

Physical Abuse

(Information taken from NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/physical-abuse/>)

It can be difficult to know what you can do if you're worried about a child who's being physically abused. We have information and advice to help you feel confident in taking the next steps to keep children and young people safe.

What is physical abuse?

Physical abuse is when someone hurts or harms a child or young person on purpose. It includes:

- hitting with hands or objects
- slapping and punching
- kicking
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning and scalding
- biting and scratching
- breaking bones
- drowning.

It's important to remember that physical abuse is any way of intentionally causing physical harm to a child or young person. It also includes making up the symptoms of an illness or causing a child to become unwell.

Signs of physical abuse

Bumps and bruises don't always mean a child is being physically abused. All children have accidents, trips and falls. And there isn't just one sign or symptom to look out for. But it's important to be aware of the signs.

If a child regularly has injuries, there seems to be a pattern to the injuries or the explanation doesn't match the injuries, then this should be reported.

Physical abuse symptoms include:

- bruises
- broken or fractured bones
- burns or scalds
- bite marks.

It can also include other injuries and health problems, such as:

- scarring
- the effects of poisoning, such as vomiting, drowsiness or seizures

- breathing problems from drowning, suffocation or poisoning.

Head injuries in babies and toddlers can be signs of abuse so it's important to be aware of these. Visible signs include:

- swelling
- bruising
- fractures
- being extremely sleepy or unconscious
- breathing problems
- seizures
- vomiting
- unusual behaviour, such as being irritable or not feeding properly.

If a child reveals abuse

A child who is being physically abused might not realise what's happening is wrong. And they might even blame themselves. If a child talks to you about physical abuse it's important to:

- listen carefully to what they're saying
- let them know they've done the right thing by telling you
- tell them it's not their fault
- say you'll take them seriously
- don't confront the alleged abuser
- explain what you'll do next
- report what the child has told you as soon as possible.

Effects of physical abuse

Physical abuse can have long lasting effects on children and young people. It can lead to poor physical or [mental health](#) later in life, including:

- anxiety
- behaviour issues
- criminal behaviour
- depression
- [drug and alcohol problems](#)
- eating disorders
- issues at school
- obesity
- [risky sexual behaviour](#)
- suicidal thoughts and/or attempts.

Effects of shaking a baby or infant

If a baby or infant is shaken or thrown, they might suffer head or brain injuries, causing:

- fractures

- internal injuries
- long-term disabilities
- learning problems
- seizures
- hearing and speech problems
- sight issues or blindness
- behaviour issues
- brain damage
- death.

Who's at risk

Physical abuse can happen in any family. But some parents might find it hard to give their children a safe and loving home if they're facing:

- poverty
- poor housing
- issues with drugs and alcohol
- mental health issues
- relationship problems
- domestic abuse
- isolation or a lack of support
- the effects of childhood abuse or neglect.

Babies have a higher risk of suffering physical abuse as well as disabled children, especially those who are unable to tell someone what's happening or don't understand what's happening to them is abuse.

Support

For parents

If you're an adult experiencing physical abuse, there are organisations that can help.

- [Relate](#)
[0300 003 0396](tel:03000030396)
You can talk to Relate about your relationship, including issues around physical abuse.
- [National Domestic Violence Helpline](#)
[0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247)
A 24 hour free helpline run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge.
- [Men's Advice Line](#)
[0808 801 0327](tel:08088010327)
Advice and support for men experiencing domestic violence and abuse.
- [National LGBT+ Domestic Abuse Helpline](#)
[0800 999 5428](tel:08009995428)
Emotional and practical support for LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse.

We're here to support you, no matter your worry. Call us on [0808 800 5000](tel:08088005000), email help@nspcc.org.uk or fill in our [online form](#).

For children and young people

How Childline can help

We understand how difficult it is for children to talk about physical abuse. Whether it's happening now or happened in the past, Childline can be contacted 24/7. Calls to [0800 1111](tel:08001111) are free and confidential. Children can also contact [Childline online](#).

Childline has information and advice for children and young people about [physical abuse](#), including why it happens and what they can do.