


ABOUT CHILD ABUSE AND HARM

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Understanding child abuse and harm will help you to make good decisions when you're worried about a child. It's important to understand the relationship between abuse and harm.

 **Child abuse** is an action or inaction that causes injury, death, emotional harm or risk of harm to a child. There are four forms of child abuse - physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.


Harm is the detrimental impact on the child caused by the abuse. There are three types of harm: physical, emotional and psychological.

Any of the four types of abuse can cause any of the three types of harm. For example, physical abuse may result in physical harm but it can also result in emotional or psychological harm. Sexual abuse can result in physical, emotional or psychological harm but it cannot result in 'sexual harm' as that is not a recognised type of harm.

The relationship between abuse and harm

Abuse is defined as an action or inaction against a child while harm refers to the detrimental effect or impact of that action or inaction on the child.

Child Safety Services has created a table to show examples of the relationship between parental actions, behaviour or intent and the resulting harms for the child:

	Physical	Emotional	Sexual	Neglect
Types of abuse actions behaviours by parent/carer	Hitting Punching Scalding Domestic and family violence	Scapegoating Rejection Persistent hostility Domestic and family violence	Penetration Sexual exploitation Exposure to pornography	Failure to attend to medical needs Poor Hygiene / Nutrition Inadequate supervision
				
	Physical <i>Refers to the body</i>	Emotional <i>Refers to the ability to express emotions</i>	Psychological <i>Refers to the mind and cognitive processes</i>	
Resulting Harm impact experienced by the child	Bruising Fractures Internal injuries Burns	Depression Hyper vigilance Poor self-esteem Self harm Fear/ Anxiety	Learning and development delays Disorganised attachment Impaired self-image In infants, neurological changes in the developing brain	

Harm and significant harm

In order for the harm to be serious enough to warrant Child Safety Services intervention, it must be 'significant'. In deciding whether to intervene, Child Safety Services considers whether a child has suffered, is suffering, or is at risk of suffering significant harm and whether there is a parent able and willing to protect the child.



Harm is defined as any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.

Significant harm is harm that is not minor or trivial and may reasonably be expected to cause a substantial, negative impact on the child's safety, welfare or wellbeing.



For more information about the assessment of risk and harm, check out Child Safety Services' *Practice Guide: The assessment of risk and harm*: www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/child-safety-practice-manual/resources/departmental-resources

What is child abuse?

Generally speaking, child abuse is the mistreatment of a child by a parent or caregiver. Child abuse can be a single incident or several incidents that take place over time.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a child suffers physical trauma or injury that is not accidental. It doesn't always leave visible marks or injuries. Physical abuse can include hitting, shaking, throwing, burning, biting and poisoning.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse happens when a child's social, emotional or intellectual development is damaged or threatened. It can include constant rejection, teasing, bullying, yelling, criticism and exposure to domestic and family violence.

Neglect

Neglect occurs when a child's health and development are affected because their basic needs are not met. These include the need for food, housing, health care, adequate clothing, personal hygiene, hygienic living conditions, medical treatment and adequate supervision.

Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse happens when an adult, a stronger child or a teenager uses their power or authority to involve a child in a sexual activity. The sexual activity does not always need to be a physical act; it can also be a non-contact abusive behaviour such as flashing, exposure to sexually explicit material or inappropriate sexual conversations.

Signs of child abuse or neglect

A child who has been, or could be, experiencing abuse or neglect may show behavioural, emotional or physical signs of stress and harm. Some general indicators include not reaching developmental milestones, behavioural difficulties such as hitting other children and having physical injuries.

Effects of harm

Harm experienced in childhood can have significant and lasting effects. No two children react in the same way to abuse or neglect.

Children may experience a range of emotional, psychological and physical problems as a result of being harmed, for example:

- ▶ difficulty forming relationships
- ▶ mental health disorders
- ▶ cognitive delays
- ▶ permanent physical injuries or death.



For more information about child abuse and effects of harm, check out Child Safety Services' resource, *Child abuse: What you need to know at*: www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/protecting-children/what-child-abuse