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CHILD PROTECTION AWARENESS PROGRAMME

INFORMATION PROCEDURE POLICY

Latest research from UNICEF reports two children die from abuse in Britain every week. 80% of abusers are the children's biological parents.

In 2017 the names of 53,770 children in England and Wales were registered on the Child Protection Registers because they suffered abuse or because they were at risk of abuse. These situations were reported by people who care; by teachers, health professionals, voluntary workers, friends, family or neighbours.

Sadly, there are many more children whose plights go unnoticed. Nacoa takes care to ensure that staff and volunteers understand about abuse and why and when it may be appropriate to alert the authorities to the fact that a child or young person is suffering.

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WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

The term 'child abuse' is used to describe a range of ways in which people, usually adults, harm children. Often the adult is a person who is known and trusted by the child or young person.

The words 'child' or 'children' within this report should be taken to mean children and young people up to the age of sixteen.

Child abuse is neglect, physical injury, sexual abuse or emotional abuse inflicted or knowingly not prevented, which causes significant harm or death. It can be inflicted or knowingly not prevented by the person who cares for the child, a person known to the child who is not the carer or by someone not known to the child. In many cases, children are subjected to a combination of forms of abuse, e.g. neglect and emotional abuse.

Child abuse can take place in the home, at school or anywhere where children spend their time. Some forms of abuse are obvious, for example when an adult strikes out at a child in anger but others are much more difficult for outsiders to detect. While some forms of abuse are a result of someone carrying out an action that harms the child, other forms of abuse are a result of neglect, of failing to take steps that keep children safe and well.

Physical Abuse

Each year an estimated 150,000 children are physically abused.

Physical abuse takes place when someone:

- Physically hurts or injures a child by hitting, shaking, squeezing, burning, biting or attempting to drown or suffocate them
- Harms a child by giving the child alcohol, inappropriate drugs or poison
- Fails to prevent physical injury or suffering, e.g. not putting up a fireguard

This is not to say that whenever an injury is caused to a child, it must be a case of physical abuse. An adult or older child might inflict an injury on a child by accident, for example whilst playing football. What matters is whether the child was knowingly put at risk or whether the parent paid reasonable attention to their child's safety.

Sexual Abuse

Each year an estimated 100,000 children have a potentially harmful sexual experience. This occurs when an adult exploits their power, authority or position and uses a child sexually to gratify their own needs. Both boys and girls are sexually abused and it can begin with babies who are only a few months old.

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Sexual abuse can take a number of forms, including:

- Enticing or forcing a child to engage in fondling, masturbation, oral or anal intercourse or full sexual intercourse
- Making a child observe inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Showing a child pornographic books, videos or photographs or engaging them in inappropriate discussion about sexual matters

It is, for example, sexually abusive for adults to allow, or force, a child to watch them having sex, or to leave sexually explicit material where a child is likely to come across it.

Emotional Abuse

This area can be harder to classify than the previous two forms of abuse. Emotional abuse is persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection that has, or is likely to have, a serious effect on the child's development.

Emotional abuse includes the following:

- Persistently withholding love and affection which are essential to a child's natural emotional development
- Constantly shouting at, threatening, or demeaning the child
- Persistently being over-protective to the extent that the child is not allowed to mix with others
- Racial or other forms of harassment that undermine a child's self-esteem and prevent the child developing a positive self-image

Neglect

To develop into healthy and independent adults, all children need to have adequate food, health care and education.

Children can suffer from neglect when:

- Any of their basic needs are not being met. This could include having an inadequate diet, being denied proper health care or being inadequately dressed
- They are left unsupervised in situations which represent possible dangers, whether at home or elsewhere
- They are left alone at an age when it is inappropriate for their physical or emotional development

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WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE?

The effects of cruelty to children are wide-ranging and profound. They vary according to the type of abuse, and how long it has been endured, but can include:

- Behavioural problems
- Educational problems
- Mental health problems
- Relationship difficulties
- Drug and alcohol problems
- Suicide or other forms of self-harm
- In extreme cases, death following abuse

Many survivors comment that the emotional consequences are far more severe than the physical effects of abuse. One survivor described the consequences of abuse:

“Today I live with rage and sadness that rules my life. I feel I shall never be a whole human being.”

Many children of alcoholics who suffer abuse tell us that if we knew who they really were, we would loathe them. Deep-seated shame is often the result of abuse.

Many abused children become withdrawn, introverted and depressed, making it harder for outsiders to help. Children who have been abused often suffer from low self-esteem. When adults or other children treat them as though they are worthless, they begin to believe they are worthless, and believing that they cannot be helped, they withdraw into their own isolated world. The effects of abuse are long lasting and sadly many victims of abuse also endure a sense of guilt, believing that they themselves caused the abuse to take place.

Fortunately, children who are abused can be helped. What is vital is that everyone who works with children, whether on a paid or voluntary basis, is equipped to recognise the signs of child abuse from the earliest opportunity, so that the harm can be stopped and the damage can start to be repaired.

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IDENTIFYING POSSIBLE SIGNS OF ABUSE

Even experienced professionals working in child protection do not always find it easy to recognise the signs of abuse. When your suspicions have been alerted, your first reaction may be shock, anger or disbelief. You may also feel unhappy about reporting a case if you fear there may be an innocent explanation after all.

Remember, however, that it is your responsibility to act on your concerns by passing them on to the helpline Supervisor or Chief Executive, so action can be taken if necessary.

In considering whether a child is suffering some form of abuse, you should look at two areas: physical signs and behavioural signs. In our work here, communicating via the telephone helpline, the physical and behavioural signs can often be found in the tone and manner of speaking and changes in the way they relate to you. Your knowledge of a child or young person over time will be a valuable aid in assessing whether a change in behaviour is significant, and you should not ignore what your judgement is telling you. If a child or young person is showing several of the signs listed below, there is a possibility that abuse is taking place.

Neglect

Neglect is a very difficult form of child abuse to recognise. It is often seen as less serious than other forms of abuse, but its effects can be very damaging. Children who are neglected often develop more slowly than others and find it hard to make friends and “fit in” with their peer group.

Physical signs to look or listen out for:

- Being constantly hungry and sometimes stealing food from others
- Being in an unkempt state; frequently dirty or smelly
- Loss of weight or being constantly underweight
- Being dressed inappropriately for the weather conditions
- Untreated medical conditions – not receiving medical treatment for illnesses or injuries

Behaviour signs to look or listen out for:

- Being tired all the time
- Frequently missing school or being late
- Failing to keep hospital or medical appointments

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- Having few friends
- Being left alone or unsupervised on a regular basis
- Compulsive stealing or scavenging, especially of food

Physical Abuse

Most children collect cuts and bruises quite routinely, as part of the rough and tumble of daily life. This makes it difficult to spot those cuts and bruises that are not accidental. Physical abuse may have occurred when the injuries fall into one or more of the following categories:

Physical signs to look or listen out for:

- Injuries which the child cannot explain, or explains unconvincingly
- Injuries which have not been treated or treated inadequately
- Injuries on parts of the body where accidental injury is unlikely, such as the cheeks, chest or thighs
- Bruising which reflects hand or finger marks
- Cigarette burns, human bite marks
- Broken bones (particularly in children under the age of two)
- Scalds, especially those with upward splash marks where hot water has been deliberately thrown over the child, or "tide marks" – rings on the child's arms, legs or body where the child has been made to sit or stand in very hot water

Behavioural signs to look or listen out for:

- A child is reluctant to have their parents contacted
- Aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts
- A child who runs away or shows fear of going home
- Reluctance to get undressed for sporting or other activities where changing into other clothes is normal
- Covering arms and legs even when hot

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- Depression or moods which are out of character with the child's general behaviour
- Unnaturally compliant to parents or carers.

Sexual Abuse

Both girls and boys can be victims of sexual abuse and several factors combine to make abuse difficult to identify. Most acts of abuse (but not all) are likely to happen in private and child abusers go to incredible lengths to prevent discovery. The child is often threatened to keep silent and many children feel such a strong sense of guilt and shame that they are reluctant to speak about what has happened to them.

Nevertheless, there are some clues to sexual abuse:

Physical signs to look or listen out for:

- Pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in the genital or anal areas
- Any sexually transmitted disease
- Recurrent genital discharge or urinary tract infections without apparent cause
- Stomach pains or discomfort when the child is walking or sitting down

Behavioural signs to look or listen out for:

- Sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour
- An apparent fear of someone
- Running away from home
- Nightmares or bedwetting
- Self-harm, self-mutilation or attempts at suicide
- Abuse of drugs or other substances
- Eating problems such as anorexia or bulimia
- Sexualised behaviour or knowledge in young children
- Sexual drawings or language

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- Possession of unexplained amounts of money
- The child taking a parental role at home and functioning beyond their age level
- The child not being allowed to have friends (particularly in adolescence);
- Alluding to secrets which they cannot reveal;
- Telling other children or adults about the abuse.

Emotional Abuse

As with sexual abuse, emotional abuse is hard to identify with certainty. Some children are by nature shy and find it difficult to be outgoing and confident, and this does not mean that they are being abused. You should look out for the following:

Physical signs to look or listen out for:

- A failure to grow or to thrive (particularly if the child thrives when away from home)
- Sudden speech disorders
- Delayed development, either physical or emotional

Behavioural signs to look or listen out for:

- Compulsive nervous behaviour such as hair twisting or rocking
- An unwillingness or inability to play
- An excessive fear of making mistakes
- Self-harm or mutilation
- Reluctance to have parents contacted
- An excessive deference towards others, especially adults
- An excessive lack of confidence
- An excessive need for approval, attention and affection
- An inability to cope with praise

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HOW TO RESPOND

The above signs may not be apparent over a telephone line, although so many things are communicated through voice, intonation and the change in the style of reporting as well as direct reporting changes in behaviour. It can take a great deal of courage for a child or young person to talk to someone about their abuse, because they are “telling on” someone who is more powerful than they are. The child or young person learns to be very good at covering up the abuse and is able to give plausible explanations for what has happened. They may feel they are betraying e having to betray a person who is not only close to them, but also loved by them and they are risking a great deal in the hope that you will believe what they say.

Some helpful responses:

- Remain calm, accessible and receptive
- Listen carefully, without interrupting
- Be aware of your own non-verbal messages
- Make it clear that you are taking the caller seriously
- Acknowledge their courage and reassure them that they are right to tell
- Reassure the caller that they need not feel guilty, that you're sorry that this has happened to them
- Let them know that you are going to do everything you can to help and what may happen as a result
- Make a note of what was said. Use the child or young person's actual words wherever possible

Working with suspicions and concerns

Sometimes you will be worried about a child's wellbeing although the child may not have said anything to suggest that they have been abused. This can be very difficult for you. You can help by recalling your training and your listening skills. Remember the following:

- Be the sort of person a child can talk to
- Be available and prepared to listen
- Discuss your concerns with a member of the Nacoa team, the Helpline Supervisor, a fellow volunteer or Chief Executive
- Do not keep things to yourself

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- Do not rely on someone else to take action

SAFEGUARDING

Taking action in response to child abuse is not easy but one of the worst things you can do is nothing. Many child abuse inquiries have shown that a failure to act has resulted in serious injury or death. Your information could be vital in preventing further abuse.

In many proven cases of child abuse, it is often the case that people who have had contact with the victim have held suspicions for some time and not acted upon them. Occasionally, this reticence has resulted in a tragedy that could have been avoided.

You should remember that once you have reported your suspicions, and Nacoa makes a referral to the NSPCC or Social Services, many other checks will take place by professionals trained in identifying child abuse. The authorities will not blame you if your suspicions are groundless, or be annoyed that you have wasted their time – they would far rather be alerted unnecessarily than fail to protect a child who was being abused.

The safety and well-being of children is of paramount importance and all concerns about child abuse must be taken seriously. Child protection supersedes all other considerations, including that of confidentiality. However, we need information to identify the caller before we make a report to NSPCC or Social Services.

What action should you take?

If you see, hear or are told something that makes you concerned about a child's welfare and we have identifying information, name, address, land line (sometimes mobile) telephone number, record it and report it to the helpline Supervisor or Chief Executive. We also have two Child Protection Officers to whom concerns can be reported, as well as procedures that set out what to do next. Familiarise yourself with the Child Protection and Confidentiality Policies so you know how to proceed.

In general, it is best to tread gently, sharing your concerns with a member of the Nacoa team. Even if you have reason to believe that the abuse is taking place in the home, research shows that the provision of support for parents and families is often the key to preventing further neglect or abuse.

In some circumstances you may have good reason to believe that the child is at immediate and serious risk. In these cases, the child's safety must come first, regardless of the impact your action may have on the child's parents or carers.

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Procedure for reporting is as follows:

1. Discuss your concerns with the Helpline Supervisor and/or another member of the Nacoa team as soon as possible

If the child needs urgent medical attention, obtain medical help first as a matter of urgency (put in place end call procedure so child can call 999)
2. If you are still concerned for the child or young person's welfare complete a referral form
3. The Chief Executive and the Trustees will be made aware and together you will decide the next step
 - a. To continue to support and monitor caller
 - b. To advise caller that a referral will be made
Advise caller to call NSPCC 0800 800 500 or Social Services to make a referral themselves
Agree a time limit when Nacoa will also make referral
 - c. To immediately call the NSPCC or Social Services
4. When making a referral call to the Duty Officer at Social Services in caller's area, Helpline Supervisor/CEO or volunteer (who may have been working closely with caller) must be prepared to provide the following details:
 - Your name, Nacoa's name, address, telephone number and your role
 - As many details of the child as you can, including name, address and the name of the school which she/he attends
 - What you have been told by the child or young person, providing details where possible and details of the child's emotional state at the time
 - What the child or young person has said in response to any concerns you have
 - The action you have taken so far
5. Social Services will advise what to do next and will then take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate further enquiries are made.
6. Keep an accurate record of what you have heard and done on the referral form.

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What happens next?

Once we have reported our concerns to Social Services, the responsibility for gathering information and deciding what will happen, rests with them.

In some cases, a brief assessment might reveal one or more unmet needs, which can be solved by providing specific forms of support. In other, more serious cases the information you have provided will trigger a thorough check of records involving a number of organisations and, if there is confirmation of your concerns, this may give rise to a full child protection investigation. If there is evidence to suggest that child abuse or neglect is taking place, a child protection conference will be held.

These conferences are multi-disciplinary, that is they bring together people from different professions and organisations so that they can all contribute to the discussion. Child protection conferences are likely to involve social workers, the GP, the health visitor, teachers and other professionals. In many cases, the child's parents may also be invited and in some situations, the child also attends the conference.

The purpose of the conference is to build up a picture of the child's life and to identify whether abuse has taken place. Decisions will also be taken at the conference about further action.

Where do you and Nacoa come in?

Having made our vital contribution, we leave matters to those with a statutory responsibility to act. If however, the authorities appear to have done nothing and you still believe the child is at risk, speak to the Helpline Supervisor or Chief Executive, who will decide with you whether to call Social Services again to say why you are still concerned.

Social Services Departments do not usually report back to people who refer cases to them. This may be frustrating for you, but child protection professionals have found that by respecting confidentiality, they stand a better chance of building a positive relationship with the family. This in turn offers a far better prospect of ending the abuse and repairing the damage that has been done.

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GOOD PRACTICE ISSUES

In October 1991, the Children Act came into effect in England and Wales, followed by the Children (Scotland) Act, and the Children (Northern Ireland) Order. These amalgamated many previous laws relating to children and families and established clear requirements and guidance for agencies relating to the protection of children.

For our purposes, it is not necessary for you to gain detailed knowledge regarding the law and guidance documents. It is important, however, for you to be aware that the actions taken by agencies, the requirements on them to co-operate and share information with each other, and the way in which they conduct themselves are not simply because they wish to interfere in peoples' lives. They are, in effect, acting on behalf of the State to protect children, who, it is acknowledged, are inherently vulnerable.

False Allegations

It is a sad fact of life that, from time to time, organisations which exist to help children unwittingly recruit staff or volunteers who pose a risk to children. We know that child abusers are usually people known to their victims, and these people can include parents, carers, relatives or family friends. They can also include professionals and volunteers who work with children, such as teachers, doctors and youth workers.

It is also the case that people who pose no risk are sometimes vulnerable to accusations of abuse. This is because they regularly come into contact with children who may be confused or frantic enough to resort to desperate ways to stop the abuse. For example, a child being sexually abused by a step-father may accuse a youth worker in the hope that the truth will be discovered, or simply that the ensuing fuss will scare the real abuser and make him stop.

Although this can and does occasionally happen, it is important to remember that it is an unusual occurrence and that by taking the steps outlined below you will do much to minimise any chances of becoming inappropriately accused.

Your personal responsibilities

To ensure you protect children from harm and protect yourself, you must adopt a personal code of conduct adhering to the following guidelines:

A personal code of conduct

- Respect all individuals, whatever their age, developmental stage, ability, sex, sexual orientation or ethnicity
- Place the safety and well-being of children and young people first. It must be placed before any personal or organisational goals and before loyalty to friends and colleagues

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- Form appropriate relationships with children and young people. These should be based on mutual trust and respect
- Be aware of the relative powerlessness of children and young people (and especially disabled children) compared to adults
- Be committed to actively preventing the exploitation and abuse of children and young people
- Be aware of Nacoo's Child Protection and Confidentiality policies also the helpline practices and principles, and make sure that you are aware of your responsibilities within Nacoo

Nacoo's responsibilities

Nacoo's code of conduct is set out in the Nacoo Practices and Principles in Appendix 2 and 3.

It is crucial that all organisations whose staff or volunteers come into contact with children have good practice guidelines in place to protect the welfare of children and young people, staff and volunteers alike.

In order to minimise situations in which the abuse of callers might occur, Nacoo ensures the following procedures:

- Issue of Child Protection and Confidentiality policies providing clear guidelines about action to be taken if abuse is disclosed or suspected, encouraging action as soon as possible
- Apply procedures to all staff, paid or voluntary
- Implement a system of supervision and appraisal that checks on roles and relationships and observes practice
- Carry out random checks on practice
- Ensure all staff and volunteers have clear roles and responsibilities
- Adopt an 'open door' policy where everyone can share concerns with the appropriate person

Staff and volunteer recruitment

Nacoo is extremely vigilant when recruiting staff and volunteers. Specific questions about the following will be asked:

- Any criminal record

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- Whether they are known to any Social Services department as being an actual or potential risk to children
- Whether they have ever had action taken against them in relation to child abuse, sexual offences or violence
- A DBS check will be undertaken
- The names and addresses of at least two people, not relatives, who will provide references that comment on the candidate's character and if possible their previous work with children

Staff training

All staff and volunteers will be trained in the prevention of child abuse, as an integral part of any other training that they receive. This will ensure that administrators and other support staff have the opportunity to contribute to the organisation's approach to protecting children.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

The existence of child abuse is both distressing and disturbing. As a caring adult, it is natural for you to feel shocked or angry. It is important, however, for you to manage your own feelings so that you can react appropriately.

Often, awareness of child abuse can remind adults of painful situations in their own past. If this applies to you, you may need help from colleagues or professionals in dealing with them. Nacoo can and will help you.

Remember that you are playing a critical role in the development of the children we work with. Just as they value you and you value them, you need to value yourself and be aware of your own needs and take a look at 'Taking Care of Ourselves' and talk to someone, the way we encourage callers to take to us.

If you want to learn more, there are numerous books and professional journals that cover the subject. The NSPCC Publications & Information Unit can also provide a list of useful publications (telephone 0207-825 2775 or email: infounit@nspcc.org.uk).

Responding to child abuse is a responsibility shared by all adults who work with or care for children.

Together we are making a difference.

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SOME MYTHS SURROUNDING CHILD ABUSE

There are many myths surrounding child abuse and here are just a few:

Myth: Children are usually abused by strangers

Fact: Most children are abused by adults whom they know and trust

Myth: Women do not sexually abuse children

Fact: Although the overwhelming majority of child abusers are male, in around 5-10% of cases, the abuse is by a woman

Myth: Disabled children are less likely to become victims of abuse

Fact: Disabled children are more likely to be abused because they are more vulnerable and dependent on others, and may be less able to communicate what has happened to them

Myth: Children often lie about abuse

Fact: Children rarely lie about abuse, and their great fear is that they will not be believed. Abusers often tell their victims that no one will believe them if they report what has happened

Myth: Child abusers have deprived backgrounds and are of below average intelligence

Fact: Abusers come from a very wide range of social and intellectual backgrounds and may be well liked and respected members of society

Myth: Children are always safe in groups

Fact: This is not always true: young children have, for example, been sexually assaulted in nursery school whilst other adults and children were present

Myth: Children abused by their parents are always taken into care

Fact: Child protection professionals recognise that there are many benefits in keeping a child with his or her birth family, so they try to protect a child within the home where possible