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SHEFFIELD SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD
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CHILD ABUSE

How you can help if you think a
child is being harmed



Child & Young People's Services

Social workers have a major role in enquiring into child abuse and assessing the needs of families. When an allegation of child abuse is made, the Children and Young People's Service carry out enquiries to decide what action is needed to ensure a child is safe and protected and their needs are met.

In some cases, social workers and police officers work together to investigate allegations of child abuse.

South Yorkshire Police

The police have to become involved in some cases of child abuse because of their responsibility to prevent and investigate crime. It is important to remember that child abuse can be a criminal matter. In Sheffield there is a team of specially trained and experienced police officers who are skilled in working with children and families.

Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board

The child protection work of the police and the Children and Young People's Service together with that of all other professionals working with children and their parents is conducted according to Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board Procedures. These are based upon 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', guidance written by the Department of Health.

A copy of each of these can be found in Sheffield Central Library, and the Child Protection Procedures are also on the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board website:

www.sheffield.gov.uk/childprotection



*How you can help
if you think a child
is being harmed*

How you can help if you think a child is being abused

Many parents, relatives, friends and neighbours are concerned about the welfare of the children they know. This guide will help you to understand what child abuse is and how to get help if you think a child you know is being harmed.

Although you may understandably feel reluctant to get involved, **everybody in the community** is responsible for keeping children safe.

What is child abuse?

Abuse can happen to a child at any age, from birth to when they have left school. It can happen in well-off families and in poor families; it can happen to children from any ethnic and cultural background; it can happen to children with or without disabilities; it can be deliberate or unintentional.

Abuse can happen because of the way adults or other children and young people behave towards a child; it can also result from adults failing to provide proper care for the children they look after. One child may suffer different kinds of abuse at the same time.

Why is it so important to prevent child abuse?

There are obvious risks to the health and well-being of children who are subjected to abuse, and in extreme cases a child may die if concerns are not acted on.

Abuse is likely to cause long-term damage to a child's current and future life. It may lead to permanent physical and/or mental health problems, difficulty in achieving potential in such areas as education, social relationships, job prospects, and parenting ability.

Children who are being abused may show their unhappiness in many ways including being nervous, anxious, withdrawn and isolated. They may be angry and aggressive, truant from school and run away from home. In addition they may, when older, misuse drugs and alcohol and/or deliberately cause serious harm to themselves even to the extent of suicide.

If you have any doubt about reporting your concerns, please take some time to imagine what life is like for that child.

What you can do to help

It is very important that you take action straight away if you think a child you know is being abused. The longer the abuse goes on, the longer it will take for a child to recover.

Sometimes abuse gets worse over time if nothing is done and the child suffers increasingly serious harm. Children are dependant on others for their survival and have a right to be protected.

In the majority of cases when concerns are reported families may only need extra support to help them keep their children safe. Only in extreme circumstances do concerns reported to the Children and Young People's Service result in children having to live apart from their families.

You can discuss your concerns in confidence with a Children and Families Interviewing Officer at **First Point** who will do an initial assessment and then pass the information to the Children and Young People's Service duty social work team if this is necessary. First Point reception is open Monday - Thursday 8.45am - 5.15 pm and Friday 8.45 am - 4.45 pm, however telephone contact is available 24/7.

If you wish, you will be given feedback in due course about what action has been taken in response to your concerns.

Contact: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**First Point, Howden House, Union Street,
Sheffield S1 2SH, Tel: 0114 273 4855**

You can also contact the Police: Tel: 0114 2202020

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child's basic needs for love, security, praise and recognition are left unmet. It may result in a child becoming withdrawn, nervous, unhappy or lacking in confidence.

Emotional abuse may happen when an adult constantly behaves in an uncaring and hostile way towards a child, perhaps through inconsistency, bullying, rejecting, frightening, criticising, racially abusing or scapegoating the child. Some adult carers can be very possessive or over-protective towards a child.

In severe cases, children may be subjected to cruel treatment and punishment like being locked up in cold, dark surroundings. Children may be in a situation where basic needs like food, drink and warmth may be withheld or have to be 'earned'.

Warning signs:

- A child who is constantly blamed for things that go wrong
- A child who is made to carry out tasks inappropriate to their age
- A child who is not allowed to do usual childhood activities
- A child in a household where there are arguments and violence

Physical abuse

This is when someone physically hurts or harms a child. Hitting, squeezing, biting, or twisting a child's arms or legs can cause injuries like bruises, grazes, cuts or broken bones. Sometimes someone burns a child, perhaps by holding a part of their body against something very hot, by scalding, or by using something such as a cigarette.

Violently shaking a baby can cause brain injuries, which can lead to permanent disability or even death. Poisoning a child, perhaps by giving them alcohol or drugs and deliberately making them ill, is also physical abuse.

Warning signs:

- Any injuries at all to young babies who are not yet able to move on their own
- Bruises in places where you would not normally expect to find them on a child
- Bruises which have a distinctive shape or pattern, like handprints, grasp or finger marks, or belt marks
- Burns or scalds with clear outlines
- Bite marks – bruises like 'love bites'
- Bruising in or around the mouth, especially in babies

Neglect

Neglect can result when adults fail to meet the physical or emotional needs of the children they are responsible for. All children need food, clothing, warmth, love and attention, in order to grow and develop properly.

Warning signs:

- A child who always appears dirty and smelly
- A child who looks thin and ill
- A child with illnesses that have not been treated
- Inadequate or unsuitable clothing for the weather conditions
- A child who suffers repeated accidents
- A child who is not safely supervised
- A child who does not respond when given attention
- A child who craves attention and affection from any adult

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

The abuser(s) may use different methods to persuade the child to co-operate and not to tell, like bribery, threats or physical force.

Sexual abuse can take many different forms from touching to intercourse and may also include involving children in looking at, or being forced to take part in, the production of pornographic material, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. Sexual abuse can happen to boys as well as girls, and often there will be no physical signs.

Warning signs:

- A child who displays sexual knowledge or behaviour inappropriate for their age
- Injuries or unusual appearance to private areas of the body
- A child who is being encouraged into a secretive relationship with an adult
- A child who hints at sexual activity through words, play or drawings
- A child with a sexually transmitted infection