**What is Child Abuse ?**

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Someone may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting, by those known to them or by a stranger, for example, via the internet.  They may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.  Child abuse can have major long-term effects on all aspects of a child's health, development and well being.  The main forms of maltreatment are:

**Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is deliberately causing physical harm to a child. This might involve punching, kicking, biting, burning, scalding, shaking, throwing or beating with objects such as belts, whips, or sticks. It also includes poisoning, giving a child alcohol or illegal drugs, drowning or suffocation. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of illness in a child.  In pregnancy an unborn child can be harmed by domestic violence.

**Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is where repeated verbal threats, criticism, ridicule, shouting, lack of love and affection causes a severe adverse effect on a child's emotional development.  It includes conveying to children that they are worthless, unloved, inadequate or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. Emotional abuse may include not giving a child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or 'making fun' of what they say or how they communicate.  It may feature inappropriate expectations being imposed on a child, over protection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child from taking part in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another person.  It may involve serious bullying (including cyberbullying), causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of children, or it may occur alone.

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. This may involve physical contact including penetrative sex, oral sex, masturbation, kissing, rubbing, or touching outside of clothing, or it may involve non-contact activities such as involving children in watching sexual activities, producing or looking at sexual images, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet). Abusers can be men, women or other children.

**Neglect**

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect is when a parent or carer fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment), medical care, or protection from physical and emotional harm or danger.  It also includes failure to ensure access to education or to look after a child because the carer is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In pregnancy neglect may occur as a result of misusing alcohol or drugs.

**Signs of Abuse**

The following signs may or may not be indicators that abuse has taken place, but the possibility should be considered.

**Signs of possible physical abuse**

* Any injuries not consistent with the explanation given for them
* Injuries which occur to the body in places which are not normally exposed to falls or rough games
* Injuries which have not received medical attention
* Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games or swimming
* Bruises, bites, burns and fractures, for example, which do not have an accidental explanation
* The child gives inconsistent accounts for the cause of injuries
* Frozen watchfulness

**Signs of possible sexual abuse**

* Any allegations made by a child concerning sexual abuse
* The child has an excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and inappropriate knowledge of adult sexual behaviour for their age, or regularly engages in sexual play inappropriate for their age
* Sexual activity through words, play or drawing
* Repeated urinary infections or unexplained stomach pains
* The child is sexually provocative or seductive with adults
* Inappropriate bed-sharing arrangements at home
* Severe sleep disturbances with fears, phobias, vivid dreams or nightmares which sometimes have overt or veiled sexual connotations
* Eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia.

**Signs of possible emotional abuse**

* Depression, aggression, extreme anxiety, changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clingy
* Obsessions or phobias
* Sudden underachievement or lack of concentration
* Seeking adult attention and not mixing well with other children
* Sleep or speech disorders
* Negative statements about self
* Highly aggressive or cruel to others
* Extreme shyness or passivity
* Running away, stealing and lying

**Signs of possible neglect**

* Dirty skin, body smells, unwashed, uncombed hair and untreated lice
* Clothing that is dirty, too big or small, or inappropriate for weather conditions
* Frequently left unsupervised or alone
* Frequent diarrhoea
* Frequent tiredness
* Untreated illnesses, infected cuts or physical complaints which the carer does not respond to
* Frequently hungry
* Overeating junk food