

Why don't children tell someone that they are being abused?

Young children often do not know that what is happening to them is unacceptable and they may assume that the same thing is happening to their friends.

It may be that as they reach puberty and sexual matters are discussed at school and among friends that a young person realises they have been abused.

Children are often told by their abuser that they must keep what is happening to them a secret and many abusers make threats about what will happen to the child or the family if they tell anyone.

Some children or young people feel that it is their fault the abuse has happened and feel ashamed to talk about their experiences.

What is the best way to protect children from sexual abuse?

People who sexually abuse do not look any different from anyone else. The best way for the parents or carers to protect children is to know where they are and who they are with.

Children who roam unsupervised or who truant from school are at greater risk of abuse.

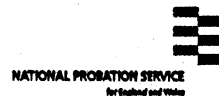
Parents should be encouraged to know how their children use the computer. This is easier if the computer is situated in the living area.

It is very difficult for children and young people to talk about sexual abuse. If a child or young person starts to talk to you, listen to them and believe them.

CONCLUSION

If you are concerned that a child is being sexually abused, 'Protecting Our Children', (2000), the policy and procedural requirements from Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight Child Protection Committees will guide you as to how to respond to a Child Protection concern. In addition, some agencies will have their own procedures to which professionals can refer.

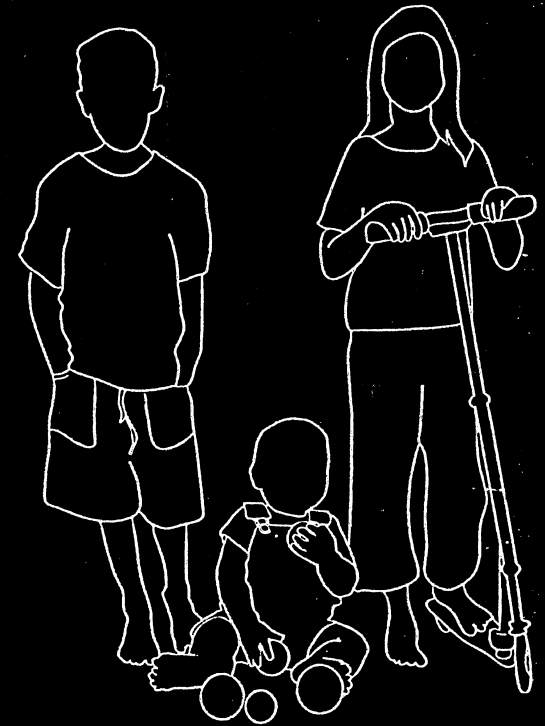
NSPCC NHS



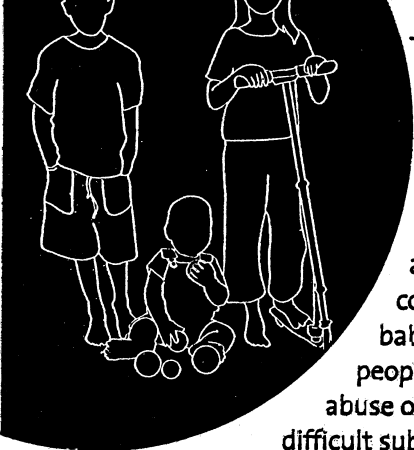
All written information is available, on request, in larger print, Braille   on audio tape  and on disk . It is also available in other languages. Please contact Southampton City Information on 023 8083 3333.

Identifying

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE



A guide for people working with children



This brief guide has been produced by Southampton Child Protection Committee and is intended to provide information and advice for people who come into contact with babies, children or young people. Although sexual abuse of children can be a difficult subject to consider, this leaflet will attempt to promote awareness and offer practical advice.

A definition of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person 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 watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways. (Department of Health, Working Together to Safeguard Children 1999)

Who is at greatest risk

Children of all ages can be sexually abused, including babies who are less than a year old. Boys are as likely to be abused as girls. Children and young people with physical or learning disabilities are at greater risk of all types of abuse.

Why do I need to know about sexual abuse?

Victims of sexual abuse often suffer very serious physical and psychological effects which can last into adulthood. If this type of abuse can be prevented or detected at an early stage, this suffering can be reduced.

Who are the abusers?

Children are usually abused by someone who they know and trust. This may be a family member, even a sibling, and the perpetrator may be male or female. Some abusers may start to commit sexual offences during adolescence. Some, but not all, will have been abused themselves as children. Often, many offences are committed without the abuser being suspected by anyone but the victim.

Abuse that happens outside the family will often be carried out by someone who is in a position of trust. Abusers may build up a relationship with a child or whole family and appear to have a genuine interest in their well-being.

Abusers will often target particular children and plan their offence against them. Part of this planning may include building up the trust not only of the child, but also his or her family and is known as 'grooming'. This can be for the purpose of abuse by others, through prostitution.

How would I know that a child was being sexually abused?

Some children can suffer sexual abuse without any sign that would alert people to what is happening. However, there may be physical or psychological signs that all is not well.

Some indicators of sexual abuse may be:

- Injury, infection, or discomfort in the genital area (although medical examination would be necessary to exclude other causes)
- A child may speak about sexual matters with a high level of knowledge that is not appropriate for his or her age.
- Sexually explicit play

Other signs may indicate any type of abuse or general unhappiness:

- Mild physical symptoms such as headache, or pain in the abdomen, or limbs.
- Withdrawn or aggressive behaviour
- Drug and alcohol misuse
- Sleep disorders
- Self harm – overdosing with tablets, cutting and harming themselves
- Eating disorders

Other factors which may cause concern

Repeat injuries are always a cause for concern.

Although each incident may seem minor, a child who has a series of superficial injuries should always be further investigated. Even if the injuries are not the result of direct abuse, there may be an issue of failing to protect the child from risk of harm.

Incompatible history - if the type of injury seems unlikely to have happened in the way that a parent or carer describes or if varying explanations are given over a period of time, or by different people. A discrepancy should be a cause for concern.

Delay in seeking medical attention - Carers may try to minimise or deny the extent of injuries and therefore not seek medical attention promptly. Conversely it should not be assumed that because a carer or parent seeks medical aid, that they cannot be responsible for the injury.

The child's age or development should be taken into account. An immobile child should not be injured.

Parental characteristics - parents who are hostile or behave inappropriately when asked for an explanation of their child's injury should cause concern. Known or suspected drug or alcohol misuse, certain mental health problems and domestic violence increase the risk of harm to children.

A child's response to being asked how an injury occurred may give cause for concern. He or she may avoid eye contact, or check with a parent for permission before giving an account. The account may sound 'rehearsed', or there may be other behavioural signs which are of concern.

Neglect may be a factor which contributes to a child being physically harmed for instance, a child who is left to play unsupervised or in a hazardous environment.

It is also important to remember that physical abuse may not occur in isolation but may be linked to emotional and sexual abuse.

CONCLUSION

Protecting Our Children, (2000) the policy and procedural requirements for Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Isle of Wight (IOW) Child Protection Committees will guide you as to how to respond to a Child Protection concern. In addition, some agencies will have their own procedures to which professionals can refer. Remember, all actions, including medical assessments must be in the best interests of the child and in accordance with the procedures.

References

Hobbs C., Hanks H., Wynne J., Child Abuse and Neglect
A Clinician's Handbook
London Churchill Livingstone 1999

DOH 1999 Working Together to Safeguard Children
London TSO 1999

Protecting Our Children. The policy and procedural requirements of Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and IOW Child Protection Committees. Local guidance.

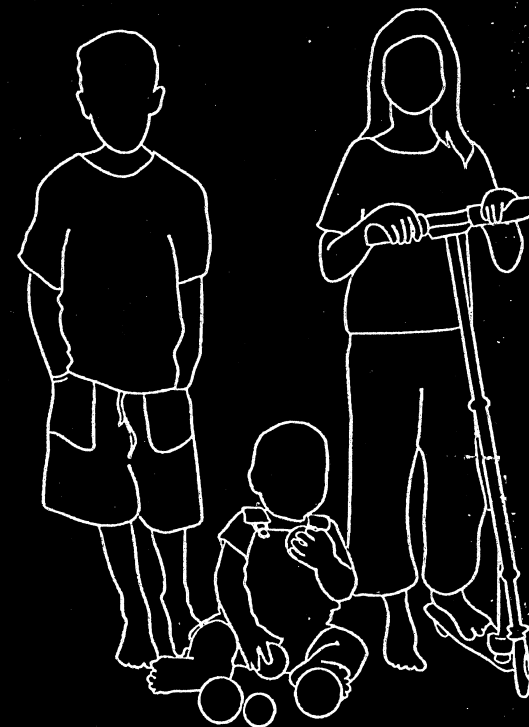
NSPCC NHS



All written information is available, on request, in larger print, Braille   on audio tape  and on disk . It is also available in other languages. Please contact Southampton City Information on 023 8083 3333.

Identifying

PHYSICAL ABUSE



A guide for people working with children

