that person has a record of child sex offences or other offences that might mean that they are a danger to your child.

To make an application you will need to visit your local police station and explain why you want a particular person to be checked. It is up to the police to decide whether to make a check and they can do so without telling the person that they are being checked.

If a check shows that someone might be a risk to your child, you will normally be told, but you will probably be asked not to share the information with other people who don't need to know.

There is more information about the Scheme at www.parentsprotect.org.uk.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems. To find your nearest CAB, including those that give advice by e-mail, click on [nearest CAB](#), or look under C in your phone book. In some circumstances, your CAB may have to pass on details of child abuse to social services or the police.

NSPCC

Helpline: 0808 800 5000

E-mail: help@nspcc.org.uk

Website: www.nspcc.org.uk

Childline

Helpline: 0800 1111

Freepost address: Freepost, NATN 1111, London E1 6BR

Website: www.childline.org.uk

All calls to Childline are treated confidentially, but if Childline suspects danger or a threat to life, they will contact social services or the police. They will tell the child that confidentiality has been broken.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Brook Advisory Centres

Helpline: 0808 802 1234

E-mail: admin@brookcentres.org.uk

Website: www.brook.org.uk

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This fact sheet was last updated on 23 March 2012, and is reviewed regularly. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check if it is still correct. Or visit our website - www.adviceguide.org.uk - where you can download an up-to-date copy.