



# Defence Youth Safety Framework

## Youth Safety Recognising Abuse

What if you are not sure if what you are seeing is abuse or neglect?

People who contact a State or Territory Child and Youth Protection Services do so because they are concerned about a young person's situation. Often they are not sure how serious a matter may be or whether a young person's experience should be considered 'abusive' or not. If you are unsure that what you are seeing constitutes abuse or neglect the following guidance may be useful in forming a reasonable belief.

If you form a reasonable belief that a young person has been, or may be at risk of being abused, you **must** act, even if you have not directly witnessed the abuse. All suspicions that a young person has been, or may be in danger of being abused must be taken seriously. This includes abuse that is suspected to have occurred outside of the Defence Youth Program and contact hours. If you consider the risk of harm for the young person requires immediate police response, call **000**.

Often people find it easier to down play their concerns or avoid thinking about the possibility that a young person may have been harmed or are at risk of harm. This can leave the young person unprotected and allow the abuse or neglect to continue. Follow the youth safety incident management guide on how to respond, report and manage youth safety incidents.

### INDICATORS OF ABUSE

There are common physical and behavioural signs that may indicate abuse or neglect. The presence of one of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse or neglect. Other things need to be considered, such as the circumstances of the young person or family. The signs below are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.

#### Myths and facts about abuse and neglect

**Myth: It's only abuse if it's violent.**

**Fact:** Physical abuse is just one type of child abuse. Neglect and emotional abuse can be just as damaging, and since they are more subtle, others are less likely to intervene.

**Myth: Abuse doesn't happen in "good" families.**

**Fact:** Abuse doesn't only happen in poor families or bad neighbourhoods. It crosses all racial, economic, and cultural lines. Sometimes, families who seem to have it all from the outside are hiding a different story behind closed doors.

**Myth: Most abusers are strangers.**

**Fact:** While abuse by strangers does happen, most abusers are family members or others close to the young person.

**Myth: Abused children always grow up to be abusers.**

**Fact:** It is true that abused children are more likely to repeat the cycle as adults. On the other hand, many adult survivors of abuse have a strong motivation to protect children against what they went through.





**Everybody has a duty to report concerns that involve the safety of young people.**

The following are some signs often associated with particular types of abuse and neglect: physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. It is important to note, however, that these types of abuse are more typically found in combination than in isolation. A physically abused young person, for example, is often emotionally abused as well, and a sexually abused young person may also be neglected.

**Indicators of Neglect:** When a person fails to supply a young person with basic physical and emotional necessities, the young person is said to be neglected.

| Physical Indicators  | Behavioural Indicators  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>poor hygiene</li> <li>wearing inappropriate clothing</li> <li>remaining unsupervised for long periods</li> <li>lacking proper medical attention</li> <li>abandonment by parents or carers</li> <li>inadequate sun protection and water during an activity;</li> <li>a lack of safe and proper food, clothing, personal hygiene or medical attention; and</li> <li>a failure to act protectively.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>telling someone that they have been neglected in some way</li> <li>stealing food and clothing</li> <li>reluctance to attend an activity</li> <li>being tired, disinterested or falling asleep at inappropriate times</li> <li>abuse of drugs or alcohol</li> <li>aggressive behaviour</li> <li>poor peer relationships</li> <li>being indiscriminate with affection</li> <li>showing desire for adult attention</li> <li>showing anxiety about being left</li> </ul> |

*\* Remember, the above are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.*

**Indicators of Psychological Harm or Emotional Abuse:** The term ‘psychological harm’ or ‘emotional abuse’ applies to behaviour which damages the confidence and self-esteem of a young person, resulting in serious emotional deprivation or trauma.

| Physical Indicators   | Behavioural Indicators   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speech disorder, learning disorder</li> <li>constant criticism;</li> <li>rejection, exclusion;</li> </ul> <p>verbal abuse – verbal abuse typically involves swearing, threatening language, ridicule, personal abuse and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>comments designed to demean and humiliate;</li> <li>exposure to family violence;</li> <li>harassment - behaviour that is offensive, humiliating, insulting or intimidating. Harassment may be the result of some real or perceived attribute or difference, such as race, colour, ethnicity, religion, political opinion, socio-economic background, age or sexual orientation.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lacking trust in others</li> <li>being tired, disinterested or falling asleep at inappropriate times</li> <li>abuse of drugs or alcohol</li> <li>aggressive behaviour</li> <li>poor peer relationships</li> <li>being indiscriminate with affection</li> <li>lacking social skills</li> <li>showing distress eg frequent crying or over concern for others</li> <li>demonstrating fear of a parent, caregiver, or other adult-person</li> <li>attention seeking or risk taking behaviour</li> <li>antisocial behaviour</li> <li>telling someone that they have been abused emotionally</li> </ul> |

*\* Remember, the above are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.*





**Indicators of Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse happens when a child or young person is physically injured by a person and it is not an accident. Physical abuse can occur when someone is bullied. Physical abuse includes injuries that happen when a person fails to take protective action or after a person forces a young person to:

- participate in an activity when they are not physically able to;
- use unsafe transportation such as allowing a child or young person to ride in a vehicle without a seat belt or proper restraint;
- physical assault such as hitting, slapping, shaking, punching and pushing; and
- participate in inappropriate activities such as a boxing match against an adult without proper protective equipment.

| Physical Indicators  | Behavioural Indicators  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bruises, cuts, sprains, dislocations, bite marks, cuts, welts, scratches</li> <li>• fractured bones</li> <li>• poisoning</li> <li>• internal injuries</li> <li>• shaking injuries</li> <li>• physical marks</li> <li>• ingestion of alcohol or drugs</li> <li>• injuries to head</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expressing little or no emotion when hurt</li> <li>• offering unlikely explanation for injuries</li> <li>• demonstrating fear of particular people, other adults or young people</li> <li>• being fearful when other young people shout</li> <li>• being excessively friendly to strangers</li> <li>• being passive and compliant</li> <li>• being physically aggressive to other young people</li> <li>• being nervous, hyperactive, aggressive or disruptive</li> <li>• telling someone that physical harm has occurred</li> </ul> |

*\* Remember, the above are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.*

**Sexual abuse or misconduct:** Child sexual abuse is an especially complicated form of abuse because of its layers of guilt and shame. It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve body contact. Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved.

Sexually abused children are often tormented by shame and guilt. They may feel that they are responsible for the abuse or somehow brought it upon themselves. The shame of sexual abuse makes it very difficult for children to come forward. They may worry that others won't believe them, will be angry with them, or that it will split their family apart. Because of these difficulties, false accusations of sexual abuse are not common, so if a child confides in you, take them seriously.

| Non-contact behaviours include:   | Contact behaviours include:   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making sexual comments directly, in letters, stories, text messages, email, or other electronic social media</li> <li>• voyeurism – “Peeping Tom”</li> <li>• exposing a child to pornography</li> <li>• perpetrator exposing parts of their body, or the young person’s body</li> <li>• exploiting a young person through prostitution or pornography</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fondling a young person’s genitals, or getting a young person to fondle the perpetrators genitals</li> <li>• masturbation</li> <li>• oral sex</li> <li>• vaginal and/or anal penetration by a penis, finger or other object</li> <li>• rubbing the perpetrators genitals against the young person’s body</li> <li>• intimate kissing</li> <li>• fondling of breasts</li> </ul> |

*\* Remember, the above are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.*





## Warning signs of Sexual Abuse

| Physical Indicators of Sexual Abuse  | Behavioural Indicators of Sexual Abuse  |
|--|---|
| <p>Many of the physical indicators of sexual abuse are only identifiable through a medical examination. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>sexually transmitted diseases</li><li>semen in the vagina</li><li>injury to the vagina, penis, scrotum or anus</li><li>abrasions and tears</li><li>bruises</li><li>bleeding from vagina, penis or anus</li></ul> <p>Often the first indication a young person gives is when they tell a person whom they trust that they have been sexually abused.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>persistent and age-inappropriate sexual activity</li><li>sexual aggression towards younger or more naive people</li><li>sexual invitations or gestures to older people</li><li>sexual interaction involving animals or toys</li><li>sexual promiscuity</li><li>regressive behaviour such as bedwetting</li><li>challenging and aggressive behaviour</li><li>suicidal and self-harming behaviour including self-mutilation, drug or alcohol abuse</li><li>risk taking behaviour</li><li>fire lighting</li><li>cruelty to animals</li><li>criminal activity</li></ul> |

*\* Remember, the above are only possible signs of abuse and neglect. The presence of these signs does not necessarily mean abuse and neglect has been, or is, occurring.*





## Reasonable Belief

A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold:

- so that people are encouraged to report suspected abuse to the relevant authorities and agencies, enabling authorities to investigate the allegations and take further action to prevent or stop any further abuse.
- which does not require proof, but does require something more than a mere rumour or speculation.
- is met if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

If you have witnessed behaviour, have a suspicion, or received a disclosure of abuse, you will need to determine whether you have formed a 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' that a young person has or is being abused or is at risk of being abused. If you form a reasonable belief that a young person has been, or may be at risk of being abused, you **must** act, even if you have not directly witnessed the abuse.

To help you assess whether your belief/suspicion is reasonable, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have information that suggests that the young person has been hurt or harmed (or is at imminent danger of harm) by something another person did or did not do?
- If the same information was given to another person would they suspect abuse or neglect?

If the answer is "yes" to either of these questions, you have formed a **suspicion/reasonable belief** and should follow the reporting steps outlined in the Defence Youth safety Incident Management found at [Youth HQ](#)

All suspicions that a young person has been, or may be in danger of being abused must be taken seriously. This includes abuse that is suspected to have occurred outside of the Defence Youth Program and/or ADF Cadets contact hours.

## Forming a belief on reasonable grounds may include:

- any person telling you they believe someone has been abused (sometimes the young person may be talking about themselves)
- physical indicators of abuse such as non-accidental or unexplained injuries; persistent neglect, or inadequate care and supervision lead you to believe that the young person has been abused.
- behavioural indicators of abuse lead you to believe that the young person has been abused.
- other signs such as family violence, parental substance misuse, psychiatric illness or intellectual disability that is impacting on the young person's safety, stability or development.

## Additional advice can be provided by SeMPRO

In October 2016 SeMPRO services - advice, information and support – were extended and made available to members of the ADF Cadets, Officers and Instructors of Cadets, volunteers, and the families of eligible personnel as well as ADF personnel. SeMPRO support coordinators are professional service providers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. SeMPRO support coordinators have experience responding to adults and young people who have been affected by sexual misconduct, and the people who support them. They can provide you with advice on supporting your child, reporting incidents, and information about support services in your local area for you and your child.

- [SeMPRO Internet](#)
- [sempro@defence.gov.au](mailto:sempro@defence.gov.au)
- 1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO) 24/





Australian Government  
Department of Defence

