

The causes of child abuse are multifaceted. Child maltreatment occurs across all socioeconomic, religious, cultural, racial, and ethnic groups ([US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012](#)). Three risk factors are commonly identified in child abuse: (1) parental characteristics, (2) characteristics of the child, and (3) environmental characteristics. However, no single factor or group of factors is predictive of abuse. Rather, the interaction of these factors is thought to increase the risk of abuse occurring in a particular family.

### **Parental Characteristics**

Some identified characteristics occur more frequently in parents who abuse their children and are therefore considered risk factors. Younger parents more often are abusers of their children. Single-parent families are at higher risk for abuse; and in single-parent families that include an unrelated partner, the partner is sometimes the abuser, although a biologic parent is most commonly the perpetrator ([US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012](#)).

Abusive families are often socially isolated and have few supportive relationships. They often have additional stressors, such as low-income circumstances with little education. Parents with substance abuse problems pose a greater risk for abuse and neglect because of a variety of factors. The additional stressors of substance abuse with the demands of normal care of children create situations in which abuse and neglect can occur, because these parents have impaired judgment and may react with violence while under the influence of drugs or alcohol ([Lyden, 2011](#)). With little or no available support system and concurrent stressors imposed by the child or environment, these parents are vulnerable to additional crises of any nature and may strike out at the child as a method of releasing their frustration and anxiety.

Other factors identified in abusive parents include low self-esteem and little knowledge of appropriate parenting skills. Parenting skills are learned behaviors, and parents who grew up with poor parental role models may have difficulty parenting their own children. Often, child abusers were abused or observed some types of abuse in their home ([Lyden, 2011](#)).

### **Characteristics of the Child**