



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. 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 harmed.

Children suffering abuse

If you are a child suffering from abuse, you can get help by talking to 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.

If you are under 16 and a health professional suspects you are being abused, they must report it to the police or the social work department, 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.

Adults who were harmed as children

If you were harmed as a child or young person, the effects of this may continue for many years and you may not realise the effects until many years later. The options available to you may depend on how long ago the incident(s) took place, how old you are and whether there are time limits for taking a particular course of action. Child protection procedures do not apply beyond the age of 16, and adults have to contact the police. The National Association for People Abused in Childhood (napac) is an organisation which can provide advice to adults who were abused in childhood. It can refer you to local counselling, support and help groups, and also has its own support line on 0800 085 3330.



Reporting child abuse

If you are worried that a child is being abused and want to report it to someone, you can call the 24 hour Scottish Child Protection Line on 0800 022 3222 or visit the website: www.children1st.org.uk/services/46/parentline-scotland. Depending on the nature of the call, the operator will transfer the call to the most relevant agency or provide details of who you should speak to next. It may be possible to ring the helpline, or one of the agencies mentioned below, without giving your full name. If you do give your name, you can ask for it to be kept confidential. This confidentiality will usually be respected.

Reporting child abuse to the department of the local authority responsible for social work

When you report child abuse to the social work department, they must look into it if they think there is a real risk to the safety or well-being of the child. The social work department 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. The social work department will interview the child, and may also interview anyone the child has come into contact with. Usually, the social work department 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, the social work department will tell the police. Occasionally, the social work department 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, the social work department may decide further action is needed. If they do, a case conference, attended by all relevant professionals, parents/carers and, sometimes, the child, will be called. The case conference will decide whether the child's name needs to be placed on the child protection register.

Child protection register

The child protection register provides information to all relevant agencies about children who are at risk of harm, and ensures that they communicate with each other about children at risk. It also helps in identifying any future risk to the child, or other children in the household.

If the case conference decides that a child's name needs to be placed on the child protection register, a protection plan will be put together and a decision will be made about whether the case needs to be referred to the Children's Reporter.

If the child's name does not need to be placed on the child protection register, the case will be closed or the family will be offered some form of support.

Child abuse and court proceedings

Where the social work department and/or the police consider that legal proceedings are necessary, there are two types of action which are likely:

- proceedings to consider compulsory measures of supervision of the child under the Children's Hearing system
- criminal proceedings against the alleged abuser.



Court orders

When parents or carers do not co-operate with an investigation, or where the child is considered to be at serious risk, the local social work department may obtain a court order to ensure the child's safety.

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 the local social work department.

As a result of police investigations, legal action may be taken against the 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 other health workers; 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 the social work department or the police.

Re-housing 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 re-housing. 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 re-house your family, re-house the abuser, or re-house the abuse victim.

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

If you are the mother or father 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.

Further help

Citizens Advice Bureau

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.

ChildLine Scotland

Freepost 1111, Glasgow G1 1B

Tel: 0870 336 2910

Freephone: 0800 1111



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

ParentLine Scotland

0808 800 2222

ParentLine Scotland is a free, confidential helpline for parents and carers. It allows people to talk and express their feelings in anonymity, if they wish, and gives callers the opportunity to 'offload' and receive support and information.

Last updated: 28 January 2011

This fact sheet is reviewed on a monthly basis. The law changes frequently. To confirm you are looking at the most up-to-date version, download the fact sheet from www.adviceguide.org.uk or contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Produced by [Citizens Advice Scotland](#) (Scottish charity number SC016637), an operating name of The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. This fact sheet provides general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law.