

Child abuse

What you need to know



What is child abuse?

There are four different types of child abuse:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- emotional abuse
- neglect.

Child abuse can be a single incident, or can take place over time.

Under the *Child Protection Act 1999* it does not matter how much a child is harmed, but whether a child:

- has suffered harm, is suffering harm, or is at risk of suffering harm
- does not have a parent able and willing to protect them from harm.

“Harm is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. For harm to be significant, the detrimental effect on the child’s wellbeing must be substantial or serious, more than transitory and must be demonstrable in the child’s presentation, functioning or behaviour.”
- *Child Protection Act 1999, Section 9*

Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, non-accidental physical trauma or injury.

Physical abuse can include:

- hitting
- shaking
- throwing
- burning
- biting.

Physical abuse does not always leave visible marks or injuries. It is not how bad the mark or injury is, but rather the act itself that causes injury or trauma for the child or young person.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when an adult, more powerful child or adolescent uses their power to involve a child in sexual activity.

Sexual abuse can be physical, verbal or emotional and can include:

- kissing or holding a child in a sexual manner
- exposing a sexual body part to a child
- speaking to children about sexual matters
- making obscene phone calls or remarks to a child or young person
- sending obscene emails or text messages to a child or young person
- fondling a child or young person's body in a sexual manner
- persistent intrusion of privacy
- penetration of the vagina or anus by either the penis, finger or any other object
- having sexual relations with a child under 16 years of age
- oral sex
- rape
- incest
- showing pornographic films, magazines or photos to a child
- having a child pose or perform in a sexual manner
- exposing a child to a sexual act
- child prostitution.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child's social, emotional, cognitive or intellectual development is impaired or threatened. It can include emotional deprivation due to persistent:

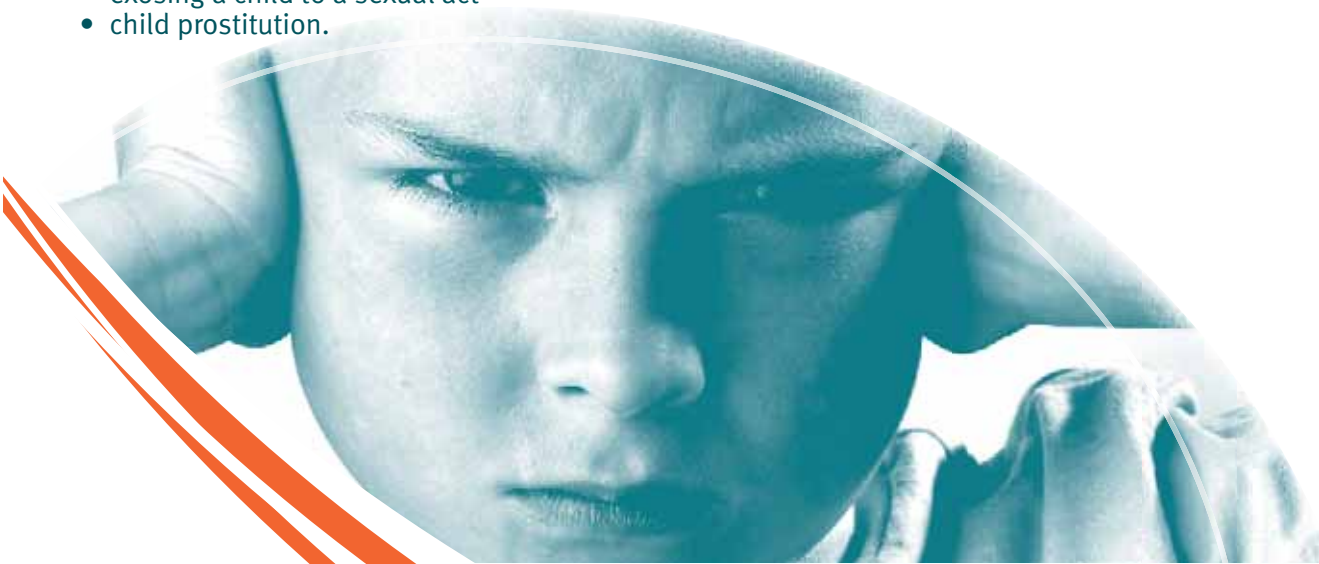
- rejection
- hostility
- teasing/bullying
- yelling
- criticism
- exposing a child to domestic and family violence.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child's basic necessities of life are not met and their health and development are affected.

Basic needs include:

- food
- housing
- health care
- personal hygiene
- hygienic living conditions
- adequate supervision.



Signs of child abuse and neglect

Children who have been, or may be, experiencing abuse may show behavioural, emotional or physical signs of stress and abuse.

Some general indicators of child abuse include:

- showing wariness and distrust of adults
- excessive rocking, sucking and biting
- difficulty sleeping, often being tired and falling asleep
- low self esteem
- difficulty relating to adults and peers
- aggressive or demanding behaviour
- abusing alcohol or drugs
- bedwetting or soiling
- being seemingly accident prone
- suicidal feelings or attempts at suicide
- difficulty concentrating
- being withdrawn or overly obedient
- reluctance to go home
- broken bones or unexplained bruises, burns or welts in different stages of healing
- a child or young person being unable to explain an injury, or providing explanations that are inconsistent, vague or unbelievable
- creating stories, poems or artwork about abuse.

Some indicators of neglect include:

- malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- poor hygiene, matted hair, dirty skin or body odour
- unattended physical or medical problems
- comments that no one is home to provide care
- being constantly tired
- frequent lateness or absence from school
- inappropriate clothing, especially inadequate clothing in winter
- frequent illness, infections or sores
- being left unsupervised for long periods
- alcohol or drug abuse being present in the household.

Why should you break the silence about child abuse?

- Every child has the right to be protected by caring adults.
- If a child has been abused, it is important for the family to reach out for help and not isolate itself.
- Think about how you may feel if you do not act to protect the child.
- Abuse can affect children for the rest of their lives.
- Children are never to blame for abuse.
- If you suspect that a child has been abused it is better to report it, even if you are not sure, rather than do nothing.
- Trust your gut feeling, rely on intuition and speak out if you think someone is abusing a child.
- If the perpetrator is a child or a teenager, speaking up may enable them to get help to address their behaviour.
- If you do report abuse, the child will always remember that someone had the courage to stand up for them and do something to protect them.





Where to get help

If you suspect a child or young person has experienced harm, or is at risk of experiencing harm, there are a number of agencies that can provide support and advice.

Department of Child Safety

To contact the Department of Child Safety call on **1800 811 810**. You can also visit **www.childsafety.qld.gov.au** or contact your local Department of Child Safety service centre.

If the report of abuse concerns an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, the local Recognised Entity will be involved. A Recognised Entity is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual or organisation who are recognised by their communities to provide cultural and family advice in Indigenous child protection matters.

Child Safety After Hours Service Centre

This service is offered by the Department of Child Safety for after hours contact and action. The Child Safety After Hours Service Centre is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on **3235 9999** or freecall **1800 177 135**.

Queensland Police Service

The Queensland Police Service has a number of dedicated Child Protection and Investigation Units across the state to investigate criminal matters relating to child abuse. If you have concerns about criminal behaviour, contact your local police station. In an emergency call **000**.



Queensland Government
Department of Child Safety