



There are four main categories of abuse as outlined in **Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children**. The following is a synopsis of the information contained in that document. For the full definitions please refer to **Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children 1993** (pp.32-34).

1. Neglect









“Neglect can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, medical care..... The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child’s needs are neglected to the extent that his or her well-being and/or development are severely affected.” (Children First p.31)

2. Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse usually happens where there is a relationship between a carer and a child rather than as a specific incident or incidents. *“Unless other forms of abuse are present, it is rarely manifested in terms of physical signs or symptoms.” (Children First p.31)*

Rather, it can manifest in the child’s behaviour or physical functioning. Examples of these include ‘anxious’ attachment, unhappiness, low self-esteem, educational and developmental underachievement and uncooperative or hostile behaviour. *“The threshold of significant harm is reached when interaction is predominantly abusive and become typical of the relationship between the child and the parent/ carer.” (Children First p.32)*






Examples of emotional abuse in children include:

-  Imposition of negative attributes on children, expressed by persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming;
-  Emotional unavailability by the child’s parent/carer;
-  Unresponsiveness, inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of the child;
-  Premature imposition of responsibility on the child;
-  Unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of the child’s capacity to understand something or to behave and control him/herself in a certain way;
-  Under or over-protection of the child;
-  Use of unreasonably harsh discipline;
-  Exposure to domestic violence.

3. Physical abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury or injury which results from willful or neglectful failure to protect a child.







Examples of physical injury include the following:

-  Shaking;
-  Use of excessive force in handling;
-  Deliberate poisoning;
-  Suffocation;
-  Allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant physical harm to a child.

4. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves the use of a child for gratification or sexual arousal by a person for themselves or others.

Examples of sexual abuse include:

-  Exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child;
-  Intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification;
-  Masturbation in the presence of the child or involvement of the child in an act of masturbation
-  Sexual intercourse with a child whether oral, vaginal or anal;
-  Sexual exploitation of a child... may also include showing sexually explicit material to children which is often a feature of the 'grooming' process by perpetrators of abuse;
-  Consensual sexual activity involving an adult and an under-age person.