

Matching Assistance Newsletter

In This Issue

[Consequences of Child Abuse](#)
[Helping an Abused Child](#)

Quick Links

[Child Abuse and Neglect](#)
[Healing Emotional and Psychological Trauma](#)

All types of child abuse and neglect leave lasting scars. Some of these scars might be physical, but emotional scarring has long lasting effects throughout life, damaging a child's sense of self, ability to have healthy relationships, and ability to function at home, at work and at school. Some effects include:

- **Lack of trust and relationship difficulties.** If you can't trust your parents, who can you trust? Abuse by a primary caregiver damages the most fundamental relationship as a child-that you will safely, reliably get your physical and emotional needs met by the person who is responsible for your care. Without this base, it is very difficult to learn to trust people or know who is trustworthy. This can lead to difficulty maintaining relationships due to fear of being controlled or abused. It can also lead to unhealthy relationships because the adult doesn't know what a good relationship is.
 - **Core feelings of being "worthless" or "damaged."** If you've been told over and over again as a child that you are stupid or no good, it is very difficult to overcome these core feelings. You may experience them as reality. Adults may not strive for more education, or settle for a job that may not pay enough, because they don't believe they can do it or are worth more. Sexual abuse survivors, with the stigma and shame surrounding the abuse, often especially struggle with a feeling of being damaged.
- **Trouble regulating emotions.** Abused children cannot express emotions safely. As a result, the emotions get stuffed down, coming out in unexpected ways. Adult survivors of child abuse can struggle with unexplained anxiety, depression, or anger. They may turn to alcohol or drugs to numb out the painful feelings.

There are several types of child abuse, but the core element that ties them together is the emotional effect on the child. Children need predictability, structure, clear boundaries, and

the knowledge that their parents are looking out for their safety. Abused children cannot predict how their parents will act. Their world is an unpredictable, frightening place with no rules. Whether the abuse is a slap, a harsh comment, stony silence, or not knowing if there will be dinner on the table tonight, the end result is a child that feel unsafe, uncared for, and alone.

Emotional child abuse

Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me? Contrary to this old saying, emotional abuse can severely damage a child's mental health or social development, leaving lifelong psychological scars. Examples of emotional child abuse include:

- Constant belittling, shaming, and humiliating a child
- Calling names and making negative comparisons to others
- Telling a child he or she is "no good," "worthless," "bad," or "a mistake."
- Frequent yelling, threatening, or bullying.
- Ignoring or rejecting a child as punishment, giving him or her the silent treatment.
- Limited physical contact with the child-no hugs, kisses, or other signs of affection.
- Exposing the child to violence or the abuse of others, whether it be the abuse of a parent, a sibling, or even a pet.

Child neglect

Child neglect-a very common type of child abuse-is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, whether it be adequate food, clothing, hygiene, or supervision. Child neglect is not always easy to spot. Sometimes, a parent might become physically or mentally unable to care for a child, such as with a serious injury, untreated depression, or anxiety. Other times, alcohol or drug abuse may seriously impair judgment and the ability to keep a child safe. Older children might not show outward signs of neglect, becoming used to presenting a competent face to the outside world, and even taking on the role of the parent. But at the end of the day, neglected children are not getting their physical and emotional needs met.

Physical child abuse

Physical abuse involves physical harm or injury to the child. It may be the result of a deliberate attempt to hurt the child, but not always. It can also result from severe discipline, such as using a belt on a child, or physical punishment that is inappropriate to the child's age or physical condition. Many physically abusive parents and caregivers insist that their actions are simply forms of discipline-ways to make children learn to behave. But

there is a big difference between using physical punishment to discipline and physical abuse. The point of disciplining children is to teach them right from wrong, not to make them live in fear.

Consequences of Child Abuse

There are a few types of consequences that result from child abuse. They are physical, psychological and behavioral.

- **Physical:** maltreatment during infancy can leave lasting effects on a child's brain development. Consequences of physical abuse include cognitive, motor, vision impairments; language and socioemotional development; hyperactivity or hyperarousal; and sleep disturbances. Nonfatal head trauma can result in visual, cognitive and motor impairment. In addition, children who are abused as children are at risk for adverse health conditions as adults. These chronic health conditions include heart disease, cancer, lung disease, obesity, high blood pressure, liver disease, and high cholesterol.
- **Psychological:** chronic maltreatment and abuse can also have a psychological impact. Children who experience chronic abuse are more likely to be diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Conduct Disorder, and a range of psychiatric disorders from depression, to anxiety and eating disorders. Children may also have difficulties with learning, memory and attention as a result of chronic abuse.
- **Behavioral:** children who experience chronic abuse are more likely to use illicit drugs, engage in high-risk sexual activities; are at risk for an increased use of smoking and alcoholism and drug abuse; have problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior. In addition, early abuse and maltreatment can also effect the way children form attachments as adults, and as a result have difficulty

maintaining healthy, intimate relationships.

Helping an Abused Child

When talking with a child about the abuse, it is important to remember that it may be very difficult for them to talk about it. There are different forms of therapy like talk therapy, art therapy and animal therapy that may be beneficial for a child who has suffered chronic abuse. However, there are some things that you as a parent can do:

- Avoid denial and remain calm. Invalidating or denying what really happened to the child will only make it harder for them to heal.
- Avoid interrogating the child. Let the child tell you in his/her own words what happened; do not ask leading questions or push for answers. It takes time, and it is important that they are the ones telling the story.
- Reassure the child. It is very important to reassure the child that he/she did nothing wrong.
- Let them know that they are safe now. Telling them this and following it up with actions will help the child heal overtime and learn to trust adults again, and form attachments. Providing love and support is the best method.
- Know that it will take time. A child will not heal from chronic abuse over night. It will take time, and lots of patience, love and support. Understanding that the child's trust has been broken and that it will take time to regain their trust is important to keep in mind. Being consistent, supportive and caring will help the child heal and regain his/her trust.