

What is child abuse?

A child or young person can be harmed emotionally, physically, sexually or through neglect of their basic needs. The effects on a child of any of these types of harm can be severe and last into adulthood. It is essential that any abuse of a child is noticed and action is taken to prevent further harm.

- **Physical** - being hurt or harmed either deliberately or through rough, careless or thoughtless behaviour.
- **Emotional abuse** - making a child feel unloved/unvalued or causing them to feel frightened.
- **Neglect** - not being given the things a child needs to feel safe and comfortable, not providing adequate supervision or not ensuring the correct treatment/care is provided
- **Sexual abuse** - encouraging a child to act inappropriately, prostitution, and inappropriate touching are examples.
- **Fabricated or Induced illness** - This is a situation where a parent or carer makes up or exaggerates a child's symptoms, or interferes with the child or their medication to make the child ill.

Who is at risk of child abuse?

Nobody knows exactly how common maltreatment of children is. It is thought there are many more cases than are known to social services. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) estimates that for each child on a child protection register, there are another eight children who are being maltreated. They estimate that one in twenty children have been abused sexually, and one in five children have been abused seriously or neglected.

General signs of abuse in children

- Bruises or burns in unusual places.
- Changes in the behaviour of a child such as being aggressive or very withdrawn.
- Unexplained changes in their emotions such as being depressed or anxious.
- Looking as though they are not being properly looked after, such as being unusually dirty, smelly or hungry.
- Having sexual knowledge or behaviour that is not appropriate for their age.
- Being afraid of a particular adult or reluctant to be alone with them.
- Being left alone when not old enough to look after themselves. Or, being left with a person who is not suitable to look after them.

These are not the only signs of child abuse and these signs are not always due to child abuse. You must trust your judgement and discuss any concerns

What should you do next?

Listen to the child. If they confide in you, make it clear to them you are taking them seriously and you are going to help them.

Who should you report a concern to?

- **Police** - If you feel that a child is at immediate risk of serious harm then call **999** for immediate action.
- **Social workers (local authority social services)**
All local authorities have a social services officer permanently on call (including out of hours) with access to the child protection register. This officer can take referrals if there are concerns about a child.

We have a designated Child safeguarding lead, Dr Judy Roberts who is contactable via email and on the phone Monday-Friday, but you can always report any concerns you have to any of our clinicians. You can report concerns directly to Merton Social Services (MASH) on the contact details below:

0208 545 4226/4227 in hours or 0208 770 5000 Out of hours. Or by email to: MASH.merton@gov.uk

We are always happy to spend time discussing any concerns you may have. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Office Manager, Senior Receptionist or Safeguarding lead.