

# Worried about a child?

How you can protect children from abuse





## Child protection isn't just for the professionals

### There is something you can do

If you have concerns, it can be difficult to know what to do for the best. There may be good reasons for how the child seems. Maybe you don't want to annoy your neighbours or make matters worse for the child.

You may be worried that the family might be split up and the children put in care (although this rarely happens). You may think the problem will resolve itself on its own. You may not know where to go for help.

Sometimes it feels easier to do nothing, but please don't. It's important that you trust your judgement and take action.

### Every action counts

Together we can stop cruelty to children. All of us must be ready to act. This booklet provides advice on what to do. However, it can't cover every aspect of child abuse. If you still have concerns, please contact the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline for free 24-hour advice.

### Why we all need to help protect children

Every 10 days a child is killed at the hands of their parents or carers. Thousands more suffer serious harm at the hands of those who are supposed to be caring for them. We know that, in a large proportion of cases, the child abuse goes unreported at the time and many children are forced to suffer in silence.

## What is cruelty to children?

Cruelty to children or child abuse is behaviour that causes significant harm to a child. It also includes when someone knowingly fails to prevent serious harm to a child.

All forms of cruelty are damaging and it can be harder to recover from the emotional impact than the physical effects. Only a small minority of cases of child abuse involves a total stranger.

It is far more likely to be carried out by someone known to the child or family – even someone close who you'd expect to trust, such as a parent, another relative or a family friend.

Abuse happens in all walks of life, but children growing up in a violent home or one where parents misuse drugs or alcohol are particularly at risk.



## The types of cruelty

**Physical abuse:** including hurting or injuring a child, inflicting pain, poisoning, drowning or smothering.

**Sexual abuse:** including direct or indirect sexual exploitation or corruption of children by involving them in inappropriate sexual activities.

**Emotional abuse:** repeatedly rejecting children, humiliating them or denying their worth and rights as human beings.

**Neglect:** the persistent lack of appropriate care of children, including love, stimulation, safety, nourishment, warmth, education and medical attention.

A child who is being abused may experience more than one type of cruelty.

Discrimination, harassment and bullying are also abusive, and can harm a child, both physically and emotionally. Bullying includes hitting or kicking, taking or damaging somebody's things, being threatening or making someone do things they don't want to, ignoring or deliberately leaving someone out of things, sending nasty text and email messages, name-calling and making racist or homophobic comments.



## What you can do

### How you can help to stop it

Try to understand the seriousness and consequences of child abuse. Learn to recognise the signs of abuse, such as:

- bruises or burns in unusual places
- significantly changed behaviour, such as aggression or becoming withdrawn or uninterested in anything
- unexplained or changeable emotions, such as depression or worry
- sudden loss of weight
- becoming unusually dirty, smelly or hungry
- appearing under (or over) dressed
- sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for the child's age
- fear of particular adults or reluctance to be alone with them.

These are not the only signs to look for, and some may not be caused by abuse. Some effects of abuse are so well hidden that only someone with the right training could uncover them. What is important is that you trust your judgement and take action if you are worried about a child.

Be someone to turn to for a child. If a child tells you that they are being abused, make it

clear to them that you take what they have told you very seriously and that you are going to help them.

Support a friend or family member who is struggling to cope with the stresses of parenting. You can:

- offer a listening ear – sometimes a chance to talk may be all that is needed to relieve some stress
- offer practical help like caring for the children or doing the shopping
- help parents to find and access support or a service that they need in their local community.

Trust your judgement when in doubt. If you have serious concerns about the welfare of a child, contact social services (social work services in Scotland), the police or the free 24-hour NSPCC Child Protection Helpline.

You can also contact the free 24-hour NSPCC Child Protection Helpline anonymously if you are worried, don't know what to do and need advice. If action needs to be taken to support a family or protect a child, we can act on your behalf. Don't wait to be absolutely sure that abuse is happening – for the child, this may be too late.

## Parents can...

- Learn about healthy child development and how to build strong families.
- Listen to children – try to understand what they're saying and doing, and why. Taking the time to listen to your child means they will feel better about themselves and be more likely to come to you with problems.
- Know what goes on in your children's school and how it responds to issues of child abuse and bullying.
- Find someone to turn to if you're under stress – all parents become stressed from time to time.
- Take time out – mums and dads have needs too, so take a break if things are

getting stressful. For example, you could ask a friend or family member to baby-sit.

- Don't cross the line and hurt your children. Take alternative actions, such as "count to 10 and think again".
- If you find being a parent tough to handle, contact Parentline Plus if you live in England or Wales, the Parents Advice Centre if you live in Northern Ireland, or ParentLine Scotland if you live in Scotland.
- Seek child protection help and advice. If you're concerned about your children's safety, contact the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline, social services (social work services in Scotland) or the police.

## “You can help to transform the protection of children and cut the amount of abuse they suffer.”

## What children and young people need to know

Children and young people need to know how to keep themselves safe, both inside and outside of the home. From the age of two or three, children should be taught to remember their full name, address and phone number. They should also learn simple personal safety rules, such as:

- Always ask your parent or carer before going off with anyone.
- You need never do anything that you don't want to with an adult or older child, even if you know them.

Children should know how to support a friend who tells them they are being abused, such as by listening and encouraging the friend to

tell a trusted adult and get help.

Children need to understand that being abused is never their choice and never their fault. Child abuse is never right.

Children should learn to tell an adult they trust or teacher about abuse, either abuse to themselves or someone they know. They can also contact ChildLine (the UK's free and confidential helpline for children and young people) on: **0800 1111** or visit: **www.there4me.com** (the NSPCC's online help service for children aged 12–16).

Children can talk to ChildLine confidentially about any worries they may have at any time.



## What to do if you're concerned about a child

### Consider taking one of these steps:

- If you feel able, ask the parent or carer what is happening.
- Talk your concerns through with a friend.
- If the family is under stress, offer the parents help – a chance to talk may be all that's needed. You could offer them a break, so they can try to sort things out. Volunteer to baby-sit. Offer practical help, such as caring for the children or shopping.
- Suggest the parents seek help – encourage them to contact a health visitor, their doctor, a social worker or a voluntary agency that supports families, such as Home-Start. The NSPCC Child Protection Helpline offers advice on child protection. Parentline Plus offers parenting advice for

parents in England and Wales, and ParentLine Scotland supports parents north of the border. Parents in Northern Ireland can contact the Parents Advice Centre

- Raise your concerns with other agencies that may be able to help, such as social services (social work services in Scotland), the NSPCC, CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup> or the police.
- In some cases, such as if you see a child being violently treated, it's better to intervene directly – taking care not to put yourself in unnecessary danger.
- Remember, there may be more than one child being harmed.
- Don't give up.

**Don't keep it to yourself – do something.**

## Where to go for help

### NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Helpline: **0808 800 5000** (24 hour)  
Textphone for deaf and hard of hearing people: **0800 056 0566**  
Email: **help@nspcc.org.uk**  
Website: **www.nspcc.org.uk**

### NSPCC Asian Child Protection Helpline

Helpline: **0800 096 7719** (Mon–Fri 11am–7pm)

### NSPCC Cymru/Wales Child Protection Helpline

Helpline: **0808 100 2524** (Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, bilingual Welsh/English service)

If you have concerns about a child, call the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline, a free 24-hour service that provides advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse. You can call anonymously.

### ChildLine

Helpline: **0800 1111**  
Website: **www.childline.org.uk**  
Address: **ChildLine, Freepost 1111, London N1 0BR**  
ChildLine provides a free, confidential, UK-wide phone counselling service for any child with any problem, 24 hours a day, every day. Children and young people can also write to ChildLine using the Freepost address.

### Home-Start

Helpline: **0800 068 63 68**  
Website: **www.home-start.org.uk**  
Home-Start recruits and trains volunteers to support parents with young children at home, across the whole of the UK.

### National Child Protection Helpline (Scotland)

Helpline: **0800 022 3222**  
The helpline provides information to the public about what steps to take if they are concerned about a child and may be contacted 24 hours a day.

### Parents Advice Centre (Northern Ireland)

Helpline: **0808 8010 722**  
Website: **www.parentsadvicecentre.org**  
The centre provides help, support and guidance to parents on any family problem. The service is available in Northern Ireland.

### Parentline Plus

Helpline: **0808 800 2222**  
Textphone: **0800 783 6783**  
Website: **www.parentlineplus.org.uk**  
Parentline is the free, confidential helpline for anyone in a parenting role in England and Wales, including step-parents and those experiencing family change, and is run by Parentline Plus.

### ParentLine Scotland

Helpline: **0808 800 2222**  
(Mon, Wed and Fri 9am–5pm; Tue and Thu 9am–9pm)  
Website: **www.children1st.org.uk/parentline**  
ParentLine Scotland is the free, confidential helpline for anyone caring for a child in Scotland or run by CHILDREN 1<sup>ST</sup>.

### Social services (social work services in Scotland)

Local authorities and the Health and Social Services Trusts in Northern Ireland are generally responsible for taking action to promote the welfare of children and for trying to keep them with their family. They can arrange for families to receive support. They also have a duty to inquire into concerns when a child may have been abused.

You will find details of your local authority, council or trust at: **www.directgov.org.uk** or in your local telephone directory. Alternatively, try your local library, a telephone helpline service or the Citizens Advice Bureau at: **www.cab.org.uk**

**In an emergency (eg, if you can see a child being abused), call the police on 999.**

### NSPCC Publications

For a free pack of our parenting publications, please send an SAE with £1.70 in stamps to:  
**Parenting Pack, NSPCC Publications, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH**

For further copies of this booklet or a catalogue of all our publications, please contact:

**NSPCC Publications, Weston House, 42 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3NH**

Tel: **020 7825 7422**

Email: **publications@nspcc.org.uk**

Fax: **020 7825 2763**

Website: **www.nspcc.org.uk/inform**

**ParentLine Scotland** also has a free range of leaflets offering advice to parents, which can be downloaded from **www.children1st.org.uk/parentline**

# Are you worried about the safety of a child?

**Do you know a child that's always bruised?**

Do you know a child that's neglected or withdrawn?

**Do you hear a baby crying constantly?**

**Do you know a child that is left alone, dirty, hungry or inadequately dressed?**

Do you know a stressed parent who cannot cope?

**Do you know a child that is constantly "put down", insulted, sworn at or humiliated?**

Every action counts. If you have concerns, there is someone who will listen.

**Don't keep it to yourself – do something.**

**NSPCC**   
**CHILD PROTECTION**  
**HELPLINE**  
**0808 800 5000**