



Nottinghamshire
Safeguarding
Children Partnership

Safeguarding Children

Indicators of
possible abuse
or neglect

For more information:

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscp

No matter where you work, you are likely to encounter children during the course of your normal working activities. You are in a unique position to be able to observe signs of abuse or neglect, or changes in behaviour which may indicate a child may be being abused or neglected.

- Be alert to the signs of abuse and neglect.
- Question the behaviour of children and parents/carers - don't necessarily take what you are told at face value.
- Know where to turn to if you need to ask for help.
- Refer to children's social care or to the police, if you suspect that a child is at risk of harm or is in immediate danger.

To help you to safeguard children, you should make sure that you understand and work within the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The procedures for Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City are available online at <https://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/> This is where you'll find detailed guidance covering a whole range of safeguarding issues, assessment tools and pathways.

You can also find out more information including training opportunities through the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership website:

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscp

Remember:

- children have a right to be safe and should be protected from all forms of abuse and neglect
- safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility
- it is better to help children as early as possible, before issues escalate and become more damaging; and
- children and families are best supported and protected when there is a co-ordinated response from all relevant agencies.

Child abuse and neglect

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment – a person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm.

Children and young people may be abused in a family, in an institutional setting, by those known to them or by a stranger. They may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families – these threats might arise at school, from within peer groups or from the wider community and also online – these risks from those not connected with the family, are known as **contextual safeguarding**. Child abuse and neglect can have major long-term impacts on all aspects of a child's health, development and well-being.

There are four main categories of abuse and neglect: **physical abuse**, **emotional abuse**, **sexual abuse** and **neglect**. Each has its own specific warning indicators, which you should be alert to. Refer to the interagency safeguarding procedures for full details.

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 occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse.

The following signs may be indicators of neglect:

Children who:

- are living in a home that is indisputably dirty or unsafe;
- are left hungry or dirty;
- are left without adequate clothing, e.g. not having a winter coat;
- are living in dangerous conditions, i.e. around drugs, alcohol or violence;
- are often angry, aggressive or self-harm;
- fail to receive basic health care; and
- parents who fail to seek medical treatment when their children are ill or are injured.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

The following signs may be indicators of physical abuse: Children with:

- frequent injuries;
- unexplained or unusual fractures or broken bones; and
- unexplained:
 - bruises or cuts;
 - bruising in non-mobile babies;
 - burns or scalds; or
 - bite marks.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development.

- Conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person;
- Not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate;
- Imposing age or developmentally inappropriate expectations on children;
- Seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another e.g. where there is domestic abuse;
- Serious bullying (including cyber bullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger;
- Exploiting and corrupting children.

The following signs may be indicators of emotional abuse:

- children who are excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong;
- parents or carers who withdraw their attention from their child, giving the child the 'cold shoulder';
- parents or carers blaming their problems on their child; and
- parents or carers who humiliate their child, for example, by name-calling or making negative comparisons.

Sexual abuse Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing.

They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

The following signs may be indicators of sexual abuse: Children who:

- display knowledge or interest in sexual acts inappropriate to their age;
- use sexual language or have sexual knowledge that you wouldn't expect them to have;
- ask others to behave sexually or play sexual games; and
- have physical sexual health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas, sexually transmitted infections or underage pregnancy.

Sexual abuse includes abuse of children through **sexual exploitation** which occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

The following signs may be indicators of sexual exploitation: Children who:

- appear with unexplained gifts or new possessions;
- associate with other young people involved in exploitation;
- have older boyfriends or girlfriends;
- suffer from sexually transmitted infections or become pregnant;
- suffer from changes in emotional well-being;
- misuse drugs and alcohol;
- go missing for periods of time or regularly come home late; and
- regularly miss school or education or don't take part in education.

This is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and in other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or from the wider community and online. Child sexual exploitation is a type of contextual safeguarding risk (described in the previous section) and a summary of other examples is included below:

Harmful sexual behaviour is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people and which may be harmful or abusive. To help determine whether a behaviour might be a normal part of a child's development refer to the Brook Sexual Behaviours Traffic Light Tool, <https://www.brook.org.uk/training/wider-professional-training/sexual-behaviours-traffic-light-tool/>

Child criminal exploitation is typified by a power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the exploitation and usually involves some form of exchange (e.g. carrying drugs in return for something). The exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or clothes) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived friendship or affection). Young people who are criminally exploited are at a high risk of experiencing violence and intimidation and threats to family members may also be made.

Serious youth violence young people involved in crime, whether exploitatively or not, may be at risk of being seriously harmed or of causing serious physical injury to another.

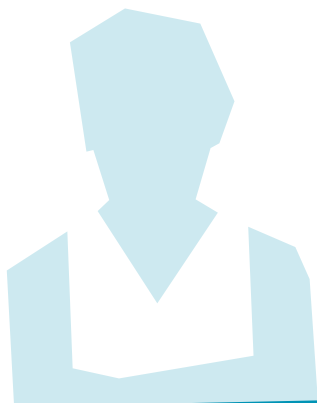
This could be a weapon-enabled violence (stabbing, shooting or hit and run type incidents) or through aggravated assault. The risk of serious youth violence may increase when the young person is gang-affiliated.

Radicalisation is defined as the process by which people come to support an extreme ideology which advocates violence. This ideology may be religious or political in nature but can also include a fascination with a person (such as someone who has been involved in murders or torture) or a social movement, for example animal rights activism.

Human trafficking and modern slavery

child trafficking is the action or practice of illegally procuring and relocating children, typically for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour (a form of modern slavery). Any child who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim.

For more information and indicators go to the interagency safeguarding children procedures: <https://nottinghamshirescb.proceduresonline.com/index.html>



Being alert to signs of abuse and neglect

The first step is to be alert to the signs of abuse and neglect, understand the interagency safeguarding procedures and consider what training would support you in your role.

Questioning behaviours

The signs of child abuse might not always be obvious, and a child might not tell anyone what is happening to them. You should therefore question behaviours if something seems unusual and try to speak to the child, alone, if appropriate, to seek further information.

If a child reports that they are being abused and neglected, you should; listen to them, take their allegation seriously, and reassure them that you will take action to keep them safe.

Depending on the circumstances of the case you might refer directly to children's social care and/or the police, or discuss your concerns with others and ask for help. You should always explain to the child the action that you are taking. It is important to maintain confidentiality, but do not promise the child that you won't tell anyone, as you may need to do so in order to protect the child.

Asking for help

Concerns about a child's welfare can vary greatly by their nature and seriousness, how they have been identified and over what duration they have arisen. If you have concerns about a child, you should ask for help. You should discuss your concerns with your manager, a named or designated professional or a designated member of staff.

Early help assessment

Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges. Refer to the Pathway to Provision to help you identify the level of need, what services are available and if an Early Help Assessment is needed (Early Help Assessment Form).

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/pathway-to-provision

Making a referral to children's social care

Nottinghamshire MASH

Telephone:

0300 500 80 90

Urgent out of hours:

0300 456 45 46

Email:

mash.safeguarding@nottsccl.gov.uk

Or by online form:

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/care/safeguarding/childrens-mash/report-a-new-concern-about-a-child

Nottingham City Children & Families Direct

Telephone:

0115 876 48 00

Email:

candfdirect@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Referring Children to Social Care:


Telephone:

Nottinghamshire
0300 500 80 90

Nottingham City
0115 876 4800

Website:

www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/nscp



Information contained in this leaflet is taken from:

What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: advice for practitioners
(HM Government) March 2015.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and the local interagency safeguarding procedures