
**Children Entering Care
The main reasons**

Learner Support Handbook



Introduction



There are many reasons why children become tagged as 'Looked After in Care'.

But whatever the reason, each child will have experienced a traumatic period in their lives, culminating in being separated from their family and feeling isolated in their own world.

This information booklet is aimed at understanding the reasons and factors that lead to children entering care. We also explore vulnerability in children, what makes them susceptible to abusers, and the risk factors of children being abused.

Why are children and Young People Vulnerable?

The **common** issues and reasons can be due to a number of factors including a young person's low self-esteem and a poor self-image.

Young people who run away from home are recognised as being more at risk of being targeted as a victim of sexual exploitation.

Vulnerabilities are identified and targeted by the abuser, whether the young person is living with their family, looked after, away from home or they have run away.

Sexual exploitation can be linked to other issues in a child or young person's life, and authorities may only have limited opportunities to gain their trust so it is very important that all staff in all authorities are able to recognise the warning signs that a child may be a victim of, or at risk of sexual exploitation.

The following are typical vulnerabilities in children prior to abuse:

- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues, parental criminality)
- History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of 'honour'-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect)
- Recent bereavement or loss
- Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships (in cases of gang-associated CSE only)
- Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited
- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families
- Friends with young people who are sexually exploited
- Homeless
- Lacking friends from the same age group
- Living in a gang neighbourhood
- Living in hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence
- Young carer, looking after sick parents

Risk factors of Child Abuse

There are many issues that may contribute to child abuse, but some factors increase the risk to children and make them more vulnerable to abuse. They can be found in the background of parents, in the environmental situation and in attributes of the child themselves.

These factors can be significant in alerting a bystander or family member to offer support to a family and keep a caring eye out.

Parental factors:

- Parent has already abused a child
- Pregnancy was not wanted
- Parent has a background of abuse when growing up
- Young, unsupported mother often with low education
- Parents have unrealistic expectations of the child and lack parenting knowledge
- Parent is isolated and has few supports
- Parent has a mental illness or is abusing drugs or alcohol

Environmental factors:

- Overcrowding in the house
- Poverty or lack of opportunity to improve the family's resources
- Family violence is present
- A non-biological adult living in the house
- Family is experiencing multiple stresses

Child factors:

- Baby is sickly, colicky or unwanted
- Child has a physical or developmental disability
- Child is the product of an abusive relationship
- Lack of attachment between child and parent

Reasons Why Children Are Placed in Care

Physical Abuse –

Probably one of the first reasons to enter our minds when we consider why a child enters the care system. Physical abuse usually means to the extreme, where bruising is left on a child and numerous attempts to help a family learn alternative means of discipline have failed. How is physical abuse defined?

Bruises:

- commonly on the head but also on the ear or neck or soft areas - the abdomen, back and buttocks
- defensive wounds commonly on the forearm, upper arm, back of the leg, hands or feet
- clusters of bruises on the upper arm, outside of the thigh or on the body
- bruises with dots of blood under the skin
- a bruised scalp and swollen eyes from hair being pulled violently
- bruises in the shape of a hand or object

Burns or Scalds:

- can be from hot liquids, hot objects, flames, chemicals or electricity
- on the hands, back, shoulders or buttocks; scalds may be on lower limbs, both arms and/or both legs
- a clear edge to the burn or scald
- sometimes in the shape of an implement for example, a circular cigarette burn
- multiple burns or scalds.

Bite Marks:

- usually oval or circular in shape
- visible wounds, indentations or bruising from individual teeth.

Fractures or Broken Bones:

- fractures to the ribs or the leg bones in babies
- multiple fractures or breaks at different stages of healing

Other Injuries and Health Problems:

- scarring
- effects of poisoning such as vomiting, drowsiness or seizures
- respiratory problems from drowning, suffocation or poisoning

Physical abuse may also mean restraining a child or placing him in a locked in a closet or other space. Things you may notice include withdrawn

- suddenly behaves differently
- anxious
- clingy
- depressed
- aggressive
- problems sleeping
- eating disorders
- wets the bed
- soils clothes
- takes risks
- misses school
- changes in eating habits
- obsessive behaviour
- nightmares
- drugs
- alcohol
- self-harm
- thoughts about suicide

Sexual Abuse –

This can mean several different things as sexual abuse is often thought about on a continuum of acts with the viewing of pornographic material or viewing of sex acts on one end of the continuum to fondling and penetration on the other.

How is sexual abuse defined?

There are 2 different types of child sexual abuse. These are called contact abuse and non-contact abuse.

Contact abuse:

Involves touching activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child, including penetration. It includes:

- sexual touching of any part of the body whether the child's wearing clothes or not
- rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's mouth, vagina or anus
- forcing or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity
- making a child take their clothes off, touch someone else's genitals or masturbate.

Non-contact abuse:

Involves non-touching activities, such as grooming, exploitation, persuading children to perform sexual acts over the internet and flashing. It includes:

- encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts
- not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others
- meeting a child following sexual grooming with the intent of abusing them
- online abuse including making, viewing or distributing child abuse images
- allowing someone else to make, view or distribute child abuse images
- showing pornography to a child
- sexually exploiting a child for money, power or status (child exploitation).

Children who are sexually abused may:

Stay away from certain people:

- they might avoid being alone with people, such as family members or friends
- they could seem frightened of a person or reluctant to socialise with them.

Show sexual behaviour that's inappropriate for their age:

- a child might become sexually active at a young age
- they might be promiscuous
- they could use sexual language or know information that you wouldn't expect them to.

Have physical symptoms:

- anal or vaginal soreness
- an unusual discharge
- sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- pregnancy.

Neglect-

Neglect is the ***most common form of abuse*** and encompasses several areas, including the child's need for food, a clean living environment, or emotional needs. It is extremely difficult to prove emotional abuse but it is often a part of the physical or sexual abuse.

- A child may be left hungry or dirty, without adequate clothing, shelter, supervision, medical or health care.
- A child may be put in danger or not protected from physical or emotional harm.

- They may not get the love, care and attention they need from their parents.
- A child who's neglected will often suffer from other abuse as well. Neglect is dangerous and can cause serious, long-term damage - even death. Signs, indicators and effects include;

Poor Appearance and Hygiene

They may:

- be smelly or dirty
- have unwashed clothes
- have inadequate clothing, e.g. not having a winter coat
- seem hungry or turn up to school without having breakfast or any lunch money
- have frequent and untreated nappy rash in infants.

Health and Development Problems:

They may have:

- untreated injuries, medical and dental issues
- repeated accidental injuries caused by lack of supervision
- recurring illnesses or infections
- not been given appropriate medicines
- missed medical appointments such as vaccinations
- poor muscle tone or prominent joints
- skin sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm
- thin or swollen tummy
- anaemia
- tiredness
- faltering weight or growth and not reaching developmental milestones (known as failure to thrive)
- poor language, communication or social skills.

Housing and Family Issues

They may be:

- living in an unsuitable home environment for example dog mess being left or not having any heating
- left alone for a long time
- taking on the role of carer for other family members.

Medical Neglect–

Sometimes a birth parent's choice to not seek medical attention stems from religious beliefs, but there are other times when a child's medical needs are neglected due to pure thoughtlessness.

Fabricated or induced illness (FII)

This is a rare form of child abuse. It occurs when a parent or carer, usually the child's biological mother, exaggerates or deliberately causes symptoms of illness in the child. FII is also known as 'Munchausen's syndrome by proxy'

FII covers a wide range of symptoms and behaviors involving parents seeking healthcare for a child. This ranges from extreme neglect, failing to seek medical care, to induced illness.

Behaviors in FII include a mother or other carer who:

- persuades healthcare professionals that their child is ill when they're perfectly healthy
- exaggerates or lies about their child's symptoms
- manipulates test results to suggest the presence of illness – for example, by putting glucose in urine samples to suggest the child has diabetes
- deliberately induces symptoms of illness – for example, by poisoning her child with unnecessary medication or other substances

Incarceration–

A child may be placed into foster care when there are no family or friends available to care for the child during a parent's incarceration in prison or jail.

Abandonment–

Children may also enter the care system when their parents have dropped them off at a sitter's and never returned, or left the children home alone for extended periods of time. Abandonment typically refers to a parent's choice to wilfully withhold physical, emotional, and financial support from a minor child.

Abandonment occurs when the parent fails to fulfil his or her parental responsibilities and *chooses* not to have contact with his or her child. Parental abandonment is not limited to non-custodial parents, either. Sometimes parents with sole custody—even those who have fought hard in court to win child custody—have also been accused of abandoning their children.

Truancy-

Truancy, also known as Educational Neglect, does impact younger children at times when parents have not ensured that the children make it to school regularly.

Death-

Though rare, as there is usually family available to care for a child after the death of a parent, there have been cases when children do enter foster care after the death of a parent.

Voluntarily Placed-

Another rare occurrence, due to the child's behaviour or a parent's health, some parents have privately placed their children into foster care.

We often think of the parent's shortcomings when a child enters care, but there are times when a child's choices mean a child must be placed into the care system.