



Government of Western Australia  
Department for Child Protection  
and Family Support

# How do I recognise when a child is at risk of abuse or neglect?



# Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when someone is deliberately hurt, or is at serious risk of being physically hurt, by their parents or carers. This can include punching, kicking, shaking or throwing, scalding/burning, strangling or leaving a child alone in a car. It can also be from excessive physical discipline, or by being given drugs including alcohol. These injuries are not treated as accidental.

## Possible signs of physical abuse

- broken bones or unexplained bruises, burns, or welts in various stages of healing
- the child or young person can't explain an injury, or the explanation is inconsistent, vague or unlikely
- the parents saying that they're worried that they might harm their child
- family history of violence
- Female Genital Mutilation
- delay between being injured and getting medical help
- parents who show little concern about their child, the injury or the treatment
- frequent visits to health services with repeated injuries, illnesses or other complaints
- the child or young person seems frightened of a parent or carer, or seems afraid to go home
- the child or young person reports intentional injury by their parent or carer
- arms and legs are kept covered by clothing in hot weather
- ingestion of poisonous substances including alcohol or drugs
- the child or young person avoids physical contact (particularly with a parent or carer).

# Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is children and young people being exposed to inappropriate sexual activity. This includes being involved in sexual acts (masturbation, fondling, oral sex or penetrative sex); or witnessing sexual activity, either directly or through pornography.

## Possible signs of sexual abuse

- inappropriate sexual behaviour for their age and developmental level (such as sexually touching other children and themselves)
- inappropriate knowledge about sex for their age
- disclosure of abuse either directly, or indirectly through drawings, play or writing
- pain or bleeding in the anal or genital area, with redness or swelling
- fear of being alone with a particular person
- child or young person implies that they have to keep secrets
- presence of sexually transmitted infection
- sudden unexplained fears
- bed wetting and soiling.



# Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is being treated in ways that damages a child's ability to feel and express a range of emotions. This can be caused by behaviours that occur over time, such as verbal abuse and teasing, rejection, physical or social isolation, threats and bullying.

## Possible signs of emotional abuse

- parent or carer constantly criticises, insults and puts down, threatens, or rejects the child or young person
- parent or carer shows little or no love, support, or guidance
- child or young person shows extremes in behaviour from aggressive to passive
- physically, emotionally and/or intellectually behind others of the same age
- compulsive lying and stealing
- highly anxious
- lack of trust
- feeling worthless
- eating hungrily or hardly at all
- uncharacteristic seeking of attention or affection
- reluctant to go home
- rocking, sucking thumb or self harming behaviour
- fearful when approached by someone they know.

# Psychological abuse

Psychological abuse is being treated in ways that damages a child's self-esteem, personal and moral development and intelligence. This can be caused by behaviours that occur over time, for example, belittling, threatening, isolating and causing the child to feel worthless.

Possible signs of psychological abuse are similar to the ones for emotional abuse.



# Neglect

Neglect is not providing enough care or supervision so that the child is injured or their development is damaged. It includes lack of food, shelter, affection, supervision, untreated medical problems and abandonment.

## Possible signs of neglect

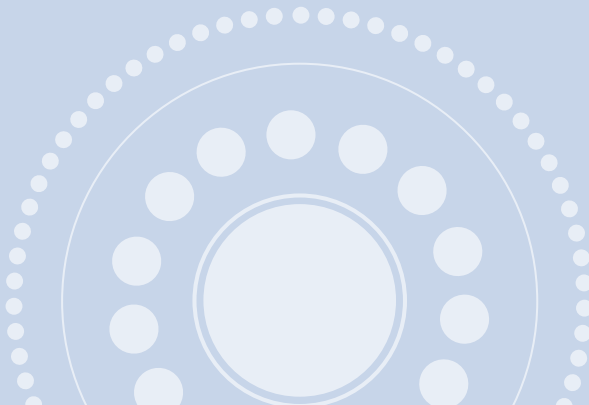
- signs of malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food
- poor hygiene: matted hair, dirty skin, or body odour
- untreated medical problems
- child or young person says that no one is home to look after them
- child or young person always seems tired
- frequently late or absent from school
- clothing not appropriate to the weather
- alcohol and/or drug abuse in the home
- frequent illness, minor infections or sores
- hunger.

# Family and domestic violence

Family and domestic violence is strongly associated with child abuse and neglect. It is more likely that a child's basic needs will not be met in a family where there is domestic violence occurs.

Witnessing violence between parents, or being involved in a violent act, can seriously affect the emotional health of children and young people. It can affect self image, response to other people, and the ability to form healthy relationships.

These children and young people don't feel safe and secure. They believe that violence is a solution to problems, and may develop signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. Family and domestic violence is seen as child abuse when it clearly affects the child or young person's physical, emotional and psychological development.



# How do I recognise when a child is at risk of abuse or neglect?

There are five main types of child abuse and neglect:

- physical
- sexual
- emotional
- psychological
- neglect

A child can suffer one or more of these.

Abuse and neglect can happen within a family or through a person outside the immediate family.

Each kind of abuse has a range of signs, though just one sign on its own may not suggest abuse.

The information about signs of abuse may be helpful if you are concerned that a child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed.

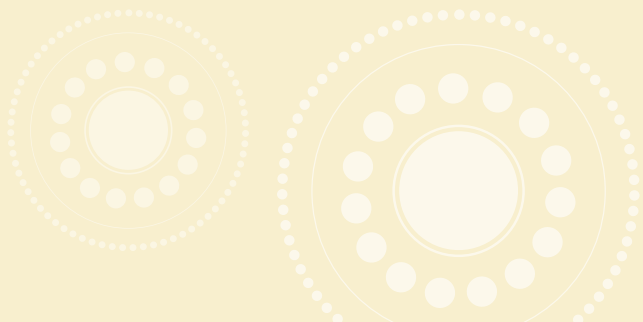


## What you can do

If you are worried about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child or young person, and have seen some of the above signs, you need to contact the Department for Child Protection and Family Support. Talking to someone experienced in supporting families or in child protection can also help you decide what actions need to happen to keep the child or young person safe.

Children and young people rely on responsible adults to act on their behalf. They can't protect themselves.

Contact details for local Department offices and other agencies are on the back of this brochure.



# Where to go for advice and support

## Department for Child Protection and Family Support

(08) 9222 2555 / 1800 622 258

(Refer to the White Pages or [www.childprotection.wa.gov.au](http://www.childprotection.wa.gov.au) for your local office)

## Parenting Line

(telephone help with caring for children)

(08) 6279 1200 / 1800 654 432

## Family Helpline

(telephone counselling for families)

(08) 9223 1100 / 1800 643 000

## healthdirect Australia

(telephone advice on health and health services)

1800 022 222

## Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800

## Men's Domestic Violence Helpline

(08) 9223 1199 / 1800 000 599

## Women's Domestic Violence Helpline

(08) 9223 1188 / 1800 007 339

## Sexual Assault Resource Centre

(08) 9340 1899 / 1800 199 888

If you are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, contact:

## Department for Child Protection and Family Support

(08) 9222 2555 / 1800 622 258

(Refer to the White Pages or [www.childprotection.wa.gov.au](http://www.childprotection.wa.gov.au) for your local office)

## Crisis Care

(08) 9223 1111 / 1800 199 008

(24 hour service for people in crisis)

## Western Australia Police

131 444

(General Enquiries and Police Attendance)

000

(Life threatening emergencies)

