

## **Keeping children safe from abuse.**

Children and young people are normally seen by lots of different adults every day, like neighbours, grandparents and teachers. But due to coronavirus (COVID-19) we're self-isolating, social distancing and spending much more time at home. This means some families might need extra support with parenting. And if a child is experiencing abuse, there aren't as many opportunities for adults to spot the signs and help.

We know isolation can put some children at a greater risk of domestic abuse, neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse.

Efforts are being made to keep school places open for vulnerable children. But it's everyone's responsibility to keep children safe, spot the signs of abuse and report concerns. We all need to play our part by checking in with families and reaching out for support and advice if we have any concerns.

### Worried about a child?

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact our helpline to speak to one of our counsellors. Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or fill in our [online form](#).

[Report abuse](#)

## Spotting the signs of abuse

Social distancing, self-isolating and quarantine can cause stress and changes in everyone's behaviour. Families are under new pressures and you may worry a child is withdrawn, anxious or depressed. [Spotting the signs of abuse](#) might be more difficult and it can be difficult to know for certain if something is wrong.

But if you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, contact our helpline to speak to one of our counsellors. Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) or fill in our [online form](#). Abuse is always wrong and should always be reported.

Some of the signs you may spot include:

- aggressive or repeated shouting
- hearing hitting or things being broken
- children crying for long periods of time
- very young children left alone or are outdoors by themselves
- children looking dirty or not changing their clothes
- children being withdrawn or anxious.

These signs don't necessarily mean that a child is being abused, there could be other things happening in their life which are affecting their behaviour, but by contacting us we can help assess the situation.

## Keeping in touch online and on the phone

While you won't see children and families in the same way you did before, there are still ways you can keep in contact. And by continuing to have a relationship with a child who may be vulnerable at home, you increase the chance of being able to spot any possible signs of abuse.

- Use video calls to maintain face-to-face contact. Ask if there are apps they use to talk to friends that you can download too.
- Think about questions you could ask that will help you see what life's like for them. Ask open-ended questions like, "tell me about your day", "what are some good things that have happened today", "tell me about some sad things that have happened this week" and "what's life at home like". It's okay to ask similar questions - it can sometimes take time for a child to open up about what's happening.
- Create new routines together. Activities you enjoyed in person can be recreated on video calls over the phone. You could read stories together, do colouring, share diary entries or play games.
- Give children and young people the opportunity to talk about what's going on for them. It may take time for them to feel comfortable talking online or over the phone so try to keep in touch regularly. Talking about things like what they're watching, reading or playing, or what they've had for dinner, may help them feel more comfortable. Or you could keep in touch via different apps or games.

It's also important to support parents and carers. Ask them about how they're coping and any worries and concerns they have. Let them know you're there to support them if they need help.

## What to do if a child reveals abuse

It can be upsetting or scary when a child reveals abuse. You might not know how to respond and be tempted to take control of the situation. We recommend you:

- **Listen carefully to what they're saying**  
Be patient and focus on what you're being told. Try not to express your own views and feelings. If you appear shocked or as if you don't believe them it could make them stop talking and take back what they've said.
- **Give them the tools to talk**  
If they're struggling to talk to you, show them [Childline's letter builder tool](#). It uses simple prompts to help them share what's happening and how they're feeling

- **Let them know they've done the right thing by telling you**  
Reassurance can make a big impact. If they've kept the abuse a secret it can have a big impact knowing they've shared what's happened.
- **Tell them it's not their fault**  
Abuse is never a child's fault. It's important they hear, and know, this.
- **Say you'll take them seriously**  
They may have kept the abuse secret because they were scared they wouldn't be believed. Make sure they know they can trust you and you'll listen and support them.
- **Don't confront the alleged abuser**  
Confronting the alleged abuser could make the situation worse for the child.
- **Explain what you'll do next**  
For younger children, explain you're going to speak to someone who will be able to help. For older children, explain you'll need to report the abuse to someone who can help.
- **Report what the child has told you as soon as possible**  
Report as soon after you've been told about the abuse so the details are fresh in your mind and action can be taken quickly. It can be helpful to take notes as soon after you've spoken to the child. Try to keep these as accurate as possible.

If you work or volunteer with children, we have advice on responding to disclosures of abuse.

## Supporting disabled children

Disabled children and young people are 3 times more likely to be abused or neglected than non-disabled young people. And while they may be less visible to professionals and unable to communicate with you easily online or at all, it's important to make a greater effort to keep in touch.

Some children and young people will have access to video chat and tools like Makaton to communicate. Ask questions about how they are and how life at home is like. Ask open-ended questions like, "tell me about your day", "what are some good things that have happened today", "tell me about some sad things that have happened this week" and "what's life at home like".

When talking to parents and carers, ask after the children and how they're being cared for, whether they're receiving the support, medication and provisions they need.

## Supporting babies, toddlers and younger children

Very young children are particularly vulnerable as they're unable to share how they're feeling and are less likely to have access to other adults they can confide in. Ask after them in your calls to parents and carers to see how they're being cared for and whether they're receiving the support they need. Ask specific questions, like "what did you and baby do in the morning."

## Support for children and young people

Coronavirus has changed how we're able to run Childline but our counsellors are still available to talk to children [online or over the phone between 9am and midnight](#). The [Childline website](#) is also available 24 hours a day. Whatever a child is going through, Childline is here to help.

## Support for adults

If you're worried about a child, even if you're unsure, you can speak to us about your concerns. Whether you want to report child abuse and neglect or aren't sure what to do, we're here to listen, offer advice and support and can take the next steps if a child's in danger.

Our telephone lines are open **Monday to Friday 8am – 10pm** and **9am – 6pm at the weekend**. You can contact us online **24 hours a day, 365 days a year**.