

Appendix 2 Categories and Definitions of Child Abuse

Child abuse has generally been defined into four main categories:

Neglect, Emotional Abuse, Physical Abuse and Sexual Abuse. A child – defined as a person under 18 yrs of age who is not or who has not been married - may at any given time be subjected to more than one form of abuse.

Neglect

Neglect is normally defined in terms of an omission, where a 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, or medical care.

Harm can be defined as the ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of a child. Whether it is **significant** is determined by his/her health and development as compared to that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.

Neglect generally becomes apparent in different ways **over a period of time** rather than at one specific point. For instance, a child who suffers a series of minor injuries is not having his or her needs met for supervision and safety. A child whose ongoing failure to gain weight or whose height is significantly below average may be deprived of adequate nutrition. A child who consistently misses school may be deprived of intellectual stimulation. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that his/her well-being and/or development are severely affected.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is normally to be found in the relationship between a caregiver and a child rather than in a specific event or pattern of events. It

occurs when a child's needs for affection, approval, consistency and security are not met. It is rarely manifested in terms of physical symptoms. Examples of emotional abuse include:

- a. persistent criticism, sarcasm, hostility or blaming.
- b. conditional parenting, in which the level of care shown to a child is made contingent on his or her behaviour or actions.
- c. emotional unavailability by the child's parent/carer.
- d. unresponsiveness, inconsistent or inappropriate expectations of a child.
- e. premature imposition of responsibility on a child.
- f. unrealistic or inappropriate expectations of a child's capacity to understand something or to behave and control himself in a certain way.
- g. under or over protection of a child.
- h. failure to show interest in, or provide age appropriate opportunities for a child's cognitive and emotional development.
- i. use of unreasonable or over harsh disciplinary measures.
- j. exposure to domestic violence.

Children show signs of emotional abuse by their behaviour (for example, excessive clinginess to, or avoidance of the parent/carer), their emotional state (low self-esteem, unhappiness), or their development (non-organic failure to thrive). The **threshold of significant harm** is reached when abusive interactions become typical of the relationship between the child and parent/carer.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is any form of non-accidental injury that causes significant harm to a child, including:

- a. shaking
- b. use of excessive force in handling

- c. deliberate poisoning
- d. suffocation
- e. munchausen's syndrome by proxy (where parents fabricate stories of illness about their child or cause physical signs of illness)
- f. allowing or creating a substantial risk of significant harm to a child

The above definitions of child sexual abuse presented here are not necessarily deemed to be legal definitions but are adopted from statutory guidelines that govern our work with children and young people and from the Code of Ethics and Good Practice in Youth Sport as issued by the Irish Sports Council and Sport NI.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for his/her gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others, for example:

- a. exposure of the sexual organs or any sexual act intentionally performed in the presence of a child
- b. intentional touching or molesting of the body of a child whether by a person or object for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification
- c. masturbation in the presence of a child or involvement of the child in the act of masturbation
- d. sexual intercourse with the child, whether oral, vaginal or anal
- e. sexual exploitation of a child
- f. consensual sexual activity between an adult and a child under 17 years. In relation to child sexual abuse, it should be noted that, for the purposes of the criminal law, the age of consent to sexual intercourse is 17 years. This means, for example, that sexual intercourse between a 16 year old girl and her 17 year old boyfriend is illegal, although it might not be regarded as constituting child sexual abuse