

Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect

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Key concepts, types, causes, effects, detection, and response strategies

1. Definition & Scope

Term	Description
Child Abuse	Any act or series of acts that cause physical, emotional, or sexual harm to a child, or that threaten the child's safety and well-being.
Child Neglect	Failure to provide for a child's basic needs (food, shelter, medical care, supervision, education) or to protect the child from harm.
Child Maltreatment	Umbrella term that includes both abuse and neglect.
Mandated Reporter	Professionals (teachers, doctors, social workers, etc.) legally required to report suspected maltreatment.

2. Types of Child Abuse

Type	Core Features	Typical Signs
Physical Abuse	Deliberate use of force causing injury.	Bruises, burns, fractures in various healing stages; fear of adults; unexplained injuries.
Sexual Abuse	Involvement of a child in sexual activity they cannot consent to or understand.	Genital pain, STIs, knowledge of sexual behavior beyond age; sudden changes in behavior, nightmares.
Emotional / Psychological Abuse	Persistent verbal assaults, humiliation, intimidation, or isolation.	Low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, extreme compliance or aggression, delayed development.
Neglect	Failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional, or educational needs.	Poor hygiene, malnutrition, unattended medical problems, frequent absences from school, unsafe living conditions.
Domestic Violence Exposure	Child witnesses or is caught in the crossfire of family violence.	Aggressive behavior, sleep disturbances, anxiety, academic problems.

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3. Risk Factors & Causes

Category	Contributing Factors
Family?Related	Parental substance abuse, mental illness, history of being abused, domestic violence, unrealistic expectations, single?parent households with limited support.
Child?Related	Disabilities, chronic illness, age (infants & toddlers are most vulnerable), behavioral problems.
Community?Related	Poverty, social isolation, lack of access to services, high crime rates, cultural norms that condone harsh discipline.
Societal?Related	Inadequate child?protection laws, stigma around reporting, insufficient funding for prevention programs.

4. Short? and Long?Term Effects

Domain	Short?Term Effects	Long?Term Consequences
Physical	Injuries, infections, developmental delays.	Chronic health problems, increased risk of substance abuse, higher mortality.
Emotional / Psychological	Fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD symptoms.	Personality disorders, difficulty forming relationships, increased risk of revictimization.
Cognitive / Educational	Trouble concentrating, school avoidance.	Lower academic achievement, reduced employment prospects, intergenerational transmission of abuse.
Social	Withdrawal, aggression, attachment issues.	Social isolation, criminal behavior, poor parenting practices later in life.

5. Detection & Assessment

1. Observation

- Look for physical indicators (injury patterns, poor hygiene).

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- Note behavioral red flags (extreme compliance, aggression, regression).

2. Screening Tools

- **Child Abuse Screening Tool (CAST)** – for health settings.
- **Parent?Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTSPC)** – assesses discipline practices.

3. Interview Techniques