



The four main types of harm – sexual abuse

Everyone who works with babies and young children should be able to recognise the signs that something may be wrong.

What is sexual abuse?

When a child or young person is sexually abused, they're forced, tricked or manipulated into sexual activities. Sexual abuse can happen anywhere – and it can happen in person or online.

There are two types of sexual abuse – contact and non-contact abuse.

Contact abuse

Contact abuse is where an abuser makes physical contact with a child or forces the child to make physical contact with someone else. This includes:

- sexual touching of any part of a child's body, whether they're clothed or not
- using a body part or object to rape or penetrate a child
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities
- making a child undress or touch someone else

Contact abuse can include touching, kissing and oral sex – sexual abuse isn't just penetrative.

Non-contact abuse

Non-contact abuse is where a child is abused without being touched by the abuser. This can be in person or online and includes:

- exposing or flashing
- showing pornography
- exposing a child to sexual acts
- making them masturbate
- forcing a child to make, view or share child abuse images or videos
- making, viewing or distributing child abuse images or videos
- forcing a child to take part in sexual activities or conversations online or through a smartphone

Possible signs of sexual abuse

Knowing the signs of sexual abuse can help give a voice to children and can get support for that child earlier on. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Some of the signs you might notice include:

- avoiding being alone with, or frightened of, people or a person they know
- language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know
- bruises
- bleeding, discharge, pains, or soreness in their genital or anal area