

Child Abuse Fact Sheet

Updated 2019

Physical & Domestic Abuse

The 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services reported that:¹

- In 2014 there were a total of 1,580 child fatalities due to abuse or neglect. In accordance with this data:
 - Of the children who died, 41.3 percent suffered physical abuse either exclusively or in combination with another maltreatment type.
- Approximately one-fifth of children were found to be victims with dispositions of substantiated (17.8%), indicated (0.8%), and alternative response victim (0.6%). The remaining four-fifths of the children were determined to be nonvictims of maltreatment. Therefore, there is a nationally estimated 702,000 victims of child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, out of these reports 17.0 percent were physically abused.

A report by Lorraine Radford et al., published by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), looking at new research findings from the NSPCC on child maltreatment in the United Kingdom, found:²

- 1 in 14 children have been physically abused
- 1 in 5 children have been exposed to domestic abuse.

A report by Holly Bentley et al., entitled “How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016” surveyed various research regarding abuse and neglect in the UK. They found that:³

- 19% of contacts to the NSPCC’s helpline last year were concerns about physical abuse.
- Domestic abuse is a factor in over half of serious case reviews (54% of cases). This data is based on analysis of 175 serious case reviews undertaken in England from 2011-2014.⁴
- A survey of 1,353 young people aged 13-17 in England, Scotland and Wales found that 21% of young people (25% of girls and 18% of boys) said they had been physically abused by their partners (1 in 5 teenagers).⁵
- Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA) estimate there are 100,000 victims living with high-risk domestic abuse (where there is a significant risk of harm or death).

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*.

² Lorraine Radford et al., *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011).

³ Holly Bentley et al., *How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2016).

⁴ Peter Sidebotham et al., *Pathways to Harm, Pathways to Protection: A Triennial Analysis of Serious Case Reviews 2011 to 2014* (Department of Education, May 2016).

⁵ Christine Barter et al., *Partner Exploitation and Violence in Teenage Intimate Relationships* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2009)

CAADA figures show that 66% of these victims have children. The average number of children each victim has is 2. This results in a total estimated figure of 132,000 children living with high-risk domestic abuse.⁶

- The child homicide rate is an important measure of child safety. It shows the number of children killed by another person.

The statistics give an indication of how many children are dying directly as a result of violence or abuse. This report found that:

- There were 75 child homicides across the UK in 2014/15.
- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (previously the British Crime Survey) is a face-to-face survey in which people resident in households in England and Wales are asked about their experiences of crime in the previous 12 months. The 2014/15 survey was based on face-to-face interviews with around 3,000 children aged 10 to 15. Crime survey estimates are higher than the number of crimes recorded by the police because the survey captures offences that have not been reported to the police. This report found:
 - In 2014/15, 5.7 per cent of 10 to 15-year-olds in England and Wales were the victim of a violent crime.
 - Of these offences, 67 per cent resulted in an injury to the victim.
 - An estimated 373,000 violent offences were experienced by children aged 10 to 15 in 2014/15.

Research from the well-known National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II) by the CDC and Office of Justice Programs looked at children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse. Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 4,503 children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (or their caregivers for children younger than age 10) in 2011. This study found that:⁷

- In the NatSCEV II sample, approximately three in five children (57.7 percent) experienced at least one exposure to five aggregate types of violence in the past year (physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, and witnessing violence).
- In 2011, approximately 2 in 5 children and youth surveyed (41.2 percent) were victims of at least one assault in the past year, and approximately 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) were injured in an assault.
- Two in five children (41.2 percent) were physically assaulted during the past year, and 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) was injured. Assaults by siblings were most common among 6- to 9-year-olds, with 28.0 percent being victims in the past year.
- NatSCEV II shows lifetime estimates for sexual victimization for 14- to 17-year-olds by gender: during their lifetimes, 17.4 percent of the older girls and 4.2 percent of the older boys said they had experienced a sexual assault.
- Completed rape occurred for 3.6 percent of girls and 0.4 percent of boys.

⁶ Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA), *A Place of Greater Safety* (CAADA, November 2012).

⁷ David Finkelhor et al., *Children's Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: An Update* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, CDC, September 2015).

- Sexual assault by a known adult occurred for 5.9 percent of girls and 0.3 percent of boys. Sexual assault by an unknown adult occurred for 3.8 percent of girls and 0.1 percent of boys.

Witnessing and Indirect Victimization: Any witnessed violence (if the child saw or heard the assault); witnessed family assault; witnessed partner assault; witnessed physical abuse; witnessed other family assault; witnessed assault in the community; or exposure to shooting, bombs, or riots. In this category of the NatSCEV II sample:

- Almost a quarter of the sample (22.4 percent) had witnessed violence in the past year, either in the family or community. In addition, 8.2 percent had witnessed a family assault, and 6.1 percent had witnessed a parent assault another parent (or parental partner) in the past year.
- Over their lifetimes, more than one in five children surveyed (20.8 percent) witnessed a family assault, and more than one in six (17.3 percent) witnessed one parent assault another parent or a parental partner.
- Among the oldest youth (ages 14–17), the lifetime rate of witnessing any family assault was 34.5 percent, and 28.3 percent of these youth had witnessed one parent assaulting another.
- In the case of witnessing a community assault, the rate for all children and youth was 16.9 percent in the past year and 58.9 percent over the lifetime of the oldest youth.

A report looking at indicators of school crime and safety (2015) by the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, found that:⁸

- There were 53 school-associated violent deaths from July 1, 2012, through June 30, 2013. Of the 53 student, staff, and nonstudent school-associated violent deaths occurring between July 1, 2012, and June 30, 2013, there were 41 homicides, 11 suicides, and 1 legal intervention death. Of these 53 deaths, there were 31 homicides, 6 suicides, and 1 legal intervention death of school-age youth (ages 5–18) at school.
- About 7 percent of students in grades 9–12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property in 2013

The Arizona Department of Child Safety produces a semi-annual child welfare report. For the most recent report looking at April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, it states that:⁹

- Between April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, there were 26,455 incoming communications to the Child Abuse Hotline that met the criteria for a report of abuse or neglect. 23% were for physical abuse.

(The following information is adapted from multiple sources. For additional information refer to: Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov; NSCPCC.org.uk; The National Child Traumatic

⁸ Anlan Zhang, Lauren Musu-Gillette, and Barbara Oudekerk, *Incidents of School Crime and Safety: 2015* (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

⁹ Arizona Department of Child Safety (2015), *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements: Semi-Annual Report for the Period of April 1, 2015 Through September 30, 2015*.

Stress Network, www.nctsn.org; and Centers for Disease Control, Child Maltreatment: Facts at a Glance, www.cdc.gov/violence/prevention/pdf/childmaltreatment-facts-at-a-glance.pdf)

How can you tell if a child is being (or has been) physically abused?

Children should be believed. The best way to know if a child is being abused is if they tell you. There may be physical signs, such as welts and bruises in various stages of healing, fingernail and human bite marks, burns, abrasions in the pattern of instruments or hands, missing or broken teeth.

There are several indicators that strongly suggest a child is being abused:

- Frequent injuries that are attributed to the child's clumsiness
- Injuries that don't seem to fit the explanation given by the parent or child
- Conflicting explanations given by parent and child
- Habitual absence from or lateness to school without a credible reason. Or a child that comes to school or church wearing long sleeved clothing on hot days
- Awkward movements or difficulty walking may suggest the child is in pain or is healing from previous injuries

What should you do if you suspect a child is being (or has been) physically abused?

- Don't jump to conclusions and assume the child is being abused. Start with open-ended questions such as, "Can you tell me how you got that bruise?" or, "How are things going at home?" Continue with follow up questions that are open-ended in order to look for inconsistencies. If the explanation for the injury seems implausible or doesn't seem to match the injuries seek professional assistance. "Are there ways in which I can help you? It is important to me that you are safe."
- Mandated reporters are to alert state authorities if they suspect abuse - your job is to report, not to investigate. (Your local agencies should be contacted in order to determine who is mandated to report as well as what is reportable.) For further help or information, the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline can provide assistance at 1-800-4A-CHILD.

Physical Abuse Myths and Facts:

Myth: It's only abuse if you meant to hurt your child.

Fact: Even accidental injuries of a child are considered abuse if the act that insured the child was done intentionally as a form of punishment.

Myth: Good parents don't get frustrated with their children's behavior.

Fact: It is okay and normal to be angry at times, but it is not okay to hurt your child in anger. Angry feelings can't get you in trouble, but violent behavior can. Parents must learn how to feel and properly express their anger so their child can learn to do the same.

Sexual Abuse

The 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services reported that:¹⁰

- Based on data from 44 states, in 2014 neglect accounted for 886 of total fatalities, sexual abuse accounted for 13 of total fatalities.
- Approximately one-fifth of children were found to be victims with dispositions of substantiated (17.8%), indicated (0.8%), and alternative response victim (0.6%). The remaining four-fifths of the children were determined to be nonvictims of maltreatment. Therefore, there is a nationally estimated 702,000 victims of child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, out of these reports 8.3 percent were sexually abused.

A report by Lorraine Radford et al., published by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), looking at new research findings from the NSPCC on child maltreatment in the United Kingdom, found:¹¹

- 1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused.
- 4.8% of 11-17-year-olds reported contact sexual abuse at some point in childhood.
- Over 90% of sexually abused children were abused by someone they knew.
- 1 in 3 children sexually abused by an adult didn't tell anyone at the time.

A report by Holly Bentley et al., entitled "How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016" surveyed various research regarding abuse and neglect in the UK. They found that:¹²

- Over 3,000 children were identified as needing protection from sexual abuse last year.
- Over 47,000 sexual offenses against children were recorded in the UK last year.
- All four countries in the UK saw an increase in the number of recorded sexual offences against children in the past year.
- Child sexual abuse costs the UK £3.2 billion in 2012.¹³
- Police recorded child sexual offenses against under 18s are up 76% in the UK. There has been an 80% increase in England, 62% increase in Scotland, 58% increase in Northern Ireland, and a 48% increase in Wales in 2010/11-2014/15.
- The National Crime Agency (NCA) estimates that there were 732 children trafficked in 2014, up 22 per cent from 602 in 2013.
- The most frequent exploitation type in CTAC referrals is sexual exploitation, followed by criminal exploitation.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*.

¹¹ Lorraine Radford et al., *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011).

¹² Holly Bentley et al., *How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2016).

¹³ Aliya Saied-Tessier, *Estimating the Costs of Child Sexual Abuse in the UK* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2014).

Fifty-one states reported 522, 945 perpetrators in 2014. The following breakdown of these perpetrators is as follows:¹⁴

- Four-fifths (83.2%) of perpetrators were between the ages of 18 and 44 years.
- The highest percentage of perpetrators were between the ages of 25-34 years.
- More than one-half (54.1%) of perpetrators were women, 44.8 percent of perpetrators were men, and 1.1 percent were of unknown sex.
- More than three-fifths (61.5%) of perpetrators maltreated one victim, more than one-fifth (22.5%) maltreated two victims, and the remaining 16 percent maltreated three or more victims.

Research from the well-known National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II) by the CDC and Office of Justice Programs looked at children's exposure to violence, crime, and abuse. Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 4,503 children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (or their caregivers for children younger than age 10) in 2011. This study found that:¹⁵

- In the NatSCEV II sample, approximately three in five children (57.7 percent) experienced at least one exposure to five aggregate types of violence in the past year (physical assault, sexual victimization, maltreatment, property victimization, and witnessing violence).
- In 2011, approximately 2 in 5 children and youth surveyed (41.2 percent) were victims of at least one assault in the past year, and approximately 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) were injured in an assault.
- Approximately 1 in 20 children and youth (5.6 percent) were sexually victimized in the past year.
- Nearly 6 percent (5.6 percent) of the total sample experienced a sexual victimization in the past year, and 2.2 percent experienced a sexual assault in the past year.
- Girls ages 14–17 represented the highest risk group, with 22.8 percent experiencing a sexual victimization and 10.7 percent experiencing a sexual assault in the past year. Among this group, 8.1 percent reported an attempted or completed rape, 13.6 percent were sexually harassed, and 12.9 percent were exposed to an unwanted Internet sexual solicitation in the past year.

The Arizona Department of Child Safety produces a semi-annual child welfare report. For the most recent report looking at April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, it states that:¹⁶

- Between April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, there were 26,455 incoming communications to the Child Abuse Hotline that met the criteria for a report of abuse or neglect. 3.6% were for sexual abuse.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*, 63-64.

¹⁵ David Finkelhor et al., *Children's Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: An Update* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, CDC, September 2015).

¹⁶ Arizona Department of Child Safety (2015), *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements: Semi-Annual Report for the Period of April 1, 2015 Through September 30, 2015*.

The effects of child sexual abuse can be long-lasting and affect the victim's mental health. Victims are more likely than non-victims to experience the following mental health challenges:¹⁷

- About 4 times more likely to develop symptoms of drug abuse
- About 4 times more likely to experience PTSD as adults
- About 3 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode as adults

The Bureau of Justice Statistics, in looking at “Facility-level and Individual-level Correlates of Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities” found that:¹⁸

- Facilities that house only females have the highest rates of youth-on-youth sexual assault.
- Youth in facilities with higher rates of youth-on-youth sexual assault are more likely to have histories of prior sexual assault victimization. These youth are more likely to self-identify as having a lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation.
- Sexual assault by another youth is more prevalent in facilities when youth are informed that sexual activity is not allowed more than 7 days after their arrival.
- Facilities with higher rates of staff sexual misconduct tend to be male-only facilities.
- Rates of staff sexual victimization are highest in facilities when youth might not report rule breaking about sexual activity because they are afraid of being punished by facility staff.
- Staff sexual misconduct is more common in facilities where staff share personal information with youth in their care.
- Rates in female-only facilities (5.3%) were more than three times greater than those in male-only facilities (1.5%).
- The percentage of youth-on-youth sexual assault was double (3.5%) in facilities that offer sex offender treatment, compared to facilities that do not offer this type of treatment (1.7%).
- The proportion of youth reporting staff sexual misconduct was highest in the largest facilities: 10.3% in facilities containing 101 or more adjudicated youth, 6.7% in facilities with 51 to 100 adjudicated youth, 5.4% in facilities with 26 to 50 adjudicated youth, and 2.3% in facilities with less than 25 adjudicated youth.
- Staff sexual misconduct was most prevalent in detention centers (7.4%) and training/long-term secure facilities (7.3%) and lowest in residential treatment centers (3.1%) and non-state-operated facilities (3.1%).
- In facilities with only male residents, 5.7% of youth reported staff sexual misconduct, compared to 1.4% in facilities with only female residents.
- Staff sexual misconduct was reported by more youth (7.1%) in facilities that offer violent offender treatment, compared to facilities that do not offer this type of treatment (4.7%).

An interim report outlining the progress of the ongoing research into gang-associated sexual exploitation and sexual violence in England, conducted by The International Centre for the Study of

¹⁷ H. Zinzow et al., “Prevalence and Risk of Psychiatric Disorders as a Function of Variant Rape Histories: Results From a National Survey of Women,” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 47 (2012): 893-902.

¹⁸ Leanne Heaton et al., *Facility-level and Individual-level Correlates of Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities, 2012* (Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2016).

Sexually Exploited and Trafficked Young People and The Vauxhall Centre for the Study of Crime within the Institute of Applied Social Research (IASR) at the University of Bedfordshire, found that:¹⁹

- Sexual violence and exploitation between young people in gang-affected neighborhoods largely reflects what we know about sexual violence and sexual exploitation in general:
 - Perpetrators are predominantly male, victims are predominantly female
 - It invariably takes place between people who are known to each other
 - It is used as a means of boys and young men exerting power and control over girls and young women.

- There are however certain features of gang-associated sexual violence and exploitation that are unique to, or exacerbated by, the gang environment. These include:
 - Using sex as a means of initiating young people into a gang
 - Sexual activity in return for (perceived) status or protection
 - Young women 'setting up' people in other gangs
 - Establishing a relationship with, or feigning sexual interest in, a rival gang member as a means of entrapment
 - Sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

- Not all young women are viewed as having equal rights to assent to or decline sexual activity. Young women who are seen as engaging in casual sex are viewed by some as having lost their right to withhold consent. Experiences of sexual violence also increase vulnerability to further incidents of the same.

A 2012 interim report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups found that:²⁰

- Based on evidence submitted to the CSEGG Inquiry, at least 16,500 children were identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation during one year and 2,409 children were confirmed as victims of sexual exploitation in gangs and groups during the 14-month period from August 2010 to October 2011.
- Of the 2,409 victims reported in the call for evidence process, 155 were identified as also being perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. This overlap is deeply troubling.
- Respondents to the call for evidence identified sexually exploited children and young people ranging in age from 4 to 19 with a peak age of 15. Victims involved with a gang tended to be younger than those involved with a group.

(The following information is adapted from multiple sources. For additional information refer to: Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov; NSCPCC.org.uk; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsn.org; and Centers for Disease Control, Child Maltreatment: Facts at a Glance, www.cdc.gov/violence/prevention/pdf/childmaltreatment-facts-at-a-glance.pdf)

¹⁹ H. Beckett et al., *Research Into Gang-Associated Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Violence* (University of Bedfordshire and Children's Commissioner, November 2012).

²⁰ Sue Berelowitz et al., *"I Thought I Was the Only One. The Only One in the World"* (The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups, November 2012).

How can you tell if a child is being (or has been) sexually abused?

Children who have been sexually abused may display a range of emotional and behavioral reactions, many of which are characteristic of children who have experienced other types of trauma. These reactions include:

- An increase in nightmares and/or other sleeping difficulties
- Withdrawn behavior
- Angry outbursts
- Increased fear
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Not wanting to be left alone with a particular individual(s)
- Sudden changes in need for privacy when using the bathroom
- Regression developmentally
- Sexual knowledge, language, and/or behaviors that are inappropriate for the child's age

Although many children who have experienced sexual abuse show behavioral and emotional changes, many others do not. It is therefore critical to focus not only on detection, but on prevention and communication—by teaching children about body safety and healthy body boundaries such as is found in VC and by encouraging open communication about sexual matters.

Why don't children disclose sexual abuse?

There are many reasons children do not disclose being sexually abused, including:

- Threats of bodily harm (to the child and/or the child's family)
- Desire to protect parents or others within their family
- Believe that the abuse is their fault
- Fear of being removed from the home
- Fear of not being believed
- Shame or guilt

Most often the abuser is someone the child or the family cares about and thus, the child may worry about getting that person in trouble. In addition, children often believe that the sexual abuse was their own fault and may not disclose for fear of getting in trouble themselves. Very young children may not have the language skills to communicate about the abuse or may not understand that the actions of the perpetrator are abusive, particularly if the sexual abuse is made into a game.

What should you do if you suspect a child is being (or has been) sexually abused?

If a child discloses abuse, it is important to stay calm, listen carefully, and NEVER blame the child. Thank the child for telling you and reassure him or her of your support, that you will get them help. Call for help immediately and reach out for support for yourself as well.

If you know or suspect that a child is being or has been sexually abused, please call the Childhelp® National Child Abuse Hotline at 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453) or visit the federally funded

Child Welfare Information Gateway at: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/responding>. If you need immediate assistance, call 911.

Many communities also have local Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) that offer coordinated support and services to victims of child abuse (including sexual abuse). For a state-by-state listing of accredited CACs, visit the website of the National Children's Alliance

Sexual Abuse Myths and Facts

Myth: Child sexual abuse happens infrequently.

Fact: Sadly, child sexual abuse is not rare. Retrospective research indicates that as many as 1 out of 4 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. However, because child sexual abuse is by its very nature secretive and happens within trusted relationships, many of these cases are never reported. Many victims of childhood abuse never tell anyone about their experiences.

Myth: A child is most likely to be sexually abused by a stranger.

Fact: Children are most often sexually abused by someone they know and trust. Approximately three quarters of reported cases of child sexual abuse are committed by family members or other individuals who are considered part of the victim's trusted "inner circle."

Myth: Preschoolers do not need to know about child sexual abuse and would be frightened if educated about it.

Fact: Numerous educational programs are available to teach young children about body safety skills and the difference between "good," "bad," and "secret" touch. These educational programs can help children develop basic relational safety skills in a way that is helpful rather than frightening. There are several good YouTube videos about safe and unsafe touch that are appropriate for children. When parents talk about sexual abuse the child knows it is okay for them to talk about it too.

Myth: Children who are sexually abused will never recover.

Fact: If children disclose and are believed, they can and do heal. A combination of effective counseling and focused support from parents and/or caregivers are important pieces of restoration for children and their families.

Myth: Child sexual abuse is always perpetrated by adults.

Fact: Twenty-three percent of reported cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by individuals under the age of 18. While some degree of sexual curiosity and exploration is to be expected between children of about the same age, when one child coerces another to engage in adult-like sexual activities or when there are other power differentials the behavior is considered unhealthy and abusive. Both the abuser and the victim need counseling.

Myth: Talking about sexual abuse with a child who has suffered such an experience will only make it worse.

Fact: Although it is natural for a child to not want to talk about their abuse, it is important that they do so with trusted and trained caregivers and mental health professionals. Treatment from a mental health professional can minimize the physical, emotional, and social problems of these children by allowing them to process their feelings and fears related to the abuse. The sooner a child is offered support and counseling the better.

Emotional Abuse

A report by Lorraine Radford et al., published by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), looking at new research findings from the NSPCC on child maltreatment in the United Kingdom, found:²¹

- 6.8% of 11-17-year-olds had experienced emotional abuse by a parent or guardian.

A report by Holly Bentley et al., entitled “How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016” surveyed various research regarding abuse and neglect in the UK. They found that:²²

- Over 19,000 children were identified as needing protection from emotional abuse last year.
- Emotional abuse is the 2nd most common reason for children needing protection from abuse.

Research from the well-known National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II) by the CDC and Office of Justice Programs looked at children’s exposure to violence, crime, and abuse. Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 4,503 children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (or their caregivers for children younger than age 10) in 2011. This study found that:²³

- Emotional abuse by a caregiver was the most frequent; the past-year rate was 8.0 percent for the total sample and the lifetime rate was 25.7 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds.

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- Between April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, there were 26,455 incoming communications to the Child Abuse Hotline that met the criteria for a report of abuse or neglect. 0.5% were for emotional abuse.

(The following information is adapted from multiple sources. For additional information refer to: Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov; NSCPCC.org.uk; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsn.org; and Centers for Disease Control, Child Maltreatment: Facts at a Glance, www.cdc.gov/violence/prevention/pdf/childmaltreatment-facts-at-a-glance.pdf)

What is emotional or psychological abuse?

Because there's an element of emotional abuse in all other types of child abuse and neglect, it can be difficult to identify the signs and to separate what's emotional abuse from other types of abuse. In a sense one does not have to, but the important thing is to get a child help who is signaling the need for such intervention.

²¹ Lorraine Radford et al., *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011).

²² Holly Bentley et al., *How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2016).

²³ David Finkelhor et al., *Children’s Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: An Update* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, CDC, September 2015).

²⁴ Arizona Department of Child Safety (2015), *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements: Semi-Annual Report for the Period of April 1, 2015 Through September 30, 2015*.

Emotional abuse includes:

- Humiliating or constantly criticizing a child
- Threatening, or shouting at a child or calling them names
- Making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- Blaming, scapegoating
- Making a child perform degrading acts
- Not recognizing a child's own individuality, trying to control their lives
- Pushing a child too hard or not recognizing their limitations
- Exposing a child to distressing events or interactions such as domestic abuse or drug taking
- Failing to promote a child's social development
- Not allowing them to have friends
- Persistently ignoring them
- Being absent
- Manipulating a child
- Never saying anything kind, expressing positive feelings, or congratulating a child on successes
- Never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect.

How can you tell if a child is being emotionally or psychologically abused?

There aren't many obvious physical symptoms of emotional abuse or neglect, but you may identify signs or changes in a child's behavior or emotional expression, or lack thereof. Because changes in emotions are a normal part of development, it can be difficult to tell if a child is being emotionally abused.

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected may:

- Be overly affectionate towards strangers or people they haven't known for very long
- Lack confidence or become wary or anxious
- Not appear to have a close relationship with their parent, e.g. when being taken to or collected from pre-school, etc.
- Be aggressive or violent towards other children and animals.

Older children may:

- Use crude or inappropriate language
- Act in a way or know about things that are inappropriate developmentally (words or behaviors you wouldn't expect them to know for their age)
- Struggle to control strong emotions or have extreme outbursts of anger and rage
- Seem isolated from their parents
- Lack social skills or have few, if any, friends.

Who are the perpetrators?

Almost any adult involved in a relationship with a child is a potential perpetrator. Parents, teachers, pastors, social workers, neighbors, lawyers, or judges may all be capable of emotional maltreatment.

Common characteristics of the abusing adult include:

- Blaming or belittling the child in public
- Describing the child negatively
- Always assuming the child is at fault
- Having unrealistic expectations of the child
- Openly admitting to disliking or hating the child
- Threatening the child with severe punishment
- Withdrawing comfort as a means of discipline
- Being emotionally cold and un-supportive
- Suffering from alcohol and drug abuse
- Possessing a violent nature

What factors cause an adult to abuse a child psychologically?

Most emotional abuse occurs for many of the same reasons that physical abuse occurs. Parents are vulnerable to becoming involved in maltreatment if stresses in their lives build up or if they are unable to manage these stresses. They may also have diminished capacity for understanding and dealing with children (mental retardation, psychopathology, alcoholism, drug abuse), false ideas about children's needs, or mental illness/psychosis. Also, the abuser's goal may be to control. Nevertheless, a single factor may not lead to abuse, but in combination these vulnerabilities can create the social and emotional pressures that lead to emotional abuse. Specific types of problems that can contribute to emotional abuse are social problems that can contribute to family stress (unemployment, poverty, isolation from relatives and friends, divorce, death, immature parents), health crises (illness of a family member, disability of a family member, drug and alcohol abuse within the family), and mental health problems (mental disability, depression). For these reasons it is important to support the system around the child as much as it is important to help the child.

What should you do if you suspect emotional or psychological abuse?

To effectively identify and confirm emotional abuse, it is necessary to observe the abuser-child interaction on varied and repeated occasions. If emotional abuse is suspected, action can be taken regardless of whether the suspected offender is within the child's home, childcare setting, or elsewhere in the community.

It is the caregiver's responsibility to report and not investigate suspicions of child abuse. It is the child protection agency's responsibility to investigate reports of any type of abuse. A careful evaluation of those involved and the sources of stress should be completed by appropriate and skilled professionals which usually consists of a multi-disciplinary team consisting of: a child protection worker, a physician, a psychiatrist or psychologist, a public health nurse, and a teacher will become involved.

Neglect & Maltreatment

The 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services reported that:²⁵

- The youngest children are the most vulnerable to maltreatment. In 2014, 52 states reported that more than one-quarter (27.4%) of victims were younger than 3 years. The victimization rate was highest for children younger than 1 year (24.4 per 1,000 children in the population of the same age).
- Nearly three-quarters (70.7%) of all child fatalities were younger than 3 years old.
- In 2014 there were a total of 1,580 child fatalities due to abuse or neglect. Of the children who died, 72.3 percent suffered neglect.
- Based on data from 44 states, in 2014 neglect accounted for 886 of total fatalities and medical neglect accounted for 109 of total fatalities.
- In 2014, there were an estimated 74,356,370 children in the United States. Of these children, approximately 3.2 million children were the subjects of at least one report of maltreatment.
- There is a nationally estimated 702,000 victims of child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, out of these reports three-quarters (75.0%) of victims were neglected.

A report by Lorraine Radford et al., published by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), looking at new research findings from the NSPCC on child maltreatment in the United Kingdom, reported that:²⁶

- 1 in 10 children have experienced neglect
- Strong associations were found between maltreatment, sexual abuse, physical violence, and poorer emotional wellbeing, including self-harm and suicidal thoughts.

According to Finkelhor et al., at least one in four children have experienced child neglect or abuse (including physical, emotional, and sexual) at some point in their lives, and one in seven children experienced abuse or neglect in the last year.²⁷

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), in reviewing child protection registers for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, found that in 2015 there were 57,345 children on child protection registers or subject to a child protection plan at 31 March (or 31 July in Scotland). This is up nearly 7,000 children from 2011, which had recorded 50,552 children.²⁸

In looking at the economic burden of maltreatment in the United States, Xiangmig Fang et al, found that, the estimated average lifetime cost per victim of nonfatal child maltreatment is \$210,012 in 2010 dollars, including \$32,648 in childhood health care costs; \$10,530 in adult medical costs; \$144,360 in productivity losses; \$7,728 in child welfare costs; \$6,747 in criminal justice costs; and \$7,999 in special education costs. The estimated average lifetime cost per death is \$1,272,900,

²⁵ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*.

²⁶ Lorraine Radford et al., *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2011).

²⁷ Finkelhor, D., et al "Prevalence of Childhood Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: results From the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence," *JAMA Pediatrics* 169(8) (2015): 746-54.

²⁸ *Child Protection Register Statistics UK: 2011-2015* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2015).

including \$14,100 in medical costs and \$1,258,800 in productivity losses. The total lifetime economic burden resulting from new cases of fatal and nonfatal child maltreatment in the United States in 2008 is approximately \$124 billion. In sensitivity analysis, the total burden is estimated to be as large as \$585 billion.²⁹

A report by Holly Bentley et al., entitled “How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016” surveyed various research regarding abuse and neglect in the UK. They found that:³⁰

- Over 25,500 children were identified as needing protection from neglect last year.
- Neglect is a factor in 60% of serious case reviews. This data is based on analysis of 139 serious case reviews undertaken in England from 2009-2011. Serious case reviews are commissioned when a child dies, or is seriously injured, as a result of abuse or neglect.³¹
- There are currently over 57,000 children identified as needing protection from abuse in the UK.
- NSPCC in their 2013 report estimated that for every child identified as needing protection from abuse, another 8 are suffering abuse.³²
- Research in the US found that 90% of children who experienced maltreatment had a mental illness by the age of 18.³³
- In a survey of 1,308 professionals in the UK, 98% of the professionals reported there was not enough therapeutic support for children who have been abused.³⁴
- In looking at data from a 2010/11-2014/15 report, children starting to be looked after due to abuse or neglect is up 16% in England and Wales. Furthermore, there was a 24% increase in children becoming subject to a child protection plan/being added to the child protection register.
- Number of recorded cruelty and neglect offenses: This measure shows the number of offences recorded by the police where an adult who has responsibility for a child under 16 “willfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons or exposes a child under 16 in a manner likely to cause them ‘unnecessary suffering or injury to health.’” This report found:
- Police recorded 10,136 cruelty and neglect offences against children aged under 16 in the UK in 2014/15. There has been a 24% increase in the number of children in the child protection system in the UK in the last five years.

²⁹ Xiangmig Fang et al., “The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 36 (2012): 156-165.

³⁰ Holly Bentley et al., *How Safe are our Children? The Most Comprehensive Overview of Child Protection in the UK 2016* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2016).

³¹ Marian Brandon, et al., *Neglect and Serious Case Reviews: A Report from the University of East Anglia Comissioned by NSPCC* (University of East Anglia and NSPCC, 2013).

³² Lisa Harker et al., *How Safer are our Children?* (London: National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2013).

³³ As cited in L. Sroufe et al., *The Development of the Person: The Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation from Birth to Adulthood* (New York: Guilford, 2005).

³⁴ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, *NSPCC Survey of Professionals, 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/fighting-for-childhood/news-opinion/support-children-abuse-inadequate/>

- In England 61 per cent of looked after children are looked after due to abuse or neglect. In Wales the figure is 66 per cent. The term “looked after children” refers to those children who are cared for by the state.
- Between 6% and 10% of looked after children have three or more placements in a year.

Data collected from the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System, indicated that for 2014 found:³⁵

- Professionals made three-fifths (62.7%) of reports of alleged child abuse and neglect.
- The three largest percentages of report sources were from such professionals as legal and law enforcement personnel (18.1%), education personnel (17.7%) and social services personnel (11.0%).
- Fifty-one states reported 522, 945 perpetrators in 2014. The following breakdown of these perpetrators is as follows:³⁶
 - The highest percentage of perpetrators were between the ages of 25-34 years.
 - More than one-half (54.1%) of perpetrators were women, 44.8 percent of perpetrators were men, and 1.1 percent were of unknown sex.
 - More than three-fifths (61.5%) of perpetrators maltreated one victim, more than one-fifth (22.5%) maltreated two victims, and the remaining 16 percent maltreated three or more victims.

The Arizona Department of Child Safety produces a semi-annual child welfare report. For the most recent report looking at April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, it states that:³⁷

- Between April 1, 2015 through September 30, 2015, there were 26,455 incoming communications to the Child Abuse Hotline that met the criteria for a report of abuse or neglect. Of these, 72.9% were for neglect.
- The rates of maltreatment have greatly increased from 20,466 cases in October 2011 to 26,455 in September 2015.
- Compared to one year ago, there has been a 5.5 percent increase in reports received by the Child Abuse Hotline meeting the criteria of a report of abuse or neglect.

Research from the well-known National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV II) by the CDC and Office of Justice Programs looked at children’s exposure to violence, crime, and abuse. Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide sample of 4,503 children and youth ages 1 month to 17 years (or their caregivers for children younger than age 10) in 2011. This study found that:³⁸

³⁵ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2014*, 63-64.

³⁷ Arizona Department of Child Safety (2015), *Child Welfare Reporting Requirements: Semi-Annual Report for the Period of April 1, 2015 Through September 30, 2015*.

³⁸ David Finkelhor et al., *Children’s Exposure to Violence, Crime, and Abuse: An Update* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, CDC, September 2015).

- 13.8 percent of the sample experienced such maltreatment in the past year, and 25.6 percent experienced it during their lifetimes.
- The lifetime rate of child maltreatment for the oldest subgroup, 14- to 17-year-olds, was 41.2 percent.
- Emotional abuse by a caregiver was the most frequent; the past-year rate was 8.0 percent for the total sample and the lifetime rate was 25.7 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds.
- The rate for physical abuse by a caregiver was 3.7 percent for the full sample in the past year and 18.2 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds in their lifetimes.
- The rate for neglect was 6.5 percent for the full sample in the past year and 22.3 percent for 14- to 17-year-olds in their lifetimes.

(The following information is adapted from multiple sources. For additional information refer to: Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov; NSCPCC.org.uk; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, www.nctsn.org; and Centers for Disease Control, Child Maltreatment: Facts at a Glance, www.cdc.gov/violence/prevention/pdf/childmaltreatment-facts-at-a-glance.pdf)

What is the definition of neglect abuse?

Neglect is the failure of a parent, guardian, or other caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs.

Neglect may be:

- Physical (e.g., failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision)
- Medical (e.g., failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment)
- Educational (e.g., failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs)
- Emotional (e.g., inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs)

How can you tell if a child is being neglected?

Consider the possibility of neglect when a child:

- Is frequently absent from school
- Begs or steals food or money
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather
- States that there is no one at home to provide care

Consider the possibility of neglect when the parent or caregiver:

- Appears to be indifferent to the child
- Seems apathetic or depressed
- Blames the child
- Behaves irrationally or in a bizarre manner
- Is abusing alcohol or other drugs

What should you do if you suspect a child is being neglected?

If you suspect a child is being neglected or contact your local child protective services office or law enforcement agency so professionals can assess the situation. Many States have a toll-free number to call to report suspected child abuse or neglect.

Neglect Myths and Facts:

Myth: It's only abuse if it's violent.

Fact: Physical abuse is just one type of child abuse. Neglect and emotional abuse can be just as damaging, and since they are more subtle and have no visible effects, others are less likely to intervene.

Myth: Only bad people abuse their children.

Fact: While it's easy to say that only "bad people" abuse their children, it's not always so black and white. Not all abusers are intentionally harming their children. Many have been victims of abuse themselves, and don't know any other way to parent. Others may be struggling with mental health issues or a substance abuse problem.

Myth: Child neglect doesn't happen in "good" families.

Fact: Child maltreatment doesn't only happen in poor families or bad neighborhoods. It crosses all racial, economic, and cultural lines. Sometimes families who seem to have it all from the outside are hiding a different story behind closed doors.

Myth: Neglect does not happen very often.

Fact: Neglect is the most common reason for taking child protection action and is just as damaging as other forms of abuse. A child who's neglected will often suffer from other abuse as well. Neglect is dangerous and can cause serious, long-term damage - even death.

Depending on the nature of the emotional or psychological abuse tactic employed, it can also be referred to as child neglect. The U.S. government defines emotional abuse as neglect when there is a "pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development or sense of self-worth."

Examples of abuse include:

- name-calling
- insulting
- threatening violence (even without carrying out threats)
- allowing children to witness the physical or emotional abuse of another
- allowing children to use illegal drugs

It's very difficult to know how common child emotional abuse is. A wide range of behaviors can be considered abusive, and all forms are considered underreported. Childhelp estimates that more than three million reports of child abuse are made every year in the United States. Child abuse occurs in all types of families. However, reported abuse appears to be most common in families that:

- have financial difficulties

- are dealing with single parenthood
- are experiencing or experienced a divorce
- struggle with substance abuse issues

SIGNS OF ABUSE

What Are the Signs of Child Emotional Abuse?

Signs of emotional abuse in a child may include:

- being fearful of parent
- saying they hate the parent
- talking badly about themselves (“I’m stupid”)
- seeming emotionally immature when compared to peers
- exhibiting sudden changes in speech, such as stuttering
- experiencing sudden change in behavior, such as doing poorly in school

Signs in a parent or caregiver include:

- showing little or no regard for the child
- talking badly about the child
- not touching or holding the child affectionately
- not tending to the child’s medical needs

REPORTING ABUSE

Who Should I Tell?

If you or someone you know is being emotionally abused, contact your local children or family services departments. Ask to speak to a counselor. You can also call the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4ACHILD (1-800-422-4453) for information on free help in your area. Many family services departments allow callers to report suspected abuse anonymously.

If it’s not possible to contact a family services agency, ask someone you trust, such as a teacher, relative, doctor, or clergyperson for help. You might be able to help a family you are concerned about by offering to babysit or run errands. However, don’t put yourself at risk or do anything that would increase risk for the child you’re concerned about.

Some forms of abuse, such as yelling, may not be immediately dangerous. However, other forms, such as allowing children to use drugs, can be instantly harmful. If you have any reason to believe you or a child you know is in danger, call 911 immediately.

No one deserves to be abused. If you’re worried about what will happen to the child’s parents or caregivers, remember that getting them help is the best way to show them you love them.

Be sure to taste your words before you spit them out.

—Anonymous

Be careful with your words. Once they are spoken, they can only be forgiven, not forgotten.

Anonymous