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Child neglect and emotional abuse

Neglect and emotional abuse can cause a child a lot of harm. It is often hard to see or prove this kind of abuse, so other people may be unlikely to help the child. When a child is being physically or sexually abused, emotional abuse is also often happening to the child.

Symptoms

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

These are examples of emotional abuse:

- Not providing the child with a safe environment. The child witnesses violence or severe abuse between parents or adults.
- Threatening the child with violence or abandonment.
- Constantly criticizing or blaming the child for problems.
- The child's parent or caregiver does not show concern for the child, and refuses help from others for the child.

These are signs that a child may be emotionally abused. They may have any of the following:

- Problems in school
- Eating disorders, leading to weight loss or poor weight gain
- Emotional issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety
- Extreme behavior such as acting out, trying hard to please, aggressiveness
- Trouble sleeping
- Vague physical complaints

CHILD NEGLECT

These are examples of child neglect:

- Rejecting the child and not giving the child any love.
- Not feeding the child.
- Not dressing the child in proper clothing.
- Not giving needed medical or dental care.

- Leaving a child alone for a long time. This is called abandonment.

These are signs that a child may be neglected. The child may:

- Not go to school regularly
- Smell bad or be dirty
- Tell you that there is no one at home to take care of them
- Be depressed, show bizarre behavior, or use alcohol or illicit drugs

Treatment

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

If you think a child is being abused, contact a health care provider, the police, or child protective services in your city, county or state.

- Call 911 or the local emergency number for any child in immediate danger because of abuse or neglect.
- You can also call Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453). Crisis counselors are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Interpreters are available to help in 170 languages. The counselor on the phone can help you figure out what steps to take next. All calls are anonymous and confidential.

Counseling and support groups are available for children and for abusive parents who want to get help.

Outlook (Prognosis)

The long-term outcome depends on:

- How severe the abuse was
- How long the child was abused
- The success of therapy and parenting classes

Alternative Names

Neglect - child; Emotional abuse - child

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Review Date 10/20/2024

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Health Content
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06/01/2028

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