

## Child Protection for International Schools

### Module 2 – Categories of Child Abuse

In this module we will cover:

- what is child abuse?
- the four main types of child abuse
- the prevalence of abuse
- the physical and behavioural signs of abuse
- the effects of child abuse
- myths about child abuse.

#### What is child abuse?

Child abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child or young person. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional, education or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others unknown to them (eg via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

Children who have been abused can experience serious and potentially devastating long-lasting effects that can continue into adulthood.

#### Types of child abuse

There are four main types of child abuse.

Child abuse can be:

- physical
- sexual
- emotional
- neglectful behaviour towards a child.

Child abuse can and does happen to children from any background, culture, class, ethnicity or faith. It is important that people working with children and young people know how to spot abuse and neglect and know what to do if they have concerns. Children and young people generally do not tell others about abuse and neglect directly but may signal indirectly via their emotional states and behaviour.

#### Prevalence of abuse

The World Health Organization estimates that a quarter of all adults have been physically abused as children. One in five women and one in thirteen men report having been sexually abused as a child. They also estimate that there are 41,000 homicide deaths in children under 15 years of age every year, though this is an underestimation as child maltreatment may be incorrectly reported as falls, burns, drowning and other causes.

Children and young people who have been referred to support services, however, are just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more children who experience abuse or neglect who do not come to the notice of people who can help them. Abusers can go to great lengths to conceal their abuse.

You can play your part in helping to protect children by being aware that abuse exists and being prepared to act should you suspect abuse. When considering the possibility of abuse, it is important to evaluate what you know about the child then consider both the physical and behavioural signs that are giving you cause for concern.

Both the physical and behavioural signs are important because by themselves individual signs do not necessarily indicate abuse or neglect. Children and young people may communicate their abuse or neglect indirectly through their behaviour and appearance.

You should reflect on what you know about the child and their behaviour over time. Consider whether what you are seeing, or hearing is out of the norm for them.

### Forms of abuse

The following signs of abuse are not exhaustive and remember that a child may be experiencing more than one type of harm; for example, emotional abuse and neglect.

#### Physical abuse

Physical abuse may involve:

- hitting
- shaking
- throwing
- drowning
- burning or scalding
- poisoning
- suffocating
- 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. It can also include inappropriate use of restraint.

#### *Possible signs of physical abuse*

Children often get bumps and bruises during their everyday play or social interaction, but it doesn't mean that they are being abused. All injuries need to be considered in the light of the age of the child, their stage of development, their social background, where injuries are on their body and any explanation given.

#### Physical signs may include:

- finger mark bruising on any area of the body where bruises are unlikely to appear in everyday play

- presence of injuries that are in several stages of healing suggesting that a child has experienced repeated maltreatment over time
- injuries to the soles of the feet
- bald patches on a child's head
- injuries that form a shape or pattern
- scald marks and burning, including cigarette marks
- black eyes, broken bones, bite marks
- marks that might indicate a child has been restrained or strangled
- injuries that are inconsistent with the explanation given
- bruising to babies that are immobile because they are yet to reach the developmental milestone where they can sit without support, roll over, crawl or shuffle.

## Behavioural signs may include:

- flinching when touched
- inability to recall how injuries occurred
- avoiding getting changed for sport or other activities
- wearing trousers and shirts or blouses with long sleeves even on hot sunny days, although remember to consider this in the light of the individual child (eg some children are dressed modestly for religious and/or cultural reasons)
- reluctance to go home
- excessively eager to please
- being aggressive or withdrawn
- attempts to run away
- being sad, frequently crying
- drug and/or alcohol misuse
- behaviour that is not consistent with a child's stage of development.

## Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves someone forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. This may not necessarily involve a high level of violence and the child may or may not be aware of what is happening.

Research shows that many children and young people who are sexually abused do not tell anyone about their abuse. In fact, many children who are sexually abused by a carer will have no visible signs at all, due to the attacker not wanting to leave evidence, amongst many other reasons in the grooming process.

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Though less common, women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. Sexual abuse and sexual harassment can also occur between children of any sex. They can occur through a group of children sexually assaulting or sexually harassing a single child or group of children.

Sexually harmful behaviour from young people is not always contrived or with the intent to harm others. There may be many reasons why a young person engages in sexually harmful behaviour and both the instigator and the person it is intended towards may find it equally distressing.

Sexual activities may involve physical contact, including:

- assault by penetration

- non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing.

It may also include non-contact activities, such as:

- watching sexual activities
- encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways
- inappropriate role play
- involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images
- grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet)

## *Possible signs of sexual abuse*

### *Physical signs include:*

- stomach pains
- genital soreness, bleeding or discharge
- recurring genital-urinary infections
- discomfort in walking or sitting
- sexually transmitted infections.

### *Behavioural signs may include:*

- a change in behaviour
- not wanting to undress for physical education or sporting activities
- sexual knowledge, language and behaviours beyond their age
- self-harming
- fear or avoidance of being with a person or a group of people
- being withdrawn
- unexplained amounts of money
- disturbed sleep
- sexualised drawings
- change in handwriting
- going missing from school
- being picked up from school by taxis or cars by people who are not known to be the child's family.

Transnational sex offenders move across different countries to abuse children. Often offenders go to countries where their movements are difficult to track, or child protection systems are seen to be weak. Investigations must take place over many countries, and national crime agencies have to collaborate and share information, a process that can take many years.

In 2017, a 70-year-old former teacher was found guilty of multiple charges, including the sexual abuse of pupils in a UK school in the 1980's and 1990's. He pleaded guilty to 22 other charges relating to the sexual abuse of children in Thailand between 2009 and 2012. The arrest took place after an extensive coordinated response by Europol and the UK.

**Further information** – Europol is the European Union's law enforcement agency. Schools can help reduce risk by ensuring appropriate pre-employment checks have been carried out, such as the International Child Protection Certificate.

## Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe adverse effects on the child's health and emotional development. It is sometimes referred to as psychological abuse.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may also occur alone.

Emotional abuse may involve:

- conveying to a child they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only because they meet the needs of another person
- not giving the child the opportunities to express their views
- deliberately silencing them or making fun of what they say or how they communicate
- age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on the child
- rejecting or ignoring a child completely
- using degrading language or behaviours towards them
- preventing the child from interacting socially with other children or adults
- experiences of bullying
- a child seeing or hearing the ill treatment or serious bullying (including cyberbullying) of another
- causing children to feel frequently frightened or in danger
- the exploitation or corruption of children.

Emotional abuse also includes radicalising a child or young person who may be subsequently drawn into terrorist-related activity. Young people may also experience emotional abuse through their peers. Peer-on- peer abuse can be face-to-face or online, by an individual or by a group.

### *Possible signs of emotional abuse*

Physical signs may include:

- self-harm marks
- erratic weight or growth patterns
- delayed development, either physically or emotionally
- erratic behaviour.

Behavioural signs may include:

- difficulty in forming relationships
- inappropriate attention-seeking
- being withdrawn
- unexplained underachievement at school
- self-harming
- bed-wetting
- disturbed sleep.

Sally, aged 14, had taken it very badly when her parents split up, but now her mother had met someone else who had moved in with them. The man displayed very controlling behaviour; he liked the house kept immaculate and set out strict rules for acceptable behaviour. He also had firm guidelines about what was expected from Sally to achieve success both with homework and her overall performance at school. Sally became withdrawn and this led to problems with friends who disowned her one by one. Previously very bright and willing to learn, Sally let her school work slip and a concerned teacher who noticed the change talked to her about it. Sally disclosed that her step-father told her she was 'thick' and 'worthless' and didn't deserve to be a member of their family. Sally knew that whatever she did, it would never be enough, so she stopped trying altogether.

## Neglect

Neglect is 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 because of maternal substance misuse.

Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing or shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical or emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
- respond to a child's basic emotional needs.

A child who is neglected will often be subjected to other forms of abuse.

Children and young people can also be subjected to neglect by the people that are employed to look after them; for example, au pairs, nannies, chauffeurs. Children and young people may not get the care and attention they need or be adequately supervised or protected from emotional harm.

In an international setting there may also be language barriers between children and young people and the people employed to look after them.

### *Possible signs of neglect*

#### Physical signs may include:

- unattended medical or dental problems
- lack of energy due to inadequate food intake and/or poor nutrition
- poor personal hygiene/unwashed clothing
- inadequate clothing (not having warm clothes in winter)
- untreated skin or hair problems (rashes, sores, flea bites, head lice)
- very thin or swollen stomach
- constantly hungry
- lack of muscle tone (bones appearing to stick out)
- constant tiredness.

Behavioural signs may include:

- demanding constant attention and affection
- difficulty in making friends
- missing or irregularly attending school or nursery
- frequent lateness
- stealing or begging food from others
- emotional withdrawal
- lack of aspirations
- low self esteem
- poor social relationships
- alcohol or substance misuse
- developmental delay (weight, language, social skills).

## The effects of abuse

Child abuse causes suffering to children and families and can have long-term consequences. Abuse affects children deeply as they grow up and the feelings of being 'useless', 'worthless' or 'damaged goods' are often carried over into adult life.

Children who have experienced abuse and adults who have been abused in childhood may suffer from problems around:

- behaviour
- attainment
- mental health
- relationships
- substance misuse (drugs and alcohol) and self-harm
- physical brain development leading to a host of serious problems as children grow (caused by neglect).

They may also develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is the name given to the psychological and physical problems that can sometimes follow threatening or distressing events. The trauma can be a single event or a series of events taking place over many months or even years. PTSD can develop in childhood or in adulthood. Some people may develop PTSD months or even years after the abuse has taken place. One of the most common symptoms of PTSD is having repeated and intrusive distressing memories of the event. There may also be a feeling of reliving the event through 'flashbacks' or nightmares. There can also be physical reactions, such as shaking and sweating.

## Myths about child abuse

**Myth: Neglect is just as damaging as the other types of abuse.**

**True:** Some people mistakenly think that if abuse is not violent or sexual in nature, it is not as bad. However, emotional abuse and neglect can be just as damaging and because they can be difficult to identify and other people are less likely to intervene.

**Myth: Children who have been abused hate their parents and want to get away from them.**

**False:** Most children who have been abused by their parents still have a strong attachment or love for their parents and want to remain living with them. What they really want is for the abuse to stop.

**Myth: Children don't normally say they are being abused.**

**True:** Abusers can be very effective in making children too fearful to talk about what is going on. Often children do not have the words to use to let someone know what is happening to them. We are more likely to identify children who are being abused through physical signs or their behaviour.

**Myth: If the child doesn't tell someone about the abuse taking place, it cannot be that serious.**

**False:** It is difficult for children and young people to tell someone about the abuse and neglect that is happening; this is why it is important to understand behaviours and physical signs.

## Summary

In this module, you have learned what child abuse is and the four main types of abuse. You have also learned about the possible physical and behavioural signs for physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect.

The consequences of abuse in childhood can impact the individual in many negative ways in later life. With this in mind, it is important that everyone who works with children and young people understand how to recognise signs of possible abuse.

You are now ready to complete the corresponding questionnaire.