

Definitions of Abuse

Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers the health, safety, or welfare of another through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of another's self-worth. The latter is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

Physical Abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to someone. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to the body.

Emotional Abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes another person to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the victim of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Someone exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

Sexual Abuse: Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.

Ritual Abuse: Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a person are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for another's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the child or other person, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem too grim to be true. Children making such reports must not be ignored.

Financial or Material Exploitation: Financial or material exploitation is defined as the illegal or improper use of an elder's or vulnerable adults funds, property, or assets. Examples include, but are not limited to, cashing a person's checks without authorization or permission; forging a person's signature; misusing or stealing a person's money or possessions; coercing or deceiving a person into signing any document (e.g., contracts or will); and the improper use of conservatorship, guardianship, or power of attorney.

Self-Abuse/Self-Harm/Self-Injury: Occurs when someone intentionally and repeatedly harms or hurts himself or herself. It is estimated that about two million people in the U.S. injure themselves in some way. The majority are teenagers and young women. They are of all races and backgrounds. It is often an expression of emotional pain or control over oneself.