

### What is child abuse and child neglect?

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting, or by failing to act to prevent, significant harm to the child. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional setting, by those known to them or, more rarely, by a stranger (Scottish Government 2014).

It is helpful to consider the different ways in which children can be abused, both within and out-with our sport.

There are four agreed categories of abuse;

- Emotional abuse,
- Physical abuse,
- Sexual Abuse, and;
- Neglect.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, for example, a child experiencing physical abuse is undoubtedly experiencing emotional abuse as well. The definitions which follow show the different ways in which these categories of abuse may be experienced by a child.

Recognising the signs of child abuse:

After each definition we have included some guidance on the main signs of abuse to look out for. However, be aware that although the physical and behavioural signs listed may be symptomatic of abuse, they may not always be an indicator and, conversely, children experiencing abuse may not demonstrate any of these signs.

Child abuse is often difficult to recognise. It is not your responsibility to decide whether a child has been abused or not. That is the role of trained professionals. At Scottish Athletics we believe it's everyone's responsibility to protect children. If you know or suspect that a child is being harmed or abused, you need to act.

Further guidance on the action you should take is available in the [Responding to a Concern](#) document. We have also included relevant links to guidance and helplines at the end of this section.

### Emotional Abuse

Is defined as the persistent emotional neglect or ill treatment that has severe and persistent adverse effects on a child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.

It may involve the imposition of age or developmentally inappropriate expectations of a child. It may involve causing children to feel frightened or in danger and includes exploiting or corrupting children. Some level of emotional abuse will be present in other types of ill treatment of children, but it can occur independently of other forms of abuse.

Examples of Emotional Abuse in Sport

- Persistent failure to show any respect to a child e.g. continually ignoring a child.
- Humiliating a child by continuously criticising their performance.

- Continually being aggressive towards a child.
- Acting in a way which undermines a child's self-esteem.

Signs which may raise concerns about emotional abuse include:

Low self-esteem	Significant decline in concentration
Running away from home	Indiscriminate friendliness & neediness
Extremes of passivity & aggression	Self-harming

### Physical Abuse:

It is defined as the causing of physical harm to a child or young person. Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning or suffocating. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer feigns the symptoms of, or deliberately causes, ill health to a child they are looking after.

Most children sustain accidental cuts and bruises throughout childhood. These are likely to occur in parts of the body like elbows, shins and knees. An important indicator of physical abuse is when the bruises or injuries are unexplained, or the explanation does not fit the injury, or the injury appears on parts of the body where accidental injuries are unlikely (e.g. on the cheeks or thighs). The age of the child must also be considered. It is possible that some injuries may have occurred for other reasons e.g. certain skin conditions and diseases.

Examples of Physical Abuse in Sport:

Physical harm can be caused by:

- Over training or dangerous training of athletes. e.g. sudden increases in training workloads.
- Allowing an athlete to compete too frequently over an extended period.
- Failure to do a risk assessment of physical limits or pre-existing medical conditions.
- Administering, condoning or failure to intervene in drug use.

Signs which may raise concerns about physical abuse include:

Refusal to discuss injuries	Untreated injuries
Improbable explanations for injuries	Fear of parents being asked for an explanation
Reluctance to go home	Avoiding certain activities due to injury
Repeat injuries over time	Avoids removing warm up clothing during sessions

### Neglect:

It is defined as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. It may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing, to

protect a child from physical harm or danger, or to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or failure to respond to, a child's basic emotional needs.

Neglect may also result in the child being diagnosed as suffering from 'non-organic failure to thrive', where they have significantly failed to reach normal weight and growth of development milestones and where physical and genetic reasons have been medically eliminated. In its extreme form children can be at serious risk from the effects of malnutrition, lack of nurturing and stimulation. This can lead to serious long-term effects such as greater susceptibility to serious childhood illnesses and reduction in potential stature. With young children in particular, the consequences may be life-threatening within a relatively short period of time.

#### Examples of Physical Neglect in Sport:

- Exposing a child to extreme weather conditions e.g. heat and cold.
- Failing to seek medical attention for injuries.
- Exposing a child to risk of injury through the use of unsafe equipment.
- Exposing a child to a hazardous environment without a proper risk assessment of the activity.
- Failing to provide adequate nutrition and water.

Signs which may raise concerns about neglect include:

Constantly hungry	Poor personal hygiene/clothing in poor condition
Constantly tired	Frequently late or not attending sessions
Untreated medical problems or injuries	Low self-esteem
Poor relationships with peers	Stealing

#### Sexual Abuse:

Is defined as any act that involves the child in any activity for the sexual gratification of another person, whether or not it is claimed that the child either consented or assented. Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or in watching sexual activities, using sexual language towards a child or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Some children may never be able to tell someone they have been sexually abused. Changes in a child's behaviour may be a sign something has happened. In some instances, there may be no overt signs to suggest that a child has been sexually abused.

#### Examples of Sexual Abuse in Sport:

- Exposure to sexually explicit inappropriate language or jokes.
- Showing a child pornographic material or using a child to produce such material.
- Inappropriate touching.

- Sexual intercourse and/or sexual activity with a child under 16.

The following signs may raise concerns about sexual abuse:

Lack of trust in adults or over familiarity with adults, fear of a particular adult	Social isolation - being withdrawn or introverted, poor peer relationship
Sleep disturbance (nightmares, bed-wetting, fear of sleeping alone)	Running away from home
Girls taking over the mothering role	School problems e.g. falling standards, truancy
Reluctance or refusal to participate in physical activity or to change clothes for games	Low self-esteem
Drug/alcohol abuse	Sexual knowledge beyond the child's age
Psychosomatic indicators such as recurrent abdominal pain or headaches	Sexual promiscuity/over sexualised behaviour
Eating disorders	Anxiety/depression/self-harm/suicide attempts

#### Further information:

Further information on abuse and neglect is available from Children 1<sup>st</sup> and also the NSPCC:

<https://www.children1st.org.uk/help-and-advice/for-parents-and-carers/spotting-the-signs-of-abuse-and-neglect/>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/signs-symptoms-effects/>

#### Sources of help:

In many situations it can be difficult to work out what to do if you are concerned about a child. If you have a concern you can contact the organisations below. They will listen and help you identify what you need to do.

**Remember: If you believe a child is in immediate danger - call the police on 999.**

<b>Children 1<sup>st</sup> helpline:</b>  Phone: 08000 28 22 33 Email: parentlinescotland@children1st.org.uk Text: 07860 022 844	<b>NSPCC helpline:</b>  Phone: 0808 800 5000 Email: help@nspcc.org.uk
<b>SCoT Welfare Director:</b>	