

## Child Protection for International Schools

### Module 3 – Specific Safeguarding Issues

In this module, we will cover specific safeguarding issues and the signs and indicators of them that should alert you to a child who may be in need, or at risk of significant harm.

#### Introduction

In module two we looked in detail at the four main categories of abuse; physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect. Child protection concerns are rarely standalone events that can be covered by one definition or label. In most cases, multiple issues will overlap with one another; a child that is being sexually exploited will experience not only sexual abuse but also experience physical and emotional abuse as well. This module focuses on other safeguarding issues that you should be aware of.

#### Female genital mutilation (FGM)

FGM involves procedures that include the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons. It is also known as “female circumcision” or cutting. The procedure may be carried out when a girl is newborn, during childhood or adolescence, just before marriage or during the first pregnancy. However, most cases are thought to take place between the ages of five and eight, and therefore girls between these ages may be especially vulnerable. It is not required by any religion. UNICEF describes FGM as a violation of girls’ and women’s fundamental rights.

#### Indicators of FGM include:

Girls who are threatened with or have undergone FGM may:

- be withdrawn from education, restricting their educational and personal development
- feel unable to disobey their parents and, as a result, may suffer emotionally
- not turn up for health appointments
- have extended absence from school or college
- go to school or college but absent themselves from lessons, possibly spending prolonged periods in the toilets
- be anxious leading up to holidays
- talk of a ‘special ceremony’
- be generally anxious, depressed or emotionally withdrawn
- have a sudden decline in performance, aspiration or motivation.

#### Forced marriage

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not or cannot consent to marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is an indefensible practice and is recognised in the UK as a form of violence against both men and women.

Forced marriage is different to an arranged marriage, where the families of both prospective spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement rests with both the people involved.

## Indicators of forced marriage:

- anxiety, depression, being emotionally withdrawn
- low self-esteem
- absence from school or permission sought for extended leave
- less commonly, cut or shaved hair as a punishment for disobeying, or a girl may say she has been to a doctor to see if she is a virgin
- showing fear about forthcoming school holidays.
- If you are concerned that the individual is in immediate danger you should call emergency services.

## Honour-based violence/abuse

So-called ‘honour-based’ violence/abuse (HBV) encompasses incidents or crimes which have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or the community. Abuse committed in the context of preserving “honour” often involves a wider network of family or community pressure and can include multiple perpetrators. Honour-based violence can be physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Victims can be of any age, gender or sexual orientation.

Crimes committed in the name of so-called honour may include:

- female genital mutilation (FGM)
- forced marriage
- breast ironing – the use of heated objects to flatten a girl’s breasts and stop them from developing
- domestic abuse
- being held against their will.

All forms of HBV are abuse (regardless of the motivation) and should be handled and escalated as such.

## Child sexual exploitation

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for financial advantage or the increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology”.

Child sexual exploitation can include seemingly consensual relationships or sexual activity in exchange for attention, a place to stay, gifts, money, cigarettes or illegal substances. It can also include serious organised crime. Children often trust their abuser; they may believe they are in a loving, caring relationship. Sexual exploitation is experienced by some children who are trafficked into a country.

## Indicators of child sexual exploitation

In addition to the general signs of sexual abuse discussed in module two, behavioural signs of child sexual exploitation include:

- being absent from school
- possessing unexplained gifts
- having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- alcohol and drug misuse
- mood swings inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

## Extremism/radicalisation

As young people go through a process of testing and developing their identity, they may be particularly vulnerable to being groomed or radicalised, either face-to-face or online.

Staff should be able to identify children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and know what to do when they are identified. Those classed as vulnerable may be targeted by extremists who tell them they can be part of something special, later brainwashing them into cutting themselves off from their friends and family. Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of your wider safeguarding duties.

## Further information

In the UK specified areas of work with children and young people; for example, health, social care, educational settings must have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” and there is a mandatory reporting duty. This duty is known as the Prevent duty and to fulfil it, it is essential that organisations conduct a risk assessment.

The Prevent duty is not mandatory internationally.

## Indicators of extremism/radicalisation include:

- spending an increasing amount of time on the internet (may be secretive or have more than one online identity)
- refusing to listen to different points of view
- becoming increasingly argumentative and abusive to others
- sympathetic to extremist ideologies and groups
- unwilling to engage with other young people who have different ideologies
- feeling persecuted
- changing friends
- changing appearance
- no longer doing things they used to enjoy.

## Domestic abuse/violence

The United Nations defines domestic abuse/ violence or intimate partner violence, as

‘a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner’.

This includes any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships including couples who are married, living together or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels.

The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional.

Domestic abuse can be coercive or controlling behaviour.

Where physical violence is present there is an additional danger to children. Exposure to domestic abuse and/or violence can have a serious, long lasting emotional and psychological impact on children. In some cases, a child may blame themselves for the abuse or may have had to leave the family home as a result.

## Indicators of domestic abuse

All children living with abuse are under stress. That stress may lead to any of the following:

- being withdrawn
- being angry
- being anxious or depressed
- fear of being abandoned
- problems in school
- truancy or poor school attendance
- speech problems, difficulties with learning
- nightmares or poor sleep patterns
- bed-wetting
- drug or alcohol abuse
- self-harm, for example, eating disorders, cutting
- general poor health.

## Online Abuse

Computers, tablets and smartphones give children and young people access to a wealth of information and opportunities for communication. Schools and colleges are increasingly working online, and as such schools should ensure that appropriate filters and monitoring systems are in place. It is also important that children are taught about online safety from an early age.

The breadth of issues classified within online safety is considerable, but can be categorised into three areas of risk:

- **content:** being exposed to illegal, inappropriate or harmful material
- **contact:** being subjected to harmful online interaction with other users

- **conduct:** personal online behaviour that increases the likelihood of, or causes, harm
- **commerce:** risks such as online gambling, inappropriate advertising, phishing and/or financial scams.

## Online risks

Children can be put at risk of:

- seeing inappropriate images
- being groomed
- being the victim of online bullying
- being contacted and manipulated by an adult for sexual purposes
- sharing personal and identifying information with strangers
- sending or receiving sexually explicit films, images or messages of themselves or others (this is known as sexting when sent by mobile phone)
- being radicalised to commit acts of terror.

## Extra information

The Internet Watch Foundation work internationally to help children who are victims of child sexual abuse by identifying and removing online images and videos, it can then lead to the rescue of the child from further abuse. The IWF have a reporting button on their website for anyone who is concerned about an image or video of child sexual abuse.

## Peer-on-peer abuse

Peer-on-peer abuse is experienced by an increasing number of children and young people and there are growing concerns raised by professionals. Peer-on-peer abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse. It can also be coercive control exercised between children and young people within their relationships.

Children and young people can be at risk of:

- harmful sexual behaviour
- serious youth violence
- domestic abuse
- child sexual exploitation.

Peer-on-peer abuse is likely to include, but may not be limited to:

- bullying
- gender-based violence
- sexual assaults
- sexting
- coercive control
- initiation ceremony also known as hazing
- upskirting.

## Indicators of peer-on-peer abuse

A child or young person may:

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- miss school or college
- truant from lessons
- be withdrawn
- experience break down of family relationships
- be anxious
- be aggressive or argumentative
- self-harm
- become involved in alcohol or substance misuse.

To help prevent peer-on-peer abuse and understand how to respond to it all staff should be clear on the school's policy and procedures.

Schools should adopt a contextual safeguarding approach. This means considering the location and culture of your school and assessing the risks that young people may be exposed to, both inside and outside of the school or college community.

## Sexual violence and sexual harassment

Sexual violence and sexual harassment can occur between two children of any sex. It can also occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children. Sexual violence and harassment can occur face-to-face, online, physically or verbally. It should not be seen as 'banter', 'part of growing up' or 'just having a laugh'

## Child trafficking and modern slavery

Child trafficking is a very serious issue which can have a devastating and lasting impact on its victims. The international definition of trafficking comes from the United Nations Palermo Protocol (2000). This defines trafficking as:

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

The Palermo Protocol makes it clear that a child cannot consent to being exploited and so the issue of coercion is irrelevant. All that is required to recognise a child as a victim of human trafficking is movement and exploitation.

Children are trafficked for many reasons including:

- sexual exploitation
- domestic servitude
- forced labour
- child labour
- benefit fraud
- criminal activity such as pickpocketing, theft and working in cannabis farms
- working in the sex industry
- forced begging

- organ harvesting
- forced marriage and illegal adoption.

## Fabricated or induced illness

Fabricated or induced illness (FII, also known as Munchausen's syndrome by proxy) is a rare form of child abuse. It occurs when a parent or carer exaggerates or deliberately causes symptoms of illness in the child. According to the British NHS, fabricated or induced illness can involve children of all ages, but the most severe cases are usually associated with children under five.

In more than 90% of reported cases of FII, the child's mother is responsible for the abuse. However, there have been cases where the father, foster parent, grandparent, guardian, or a healthcare or childcare professional was responsible.

Behaviour signs exhibited by a parent that may be associated with FII may include:

- claiming the child has symptoms which are unverifiable, such as pain
- exaggerating symptoms
- interfering with treatments; for example, not administering or overdosing medication
- deliberately inducing symptoms.

## Children missing from education

A child going missing from education is a potential indicator of abuse or neglect, including the risk of sexual exploitation, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and travelling to conflict zones.

School staff should follow the school's procedures for unauthorised absence and for dealing with children that go missing from education, particularly on repeat occasions. Where possible schools should hold more than one emergency contact number for each pupil. This will help to identify any risk of abuse and neglect and help to prevent them going missing in future.

## Breast ironing/flattening

This is the practice where a pubescent girl's breasts are ironed, massaged and flattened in order to delay the development of the breasts. The process normally starts at the first sign of puberty and can go on for many years. Breast ironing is a form of physical abuse.

## Faltering growth

Neglect may result in a child being diagnosed as suffering from 'faltering growth', also known as 'failure to thrive'. It means inadequate weight gain and physical growth compared with other children of a similar age and sex during early childhood. It can also be applied to children who have otherwise been reaching their expected rate of growth, but then the rate of growth is suddenly interrupted by a period where they fail to gain weight or even lose weight. The term is more often applied to young children, and especially babies, rather than older children.

Faltering growth needs to be diagnosed by a medical or health practitioner who understands normal growth and variation.

As well as the behavioural and physical signs of neglect a child may also:

- not attain significant developmental milestones
- have low body-fat ratio
- be dehydrated
- have normal growth which is interrupted by a period of failing to gain weight or even losing weight
- appear listless or undemanding
- not show any interest in surroundings and is unresponsive to stimulation
- have little or no movement (lies motionless in their bed or cot).

## Babies and very young children

Babies and very young children do not have the words to describe experiences of abuse.

With babies, you should be alert to physical and behavioural signs of abuse and in addition, with young children you can look at their play behaviour and their paintings and drawings. Ask yourself whether they portray images that should be beyond the knowledge of a child of that age.

Where a child has not spoken about abuse to you, but their injuries or behaviour give you cause for concern, you must discuss your concerns with your organisation's safeguarding lead or your manager.

## Summary

This module has looked at other types of abuse that children and young people may be subjected to. In most cases a child or young person will be subjected to more than one type of abuse. It is important to consider both the physical and behavioural signs, in conjunction with your knowledge about the child over time. You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire.