

Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect Everyone's Responsibility

National Child Protection Clearinghouse



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“They don’t want to
hear the truth because
the truth is so much
harder to understand”
(Fiona, 12 years)



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Source: Australian Childhood Foundation. (2004). *Play your part.*

Myths about child abuse & neglect

- λ Children make up stories about abuse **MYTH**
- λ If children don't witness domestic violence they are not affected by it **MYTH**
- λ It is not always obvious that a child is being abused **REALITY**
- λ If a child is reported to the state child protection authorities they will always be taken away from their family **MYTH**



Myths about child abuse & neglect

λ Boys are rarely victims of sexual abuse **MYTH**

λ Disabled children are more likely to become victims of abuse than non-disabled children **REALITY**

λ Teenagers are sometimes to blame for their abuse **MYTH**

λ Children who disclose about their abuse and later retract their stories were lying about the abuse **MYTH**



Myths about child abuse & neglect

- λ Consensual sex between a 14 year old and an adult is not abuse **MYTH**
- λ If abuse happened once it is likely to happen again **REALITY**
- λ Child abuse doesn't happen in well educated families **MYTH**



What is abuse and neglect?

- λ Physical abuse: any non-accidental physically aggressive act towards a child causing physical harm
- λ Neglect: Failure (usually by a parent) to provide a level of care that meets a child's basic needs
- λ Sexual abuse: the use of a minor - female and male - for sexual gratification by an adult, or an adolescent or older child (most commonly perpetrated by someone known to the child)
- λ Psychological maltreatment: a *pattern* of behaviour, rather than a single incident. Includes rejecting, ignoring, isolating, terrorising, corrupting, verbal abuse and belittlement



What is Child Maltreatment?

- λ Umbrella term for various forms of ill-treatment of children by caregivers
- λ Includes acts of commission (abuse) and omission (neglect)
- λ Types of abuse and neglect
 - υ Physical abuse
 - υ Sexual abuse
 - υ Neglect
 - υ Emotional or psychological abuse
 - υ Witnessing family violence
- λ Continuum from low to high severity
- λ Different types frequently co-occur
- λ Typically not a single incident - pattern of poor parenting



Physical Abuse

- λ Physically abusive behaviour refers to any non-accidental physically aggressive act towards a child
- λ May be intentional or may be the inadvertent result of physical punishment
- λ Physically abusive behaviours include: shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning, and kicking



Sexual Abuse

- λ The use of a minor - female and male - for sexual gratification by an adult, or an adolescent or older child
- λ Most commonly perpetrated by someone known to the child - parents, siblings and other family members
- λ Includes a wide range of sexual activities: fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal and/or anal penetration, penetration by a finger, penis or other object, voyeurism and exhibitionism, and exploitation through pornography or prostitution



Neglect

- λ Failure (usually by a parent) to provide a level of care that meets a child's needs
- λ Physical neglectful behaviours include failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, supervision, hygiene or medical attention



Psychological maltreatment

- λ Commonly known as “emotional abuse”
- λ Includes acts of commission and omission
- λ Emotionally abusive or neglectful behaviour refers to inappropriate verbal or symbolic acts and a failure to provide adequate non-physical nurture or emotional availability
- λ A pattern of abuse, it is not a single incident
- λ Includes rejecting, ignoring, isolating, terrorising, corrupting, verbal abuse and belittlement



Witnessing family violence

- λ Previously included in psychological maltreatment, however there is growing support for it being treated as a separate type of maltreatment
- λ Witnessing family violence refers to a child being present (hearing or seeing)
 - υ while a parent or sibling is subjected to physical abuse, sexual abuse or psychological maltreatment, or
 - υ is visually exposed to the damage caused to persons or property by a family member's violent behaviour



How big is the problem?

- λ Nationally there were 266,745 reports to statutory child protection services for the period 2005-2006
- λ Of which, 55,921 reports were substantiated as confirmed incidents of abuse or neglect
- λ What is the most common type of maltreatment?
 - υ Emotional abuse (includes witness DV), neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse
- λ 25,454 children living in out-of-home care (as at 30th June 2006)



Who maltreats children?

λ National Figures

- υ 74 % Natural Parent
- υ 10% Step-parent or de facto
- υ 7% Other relative or sibling
- υ 5% Friend or neighbour
- υ 4 % Others (including strangers)



Causes of child abuse & neglect

λ No one cause, factors commonly associated with maltreatment include:

- υ Alcohol and drug use
- υ Mental health problems
- υ Family violence
- υ Poor parenting skills
- υ Early child bearing
- υ Large families
- υ Children with health, disability or behavioural problems
- υ Adults with histories of being abused or neglected
- υ Poverty



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Consequences of abuse & neglect

Host of health and social problems, such as:

- v Physical health problems
- v Learning problems
- v Trauma and psychological problems
- v Early school leaving
- v Youth suicide
- v Crime
- v Homelessness
- v Mental illness
- v Drug and alcohol abuse
- v Unemployment



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What can you do for children?

- λ Show children they are important and that you care how they feel
- λ Try to understand the seriousness and consequences of child abuse and neglect
- λ Don't keep it to yourself – do something if you are worried about a child
- λ Child Protection Crisis Service: 131 278
- λ Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800



What can you do for parents?

- λ Be there to listen. The chance for a parent to talk can be very effective in relieving pressure
- λ Let parents know that you understand how challenging parenting can be
- λ All parents need support at some time
- λ Encourage parents to seek additional support when they need it
- λ Parentline: 13 22 89



What can you do in your community?

- λ Raise awareness about child abuse and neglect by talking about the problem, myths & realities
- λ Help community groups, clubs, or organisations to distribute resources throughout the community
- λ Support local efforts to help families (e.g. fundraising for local charity, food or clothing drive)



What can you do in your community cont.

- λ Ensure organisations and clubs in your local community that have contact with children have:
 - υ policies regarding appropriate screening processes
 - υ policies in place to ensure the organisation is “child safe”



More information and resources

λ Australian Childhood Foundation

www.stopchildabuse.com.au

λ National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN)

www.napcan.org.au

λ National Child Protection Clearinghouse

www.aifs.gov.au/nch



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“...Child abuse will only stop when children like me become important to everyone...”
(Josh, 9 years)



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Source: Australian Childhood Foundation. (2004). *Play your part.*

λ Play NAPCAN “Children see children do” advert



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