

What is child abuse?

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. 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 or community setting by those known to them, or more rarely, by others (including via the internet). They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child, or children.

Physical abuse: May involve adults or other children inflicting physical harm:

- By hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating.
- Giving children alcohol or inappropriate drugs.
- In sport situations, it may also occur when the nature or intensity of training exceeds the capacity of the child's immature and growing body.

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 involve a parent or carer failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing or shelter.
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
- Ensure adequate supervision
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment
- Respond to a child's basic emotional needs.
- Neglect in a sports situation may occur if an instructor or coach fails to ensure that children are safe, or exposes them to undue cold or risk of injury.

Sexual abuse: Sexual abuse involves an individual (male or female, or another child) forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening, to gratify their own sexual needs. The activities may involve:

- Physical contact (e.g. kissing, touching, masturbation, rape or oral sex).
- Involving children in looking at, or in the production of sexual images.
- Encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or watch sexual activities.
- Grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).
- Sport situations which involve physical contact, (e.g. supporting or guiding children) could potentially create situations where sexual abuse may go unnoticed. Abusive situations may occur if adults misuse their power over young people.

Child sexual exploitation: is a form of 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 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the

victim needs and wants (e.g. attention, money or material possessions, alcohol or drugs) and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator. The victim may have been exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation can also occur online without involving physical contact.

Emotional abuse: Is the emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve:

- Conveying to a child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate.
- Not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them, or making fun of what they say or how they communicate.
- Imposing expectations which are beyond the child's age or development capability
- Overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning or preventing the child from participating in normal social interaction.
- Allowing a child to see or hear the ill-treatment of another person.
- Serious bullying (including cyber bullying), cause children frequently to feel frightened or in danger.
- The exploitation or corruption of children.
- Emotional abuse in sport may also include situations where parents or coaches subject children to constant criticism, bullying or pressure to perform at a level that the child cannot realistically be expected to achieve.

Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child.

Extremism: goes beyond terrorism and includes people who target the vulnerable – including the young- by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination, justify discrimination e.g. towards women and girls, persuade others that minorities are inferior, or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society.

Bullying: Is probably more common in a sports situation than some of the other forms of abuse. Bullying (including online bullying e.g. text or social media) may be seen as deliberately hurtful behaviour, usually repeated or sustained over a period of time, where it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves. The bully may be another young person or an adult. Although anyone can be a target for bullying, victims are typically shy, sensitive and perhaps anxious or insecure. Sometimes they are singled out for specific reasons, e.g. being overweight, physically small, being gay or lesbian, having a disability or belonging to a different race, faith or culture.

Bullying can include:

- Physical pushing, kicking, hitting, pinching etc.
- Name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing and emotional torment through ridicule, humiliation or the continual ignoring of individuals.
- Posting of derogatory or abusive comments, videos or images on social network sites
- Racial taunts, graffiti, gestures, sectarianism.
- Sexual comments, suggestions or behaviour.
- Unwanted physical contact

It is ongoing over time, deliberate and intentional and there is an imbalance of power.

The acronym STOP - Several Times On Purpose – can help to identify bullying

behaviour.

How would I recognise if a child were being abused or bullied?

It is not always easy to recognise abuse, even for experienced carers. Some of the more typical symptoms, which should trigger suspicions, include:

- Unexplained or suspicious injuries such as bruises, cuts or burns, particularly if these are situated on areas of the body not normally prone to such injuries
- Sexually explicit language or actions
- A sudden change in behaviour, e.g. becoming very quiet, withdrawn and lacking in confidence, or aggressive, disruptive and unreasonable
- The child describes what appears to be an abusive act involving him or her
- A change observed over a long period of time, e.g. loss of weight or becoming increasingly dirty or unkempt.
- A general distrust and avoidance of adults or other children, especially those with whom one would expect a close relationship
- An unexpected reaction to normal physical contact
- Difficulty making friends or abnormal restrictions on socialising with others
- Has possessions or clothing damaged or go missing
- Attempts or threatens to run away
- Attempts or threatens suicide
- Continually 'loses' money

It is important to note that a child could be displaying some or all of these signs, or behaving in a way which is worrying, without this necessarily meaning the child is being abused or bullied.

Similarly there may be no signs but you may feel that something is wrong. If you notice a change in the child's behaviour, first talk to the parents or carers. It may be that the child is unhappy for a different reason, such as bereavement.

If you are concerned

If there are concerns about sexual abuse or violence in the home, talking to the parents or carers may put the child at greater risk. If this is the case, consult the Safeguarding Officer or person in charge. It is their responsibility to make the decision to contact Children's Social Care Services or the Police. It is **not** their responsibility to decide if abuse is taking place but it **is** their responsibility to act on your concerns.

If bullying is suspected, inform either the Safeguarding Officer or a member of the General Committee, who will follow the procedure laid down in the RYA Child Protection Policy and Guidelines.

