

Responding to Child Abuse

Where child abuse is observed, intervene immediately and take steps to provide a safe environment for the child. Remember, the safety and welfare of the child is of paramount importance. Report the misconduct to the person designated to receive complaints.

Where child abuse is suspected, concerns should be immediately brought to the attention of the person designated to receive complaints. The designated person will liaise appropriately with the statutory authorities.

Where child abuse is disclosed, either by the person directly affected or by a third party, the following provides general guidance as to the immediate response:

Do:

- Listen carefully with sensitivity and openness
- Give a clear simple explanation of what will happen next.
- Reassure the complainant of your support.
- Record, date and sign an account of the meeting with the complainant.
- Report to the person designated to receive complaints.

Do not:

- Panic
- Ask leading questions.
- Promise to keep the disclosure secret.
- Ask the complainant to repeat the story unnecessarily.
- Make a judgement about the complaint.
- Start an investigation.

Definition of Child Abuse

Child abuse is generally described under five headings:

Neglect

Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a care-giver and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It occurs when a child's need for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from wilful or neglectful failure to protect a child. Examples of physical injury include:

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his or her gratification or sexual arousal or for that of others.

Bullying

Bullying can be defined as repeated aggression be it verbal, psychological or physical which is conducted by an individual or group against others.¹

¹ These definitions are taken from chapter 3 of *Children First – National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. 1999