

This brochure is available in:

Arabic: يتوافر هذا المنشور باللغة العربية

Chinese: 本資料小冊子備有中文版本。

Croatian: Ovu brošuru možete dobiti na hrvatskom.

Macedonian: Оваа брошура може да се добие на македонски јазик.

Turkish: Bu broşür Türkçe olarak mevcuttur.

Vietnamese: Tập hướng dẫn này có sẵn qua tiếng Việt.

To report a child or young person at risk of harm from abuse or neglect, contact DoCS' Helpline on 132 111
TTY (02) 9633 7698



PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

People featured in photographs in this brochure are models only and are not in need of care because of domestic violence, abuse or neglect.

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spot it.
help
stop it

ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

All children have a right to live free of violence and abuse.

Unfortunately, child abuse and neglect continues to be an issue throughout Australia.

To report a child at risk of harm from abuse or neglect, contact DoCS' Helpline on 132 111

Child abuse and neglect has debilitating consequences not only for children, but for their families and communities.

Child abuse and neglect can happen to any child or young person in any family. It hurts and has lasting, damaging effects.

Children who experience abuse and neglect may become unhappy and angry adults with low self-esteem. Some children even die because of the abuse.

Sometimes children are hurt or are at risk of harm because:

- their families do not have adequate support
- their carers are experiencing a lot of stress from unemployment, illness, isolation or loneliness
- their parent(s) have not experienced good parenting themselves.

Child abuse and neglect can be prevented

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

There are different forms of child abuse. These include neglect and physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Neglect is the continued failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child with the basic things needed for his or her proper growth and development, such as food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care and adequate supervision.

Physical abuse is a non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child caused by a parent, caregiver or any other person. It includes injuries caused by excessive discipline, severe beating or shaking, bruising, lacerations or welts, burns, fractures or dislocations, attempted strangulation and female genital mutilation. Sometimes these injuries are fatal.

Emotional abuse is behaviour by a parent or caregiver that destroys a child's confidence resulting in significant emotional disturbance or trauma. This can include a range of behaviours such as excessive criticism, withholding affection, exposure to domestic violence, intimidation or threatening behaviour.

Sexual abuse is when an adult or someone who is bigger or older involves a child in a sexual activity by using their power over a child or taking advantage of a child's trust. Often children are bribed or threatened physically and psychologically to make them participate in the activity.

Child abuse and neglect is a crime

WHAT CAN I DO?

Children and young people have a right to be safe in their own homes and in the community.

Protecting children and young people from harm is everyone's business. Children and young people will only be protected from abuse and neglect if responsible adults take action on their behalf.

Reporting your concerns about a child or young person's safety or well being is the first step in preventing or stopping the abuse and protecting children from further harm. It also gives the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) the chance to help families in situations where a child or young person may be at risk.

HOW DO I REPORT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT?

If you think that a child or young person is being neglected or physically, sexually or emotionally abused, you should immediately report it to DoCS. Possible signs of child abuse and neglect are outlined in the last section of this booklet.

You can make a report by phoning DoCS' Helpline on 132 111 for the cost of a local call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (TTY 02 9633 7698).

Your report will be totally confidential – we won't tell anyone who reported the abuse or neglect to us and you don't have to tell us your name if you don't want to.

DoCS' Helpline
132 111

WHAT WILL DoCS DO?

By law we must assess reports of child abuse and neglect or reports of children who may be at risk of harm.

When you contact us, our staff will ask you for more information to help us find out about the risk of harm to the child or children involved.

We may talk to the family of the child. We may also need to talk to other people to find out about the family's circumstances.

For example, we might contact the child's teacher, child care worker or relatives. If we think the law has been broken we will talk to the police. We will link the child's family to services if they need support to help them care for their child safely.

If the child or young person is at risk of harm, we work with other agencies and professionals to make sure they are safe. If we think a child is in immediate danger, we will give them a safe place to live. We always involve the child or young person and the family as much as possible in decisions that affect them.

HOW DO I KNOW IF A CHILD IS BEING NEGLECTED OR ABUSED?

There are common physical and behavioural signs for each type of child abuse and neglect (these are listed on the following pages).

The presence of one of these signs does not necessarily mean neglect or abuse.

When considering if a child has been neglected or abused, it is important to keep in mind the life circumstances of that child, such as:

- social or geographic isolation of the child or family, including lack of access to extended family

- abuse or neglect of a sibling
- family history of violence, including domestic violence
- physical or mental health issues for the parent or caregiver affecting their ability to care for the child
- the parent or caregiver's abuse of alcohol or other drugs affecting their ability to care for the child.

If you recognise signs of abuse or neglect in a child you know, even your own child, contact DoCS' Helpline immediately on 132 111.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF NEGLECT

Signs in children

- poor hygiene ie. child consistently unwashed
- scavenging or stealing food
- extended stays at school, public places or other homes
- extreme longing for adult affection
- low weight for age
- untreated physical problems eg. untreated sores, nappy rash or urine scalds
- rocking, sucking or head-banging
- anxiety about being abandoned
- failure to thrive and develop
- focus on basic survival
- poor or pale complexion and poor hair texture.

Signs in parents or caregivers

- failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical attention or clean home conditions
- leaving the child without appropriate supervision
- inability to respond emotionally to a child
- abandoning the child
- withholding physical contact or stimulation for prolonged periods of time
- failure to provide psychological nurturing
- treating one child differently from sibling(s).



POSSIBLE SIGNS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE

Signs in children

- facial, head and neck bruising
- lacerations and welts from excessive discipline
- explanation for an injury offered by the child is not consistent with the injury
- other bruising and marks which may show the shape of the object that caused it eg. belt buckle, hand print
- bite marks and scratches
- ruptured internal organs without a history of major trauma
- fractured bones, especially in children under three years old
- burns and scalds
- head injuries where the child may show signs of drowsiness, vomiting, fits or retinal haemorrhages, suggesting the child may have been shaken
- multiple injuries or bruises
- swallowing poisonous substances, alcohol or other harmful drugs

Signs in parents or caregivers

- dislocations, sprains, twisting
- general indicators of female genital mutilation which could include having a special operation, difficulties in toileting and reluctance to be involved in sport or other physical activities in which the child was previously interested.
- direct admissions by a parent or caregiver that they fear injuring their child
- family history of violence
- history of their own maltreatment as a child
- frequent visits with their child or children to health or other services with unexplained or suspicious injuries, swallowing of non-food substances or other bodily complaints.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL ABUSE

All types of abuse harm children psychologically, but the term 'emotional abuse' is behaviour that destroys a child's confidence.

Signs in children

- feelings of worthlessness about life and themselves
- inability to value others
- lack of trust in people
- lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning
- extreme attention-seeking behaviour
- other behavioural disorders eg. bullying, disruptiveness, aggressiveness
- exposure to domestic violence.

Signs in parents or caregivers

- constantly criticising, belittling, teasing or ignoring the child, or withholding praise and attention
- excessive or unreasonable demands
- persistent hostility, severe verbal abuse, rejection and scapegoating
- belief that a particular child is bad or 'evil'
- using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
- domestic violence.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Signs in children

- describing sexual acts eg. '_____ hurts my wee-wee'
- telling you about it, directly or indirectly
- self-destructive behaviour eg. drug dependency, suicide attempts, self-mutilation
- going to bed fully clothed
- anorexia or over-eating
- bruising or bleeding in the genital area
- sexually transmitted infections
- bruising to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs
- adolescent pregnancy
- contact with a known or suspected perpetrator of a sexual assault
- unexplained accumulation of money and gifts
- persistently running away from home
- regressive behaviour eg. sudden return to bed-wetting or soiling
- sexual behaviour inappropriate for the child's age.

Signs in parents or caregivers

- exposing a child to prostitution or pornography or using a child for pornographic purposes
- intentional exposure of a child to sexual behaviour of others
- previous conviction of child sexual abuse
- coercing a child to engage in sexual behaviour with other children
- verbal threats of sexual abuse
- denial of adolescent's pregnancy by family.