



**Fact Sheet 2 February 2007**

**What is harm, maltreatment and abuse of children/young people?\***

The terms harm, maltreatment and abuse refer to 'any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It is immaterial how the harm is caused' (*Child Protection Act 1999, Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulations 2001*).

Specific types of harm to children include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

**Physical abuse**

This form of harm results in actual or potential physical harm from an interaction or lack of an interaction, which is reasonably within the control of a parent or person in a position of responsibility, power or trust.

**Sexual abuse**

This form of abuse refers to the involvement of a child/young person in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, for which the child/young person is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age, development or experience is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.

This may include but is not limited to the:

- Inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity
- Exploitative use of a child in prostitution or other unlawful practices
- Exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials

**Emotional abuse**

This form of abuse/harm includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment.

This includes the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies, commensurate with her or his

personal potential, and in the context of the society in which the child/young person dwells.

There may also be non-physical acts towards the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

These acts must be reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Acts include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scape-goating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.

**Neglect and negligent treatment**

These terms refer to the failure of carers to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of the resources reasonably available to the family or carers. For example, in an educational setting, issues like ongoing absenteeism and truancy may be neglect.

This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children/young people from harm as much as is feasible.

Neglect causes, or has a high probability of causing, harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

(\*Source: Definitions from Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention, Geneva, 29-31 March 1999, World Health Organisation)

**Further information:**

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