

Child Abuse?

How to recognise the signs and what to do next

A guide for all those who deal with children

C H I L D R E N S S E R V I C E S F A C T S H E E T

Child Abuse...

It is a fact: children do get abused. That is something none of us want to see happen.

'Abuse' can take many forms. It can mean physical attack, sexual interference or mental harm.

It can also be caused by neglect, in other words people who are responsible for children failing to provide them with proper care, attention or stimulation.

Cheshire Childrens Services believe that children deserve to be protected from these things: we want **YOUR** help to achieve that.

When there are cases of abuse, or when children are at risk of being abused, it is important that all of us who deal with children – social workers and members of the public can recognise the signs and help prevent unnecessary suffering.

The long experience of professional groups who regularly deal with child abuse cases: Childrens Services, Education, Health, Probation and Police, has led to procedures being introduced to help everyone involved

deal with cases effectively and in the best interests of the children.

This factsheet summarises that information to help members of the public, playgroup organisers, nursery workers and others who work with children. It explains what you should do and how you can help if you become worried that a child is being abused or harmed in some other way.

What is child abuse?

Most of the knocks, scrapes and bruises that children suffer as part of their active young lives are usually easily explained, we all know that accidents do happen!

However, in a number of cases these other, more serious injuries are inflicted by parents, guardians or other adults. The information in this factsheet is relevant in situations where children may be suffering sexual interference.

There are other, less obvious examples of abuse. Severe physical and emotional neglect, are just two examples. Although these may sometimes be less noticeable, they



are just as damaging and may even lead to physical abuse.

Recognising the signs...

Children deserve to be safe and secure. The best way of helping to achieve this is to know what to look for and be sensitive to the signs when they occur.

Recognising the symptoms of abuse can be difficult but you should remember that where minor injuries are inflicted, more serious injuries could follow.

Victims of abuse can be any age and from any social background. The younger the child, the more vulnerable he or she is and the more serious the damage can be if it is not stopped.

You should be particularly alert if injuries occur in families which may be involved in violence, crime, heavy drinking or where there is mental illness, poor housing conditions or financial hardship. It is important to be willing to share this information without delay and co-operate in a professional, co-ordinated approach towards preventing damage or dealing with cases quickly and effectively.

Ask yourself the following questions...

- Was this an ordinary accident?

- Is the child being properly cared for?
- Are the explanations acceptable?

Be curious – if the explanations you hear are inconsistent, be keen to get more information.

There are many signs, some or all of which can suggest that abuse is taking place or in danger of happening.

Watch out for...

- Unexplained cuts, fractures or bruises, including black eyes;
- Burns and swellings;
- Repeated minor injuries;
- Children appearing cold, undernourished or unkempt;
- A change in facial expression or general attitude;
- Unexplained absences from nursery, playgroup; or
- Lethargy, tiredness or aggressive tendencies.

All these signs may be due to ill treatment.

You should also look out for family signs which may lead to children being harmed...

- A history of domestic violence, or excessive drinking;

- A mother who shows post-natal depression and may have failed to form the normal mother-child bond;
- The attitude of parents if they are unfeeling or mechanical in their approach to children;
- Social or financial difficulties which may lead to family break down; or
- Failure to seek medical help for an obvious injury.

REMEMBER: The most important thing is to make sure the child is safe and free from danger.

The next step...

If you are suspicious that a child is being abused in any way, it is vital that you tell someone. If there is someone you can talk to easily, such as a Health Visitor or Doctor. Tell them.

Otherwise, contact your local Childrens Services office. Doctors, teachers, social workers, the police and other professionals who have been in contact with the family will discuss the case in detail and decide what to do.

You may be asked to attend: your contribution could be vital for the welfare of the child, so please attend if invited.

If children are thought to be in immediate danger, authority can be obtained to move them to a safe place to be looked after safely and properly until the matter is resolved.

We are not asking you to make judgements or interfere unnecessarily in the lives of others. We simply want to ensure that children get the love, support and protection they deserve.

We want to be there when we are needed – not when it is too late

You can help us to help the children who need our support and protection. If you are genuinely concerned about a child's welfare, please get in touch with your local Childrens Services office. The phone numbers and addresses are listed on page 4 of this factsheet. Simply ask to speak to the Duty Social Worker.

Other useful telephone numbers:

NSPCC

2-8 Henry Street Mews
Warrington, WA1 1NU
Tel: 01925 418430

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline

Tel: 0800 800 500

National Childline

Tel: 0800 1111

More information can be obtained from your local Childrens Service office:

Chester

Goldsmith House
Hamilton Place
Chester CH1 1SE
01244 603400
Internal phone 5934
Fax 01244 603130

Opening times
Mon – Thu 8.30am – 5.00pm
Fri 8.30am – 4.30pm

Ellesmere Port

County Offices
Coronation Road
Ellesmere Port CH65 9AA
0151 357 4500
Internal phone 5904
Fax 0151 357 4646

Opening times
Mon – Thu 8.30am – 5.00pm
Fri 8.30am – 4.30pm

Vale Royal

County Offices
Watling Street
Northwich CW9 5ET
01606 814900
Internal phone 4900
Fax 01606 815052

Opening times
Mon – Thu 8.30am – 5.00pm
Fri 8.30am – 4.30pm

Vale Royal

or Wyvern House
The Drummer
Winsford CW7 1AU
01606 815600
Internal phone 5600
Fax 01606 815601

Opening times
Mon – Thu 9.00am – 5.00pm
Fri 9.00am – 4.30pm

Crewe

Delamere House
Delamere Street
Crewe CW1 2LL
01270 505100
Internal phone 5100
Fax 01270 505352

Opening times
Every weekday
9.00am – 5.00pm

Congleton

54 Lawton Street
Congleton
01625 534700
Internal phone 5457
Fax 01625 410746

Appointment only at
54 Lawton Street, Congleton
Tue and Thu 10.00am – 1.00pm

Wilmslow

County Offices
Chapel Lane
Wilmslow SK9 1PU
01625 534700
Internal phone 4737
Fax 01625 410746

Appointment only
Mon and Wed
9.00am – 12.00pm

Macclesfield

The Library
Jordangate
Macclesfield SK10 1EE
01625 534700
Internal phone 4909
Fax 01625 410746

Opening times
Mon – Thu, 9.30am – 5.00pm
Fri 9.30am – 4.30pm

The Saturday Access Service and Emergency Duty Team

01606 76611
Fax 01606 275776

Cheshire County Council General public enquiries

and information
0845 11 333 11
www.cheshire.gov.uk

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