



## Definitions and features of abuse

The following definitions are derived from “Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland” (March 2016) which provides the overarching policy framework for safeguarding children and young people. For the purpose of this guidance a child is a person under the age of 18.

**Physical abuse** is deliberately physically hurting a child. It may take a variety of different forms, including hitting, biting, pinching, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating a child.

**Sexual abuse** occurs when others use and exploit children sexually for their own gratification or gain or the gratification of others. Sexual abuse may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape, or oral sex) or nonpenetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via e-technology). Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

**Emotional abuse** is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child. It is also sometimes called psychological abuse and it can have severe and persistent adverse effects on a child’s emotional development. It may involve deliberately telling a child that they are worthless, or unloved and inadequate. It may include not giving a child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them, or ‘making fun’ of what they say or how they communicate. Emotional abuse may involve bullying – including online bullying through social networks, online games or mobile phones – by a child’s peers.

**Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child’s basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, supervision or shelter that is likely to result in the serious impairment of a child’s health or development. Children who are neglected often also suffer from other types of abuse.

**Exploitation\*** is the intentional ill-treatment, manipulation or abuse of power and control over a child or young person; to take selfish or unfair advantage of a child or young person or situation, for personal gain. It may manifest itself in many forms such as child labour, slavery, servitude, engagement in criminal activity, begging, benefit or other financial fraud or child trafficking. It extends to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of children for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation can be sexual in nature.

## **Bullying**

Bullying is the repeated use of power by one or more persons to intentionally harm, hurt or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others (NI Anti Bullying Forum). Although bullying is not defined as abuse, in its more extreme form it would be regarded as a form of abuse. It can take many forms but the main types are:

- Emotional – excluding, being unfriendly;
- Physical – hitting, kicking, theft;
- Racist – racial taunts, graffiti, gestures;
- Sexual – unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments;
- Homophobic – because of or focusing on the issue of sexuality;
- Verbal – name calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing;
- Cyberbullying (e.g. text message, picture/video-clip and phone call bullying via mobile phones;email, website bullying).

The damage inflicted by bullying can frequently be underestimated. It can cause considerable distress to children to the extent that it affects their health and development or, at the extreme, causes them significant harm. In these circumstances bullying should be considered as child abuse and treated as such.

*\* Although 'exploitation' is not included in the categories of registration for the Child Protection Register (CPR), professionals should recognise that the abuse resulting from or caused by the exploitation of children and young people can be categorised within the existing CPR categories as children who have been exploited will have suffered from physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or a combination of these forms of abuse.*

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