



Definitions of child abuse

Physical abuse

Physical abuse occurs when a child or young person is subjected to any non-accidental, physically aggressive act.

The injury may be inflicted intentionally or may be the inadvertent result of physical punishment or aggressive treatment of a child.

Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, biting, burning and kicking.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse refers to a situation in which a child's caregiver or parent repeatedly rejects or threatens the child. It is also referred to as psychological abuse.

This may involve name-calling, putdowns, inappropriate symbolic acts or continual coldness from the caregiver or parent, to the extent that it significantly damages the child's physical, intellectual or emotional well-being and development.

It is a pattern of abuse, not a single incident.

It includes rejecting, ignoring, humiliating, terrorising, corrupting, verbal abuse and belittlement.

Witnessing family violence is also a form of emotional/psychological abuse. In some states and territories it is defined by legislation as a category of abuse in its own right.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse refers to acts in which a person with power or authority over a child (female or male) uses the child for sexual gratification. Acts of sexual abuse may be perpetrated by an adult, an adolescent or an older child.

Sexual abuse spans a range of contact and non-contact behaviours.

Non-contact behaviours include:

- making sexual comments directly in person, in letters, or by telephone, text messages or email
- voyeurism
- exposing a child to pornography
- exposing parts of the perpetrator's body or the child's body
- exploiting a child through prostitution or pornography.

Contact behaviours include a wide range of sexual activities including:

- fondling a child's genitals, or getting a child to fondle the perpetrator's genitals
- masturbation
- oral sex
- vaginal and/or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object
- rubbing the perpetrator's genitals against the child's body
- intimate kissing
- fondling of breasts.



Neglect

Neglect refers to a situation in which a child's parent or caregiver fails to provide the child with the basic necessities of life. It includes the failure to provide:

- food
- clothing
- shelter
- medical attention or supervision

to the extent that the child's health and development is, or is likely to be, significantly harmed.

References

'Responding to child abuse' 2003, Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Branch, Department of Human Services, Victoria.

'Keeping children and young people safe' 2005, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support, ACT.