



The four main types of harm – emotional abuse

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

What is emotional abuse?

Emotional abuse covers a wide range of harms, but focuses on when a child's development, emotions, or wellbeing are at risk. It is any type of abuse that involves the continual emotional mistreatment of a child. It's sometimes called psychological abuse.

Emotional abuse is often a part of other types of abuse but doesn't have to be.

Types of emotional abuse

Emotional abuse can include:

- humiliating or constantly criticising a child
- threatening, shouting at a child or calling them names
- making the child the subject of jokes, or using sarcasm to hurt a child
- blaming and scapegoating
- not recognising a child's own individuality or trying to control their lives
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- exposing a child to upsetting situations, like domestic abuse or drug taking
- not allowing them to have friends
- persistently ignoring them
- manipulating a child
- never showing any emotions in interactions with a child, also known as emotional neglect

Signs of emotional abuse

There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse or neglect. As children grow up, their emotions change. This means it can be difficult to tell if they're being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age

The signs of emotional abuse can also be different for children at different ages.