

2. Definitions

26 minutes read

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This section sets out definitions and signs of abuse, updating existing House of Bishops guidance. You may see, hear or observe these signs as part of the life of your Church, or as part of your engagement in the wider community.

If Church Officers hear, observe or suspect any of these, action needs to be taken.

This could mean raising the issue with the incumbent, the PSO or the Diocesan / Cathedral Safeguarding Adviser, or with statutory services in the case of an emergency or injury. It could also mean raising it with a more appropriate agency, for example a local charity or a national helpline.

For full information on what to do in response to a safeguarding concern, please refer to the following Guidance documents:

- [Responding to, assessing and managing safeguarding concerns or allegations against church officers](#)
- [Responding to safeguarding concerns or allegations that relate to children, young people and vulnerable adults.](#)
- [Responding well, to victims and survivors of abuse.](#)

Relevance to other countries

Please note that whilst there might be different perceptions of what constitutes abuse in different countries, abuse cannot be understood as a relative concept only applicable in certain contexts. Abuse is abuse. Domestic abuse and the trafficking of children for sexual exploitation, for example, are still forms of abuse whichever country they take place in and must be responded to.

Physical Abuse

Physical Abuse (children and adults)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2] , [3]
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In children this may involve:

- hitting
- shaking
- throwing
- poisoning
- burning or scalding
- drowning
- suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

In adults this may be:

- assault
- hitting
- slapping
- pushing
- misuse of medication
- restraint
- inappropriate physical sanctions.

Bumps and bruises don't always mean someone is being physically abused. Although there isn't just one sign or symptom to look out for, it's important to be aware of the signs.

If someone 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.

Symptoms may include:

- bruises
- flinching away from others
- wearing clothes that cover up, even in warm weather
- burns or scalds
- broken or fractured bones
- bite marks.

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

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

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/physical-abuse/>

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[3] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Domestic Abuse

Domestic Abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<p>Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It can seriously harm children and young people and witnessing domestic abuse is child abuse.</p> <p>It's important to remember domestic abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• can happen inside and outside the home• can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites• can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended <p>and that both males and females can be abused or abusers</p>	<p>The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 now recognises that children are victims of domestic abuse as well as their parents. It may be harder to detect in children, but signs you might see include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• aggression or <u>bullying</u>• anti-social behaviour, like vandalism• <u>anxiety, depression or suicidal thoughts</u>• attention seeking• bed-wetting, nightmares or insomnia• constant or regular sickness, like colds, headaches and mouth ulcers• <u>drug or alcohol use</u>• eating disorders• problems in school or trouble learning• tantrums• withdrawal.

Domestic Abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you might see ^[2]
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Domestic abuse is any type of controlling, bullying, threatening or violent behaviour between people in a relationship. It's important to remember domestic abuse:

- can happen inside and outside the home
- can happen over the phone, on the internet and on social networking sites
- can happen in any relationship and can continue even after the relationship has ended
- both men and women can be abused or abusers.

and that both men and women can be abused or abusers.

At time of writing, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been passed, but much is not yet in force. The Act can be found at [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#). This will create a statutory definition of domestic abuse, emphasising that domestic abuse is not just physical violence, but can also be emotional, coercive or controlling, and economic abuse. See [Section 3](#) for more information.

Productivity signs

- Change in the person’s working patterns: for example, frequent absence, lateness or needing to leave work early;
- Reduced quality and quantity of work: missing deadlines, a drop in usual performance standards;
- Change in the use of the phone/email: for example, a large number of personal calls/texts, avoiding calls or a strong reaction to calls/texts/emails;
- Spending an increased amount of hours at work for no reason.

Changes in behaviour or demeanour

- Conduct out of character with previous employment history or social engagement;
- Changes in behaviour: for example, becoming very quiet, anxious, frightened, tearful, aggressive, distracted, depressed;
- Isolating themselves from colleagues or friends;
- Obsession with timekeeping;
- Secretive regarding home life;
- Worried about leaving children at home.

Physical signs

- Visible bruising or single or repeated injury with

[1] [How to Protect Children From Domestic Abuse | NSPCC](#)

[2] For a full description, see [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#), [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Neglect

Neglect (children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2]
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The persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development.

Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.

The NSPCC adds:

Neglect can be a lot of different things, which can make it hard to spot. But broadly speaking, there are 4 types of neglect.

- Physical neglect: A child's basic needs, such as food, clothing or shelter, are not met or they aren't properly supervised or kept safe.
- Educational neglect: A parent doesn't ensure their child is given an education.
- Emotional neglect: A child doesn't get the nurture and stimulation they need. This could be through

Neglect can be really difficult to spot. Having one of the signs doesn't necessarily mean a child is being neglected. But if you notice multiple signs that last for a while, they might show there's a serious problem. Children and young people who are neglected might have:

Poor appearance and hygiene:

- being smelly or dirty
- being hungry or not given money for food
- having unwashed clothes
- having the wrong clothing, such as no warm clothes in winter
- having frequent and untreated nappy rash in infants.

Health and development problems:

- regular illness, infections or dental issues
- missed medical appointments, such as for vaccinations
- poor language or social skills
- tiredness
- repeated accidental injuries, often caused by lack of supervision
- skin issues, such as sores, rashes, flea bites, scabies or ringworm.

Housing and family issues:

Neglect and acts of omission (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ³
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs.● Failure to provide access to appropriate health, care and support or educational services.● The withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● An out of character failure to engage in social interaction and activities● Inconsistent or reluctant contact with support, such as medical and social care organisations● Poor personal hygiene● Inappropriate or inadequate clothing● Poor state of home environment● Malnutrition or unexplained weight loss● Untreated injuries and medical problems● Accumulation of untaken medication.

Self-neglect (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ⁴
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Self-neglect covers a range of behaviour related to neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very poor personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes every day • Unkempt appearance • Lack of essential food, clothing or shelter/heating • Malnutrition and/or dehydration • Living in squalid or unsanitary conditions • Neglecting household maintenance • Hoarding • Collecting a large number of animals in inappropriate conditions • Non-compliance with health or care services, accumulation of untaken medication • Inability or unwillingness to take medication or treat illness or injury.
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[1] [Neglect is also Child Abuse: Know All About It | NSPCC](#)

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

- [3](#)Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse
- [4](#)Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Organisational abuse (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
Including neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home, or in relation to care provided in one's own home, for example. This may range from one off incidents to on-going ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● An unsafe, unhygienic or overcrowded environment.● A strict or inflexible routine.● Lack of privacy, dignity, and respect for people as individuals.● Withdrawing people from community or family contacts.● No choice offered with food, drink, dress or activities.● No respect or provisions for religion, belief, or cultural backgrounds.● Treating adults like children, including arbitrary decision-making.

[1] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Sexual abuse

Sexual Abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{1,2}
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“Forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

The activities **may involve physical contact**, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing.

They **may also include non-contact activities**, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse.

Sexual abuse can take place **online**, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.

Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.”

Knowing the signs of sexual abuse can help give a voice to children and young people. Sometimes children won't understand that what's happening to them is wrong. Or they might be scared to speak out.

Some of the signs you might notice include:

- Avoiding being alone with or frightened of people or a person they know.
- Language or sexual behaviour you wouldn't expect them to know.
- Having nightmares or bed-wetting.
- Self-harm.
- Changes in eating habits or developing an eating problem
- Alcohol or drug misuse.

If a child is being or has been sexually abused online, they might:

- spend a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- have lots of new phone numbers, texts or email addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet.

Children and young people might also drop hints and clues about the abuse.

Sexual abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[3]
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• rape• indecent exposure• sexual harassment• inappropriate looking or touching• sexual teasing or innuendo• sexual photography or filming, “revenge porn”• subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts• sexual assault• sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• excessive fear/apprehension of, or withdrawal from, relationships• fear of receiving help with personal care• reluctance to be alone with a particular person.• self-harming• poor concentration, withdrawal, sleep disturbance• the uncharacteristic use of explicit sexual language or significant changes in sexual behaviour or attitude• bruising, particularly to the thighs, buttocks and upper arms and marks on the neck• pregnancy in someone who is unable to consent to sexual intercourse

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-abuse/>

[2] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[3] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) Section 14.16 onwards outlines categories of adult abuse

Exploitation

Child Exploitation - Sexual (a form of child sexual abuse)

What it is	Signs you may see ¹
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“Occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity:

- (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or
- (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually **exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.**

Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

Exploitation can take place between a child and an adult as well as ‘peer on peer’ (for example between one young person and another)

The NSPCC^[2] adds:

When a child/young person is sexually exploited online they might be persuaded or forced to:

- send or post sexually explicit images of themselves
- film or stream sexual activities
- have sexual conversations.

Once an abuser has images, video or copies of conversations, they might use threats and blackmail to force a young person to take part in other sexual activity. They may also share the images and videos with others or circulate them online.

Gangs use sexual exploitation:

- to exert power and control
- for initiation

Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for "normal" teenage or pre-teen behaviour. Signs include:

- Signs of sexual abuse and grooming
- Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour.
- Being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- Being secretive.
- Sharp changes in mood or character.
- Having money or things they can't or won't explain.
- Physical signs of abuse, like bruises
- Alcohol or drug misuse.
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy.

Other signs may include:

- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend.
- Staying out late or overnight.
- Having a new group of friends.
- Missing from home or stopping going to school or college.
- Hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups.
- Involved in a gang.
- Involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.

Child Exploitation: Criminal (including ‘county lines’)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{— —} [3] , [4]
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As set out in the [Serious Violence Strategy](#), published by the Home Office, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:

(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or

(b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or

(c) through violence or the threat of violence.

The victim may have been criminally exploited **even if the activity appears consensual**. Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

This includes ‘County Lines’, a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of ‘deal lines’. They are likely to exploit children and

Signs you may notice:

- Frequently absent from and doing badly in school.
- Going missing from home, staying out late and travelling for unexplained reasons.
- In a relationship or hanging out with someone older than them.
- Being angry, aggressive or violent.
- Being isolated or withdrawn.
- Having unexplained money and buying new things.
- Wearing clothes or accessories in gang colours or getting tattoos.
- Using new slang words.
- Spending more time on social media and being secretive about time online.
- Making more calls or sending more texts, possibly on a new phone or phones.
- Self-harming and feeling emotionally unwell.
- Taking drugs and abusing alcohol.
- Committing petty crimes like shop lifting or vandalism.

[1] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

[2] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>

[3] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/gangs-criminal-exploitation/>

[4] See also [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) Annex A for definitions of child abuse and also Annex B for related resources

Financial abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
<ul style="list-style-type: none">theftfraudinternet scammingcoercion in relation to an adult's financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactionsthe misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Missing personal possessionsAn unexplained lack of moneyPower of attorney or lasting power of attorney (LPA) being obtained after the person has ceased to have mental capacity, or being obtained by someone you would not expect.Sudden or unexpected changes in a will or other financial documentsAppearance of previously uninvolved relatives or 'close friends'.Failing to provide receipts for shopping or other financial transactions carried out on behalf of someone else.

[1] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Modern Slavery (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1]
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- slavery
- human trafficking
- forced labour and domestic servitude.
- traffickers and slave masters using whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

- Shows signs of physical or psychological abuse and untreated injuries
- Looks malnourished or unkempt, or appears withdrawn and neglected
- Seems under the control or influence of others
- Wears the same clothes every day
- Wears no safety equipment even if their work requires it
- Living in dirty, cramped or overcrowded accommodation
- Living and working at the same address
- Appears unfamiliar with their neighbourhood or where they work
- Rarely allowed to travel on their own
- Collected and dropped off on a regular basis early in the morning or late at night
- In a crowded minibus with other workers
- Has no control of their identification documents such as their passport
- Reluctant to seek help and avoids eye contact
- Appears frightened or hesitant to talk to strangers
- Fear of police, don't know who to trust or where to get help
- Afraid of deportation, and risk of violence to them or their family.

[1] <https://www.theclewerinitiative.org/spot-the-signs>, also [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) section 14.7 and [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Extremism and radicalisation (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] , [2] , [3] , [4]
<p>Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It can result in a person becoming drawn into terrorism and is in itself a form of harm.</p> <p>Extremism goes beyond terrorism and includes people who target the vulnerable – including the young – by seeking to sow division between communities on the basis of race, faith or denomination; justify discrimination towards women and girls; persuade others that minorities are inferior; or argue against the primacy of democracy and the rule of law in our society. This can include harmful minority religions (“cults”)[5]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● isolating themselves from family and friends● talking as if from a scripted speech● unwillingness or inability to discuss their views● a sudden disrespectful attitude towards others● increased levels of anger● increased secretiveness, especially around internet use. <p>Children who are at risk of radicalisation may have low self-esteem, or be victims of bullying or discrimination. Extremists might target them and tell them they can be part of something special, later persuading them into cutting themselves off from their friends and family.</p> <p>However, these signs don't necessarily mean a child is being radicalised – it may be normal teenage behaviour or a sign that something else is wrong.</p>

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/reporting-abuse/dedicated-helplines/protecting-children-from-radicalisation/>

[2] [Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

[3] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[4] [Part B: Practice Guidance \(londoncp.co.uk\)](#)

[5] For more information, see [Welcome to Inform | Inform](#)

Discrimination and bullying (adults/children)

Discriminatory abuse

What it is	Signs you may see [1],[2] ,
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● harassment● slurs or similar treatment because of:● race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin● gender and gender identity, including gender reassignment● age● disability● sexual orientation● religion● pregnancy and maternity● marriage and civil partnership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Overhearing harassment or abuse● A person appearing to be excluded from activities or groups for discriminatory reasons.● The support on offer does not take account of the person's individual needs in terms of a protected characteristic● Expressions of anger, frustration, fear or anxiety.

Bullying, cyber bullying and online abuse (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see [3],[4] , [5] , [6]

Bullying can include many different forms of abuse, including physical and emotional abuse, and typically (but not exclusively) takes place between peers.

Bullying is behaviour that hurts someone else. It includes name calling, hitting, pushing, spreading rumours, threatening or undermining someone.^[7]

It can happen anywhere – at school, at home, online, at work or in church.

It's usually repeated over a long period of time and can hurt a child both physically and emotionally.

Cyberbullying can include:

- sending threatening or abusive text messages
- creating and sharing embarrassing images or videos
- trolling – the sending of menacing or upsetting messages on social networks, chat rooms or online games
- shaming someone online
- setting up hate sites or groups about a particular child
- encouraging young people to self-

Signs include:

- being afraid to go to school or youth groups (or work or church), being mysteriously 'ill' each morning, or skipping school/youth group
- being nervous, losing confidence, or becoming distressed and withdrawn
- problems with eating or sleeping
- belongings getting 'lost' or damaged
- spending a lot more or a lot less time than usual online, texting, gaming or using social media
- seem distant, upset or angry after using the internet or texting
- be secretive about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on their mobile phone
- physical injuries, such as unexplained bruises
- not doing as well at school
- asking for, or stealing, money (to give to whoever's bullying them)
- bullying others.

[1] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance)

[2] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672217/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

[3] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/online-abuse/>

[4] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672217/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

[5] [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance)

[6] [Part B: Practice Guidance \(londoncp.co.uk\)](https://londoncp.co.uk/part-b-practice-guidance/)

[7] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/>

Female Genital Mutilation (adults/children)

What it is	Signs you may see ^[1] ^[2]
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Female genital mutilation (FGM) is when a female's genitals are deliberately altered or removed for non-medical reasons. It's also known as 'female circumcision' or 'cutting', but has many other names.

The practice is not required by any religion and is medically unnecessary, painful and has serious health consequences at the time it is carried out and in later life.

The procedure is typically performed on girls of any age but is also performed on newborn infants and on young women before marriage/ pregnancy.

FGM may be practised illegally by doctors or traditional health workers in the UK, or girls may be sent abroad for the procedure.

FGM is illegal in the UK^[3], under the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 (as amended).

- Signs FGM might happen:
- A relative or someone known as a 'cutter' visiting from abroad.
 - A special occasion or ceremony takes place where a girl 'becomes a woman' or is 'prepared for marriage'.
 - A female relative, like a mother, sister or aunt has undergone FGM.
 - A family arranges a long holiday overseas or visits a family abroad during the summer holidays.
 - A girl has an unexpected or long absence from school.
 - A girl struggles to keep up in school.
 - A girl runs away – or plans to run away - from home.
- Signs FGM might have taken place:
- Having difficulty walking, standing or sitting.
 - Spending longer in the bathroom or toilet.
 - Appearing quiet, anxious or depressed.
 - Acting differently after an absence from school or college.
 - Reluctance to go to the doctors or have routine medical examinations.
 - Asking for help – though they might not be explicit about the problem because they're scared or embarrassed

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

[2] [Female genital mutilation \(who.int\)](#)

[3] <https://www.gov.uk/female-genital-mutilation-help-advice>

Emotional and psychological abuse

Emotional abuse (children)

What it is	Signs you may see [1] [2]
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In children:

The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development.

It may involve

- conveying to a child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person.
- not giving the child opportunities to express their views, deliberately silencing them or ‘making fun’ of what they say or how they communicate.
- age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children, interactions that are beyond a child’s developmental capability
- overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction.
- seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying (including cyber bullying),
- 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 maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

There might not be any obvious physical signs of emotional abuse. A child or young person might not tell anyone what's happening until they reach a 'crisis point'. That's why it's important to look out for signs in how a child or young person is acting.

As children grow up, their emotions change. This means it can be difficult to tell if they're being emotionally abused. But children who are being emotionally abused might:

- seem unconfident or lack self-assurance
- struggle to control their emotions
- have difficulty making or maintaining relationships
- act in a way that's inappropriate for their age.

Babies and pre-school children who are being emotionally abused or neglected might:

- be overly-affectionate to strangers or people they don't know well
- seem unconfident, wary or anxious
- not have a close relationship or bond with their parent
- be aggressive or cruel towards other children or animals.

Older children/young people might:

- use language you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- act in a way or know about things you wouldn't expect them to know for their age
- struggle to control their emotions
- have extreme outbursts

Psychological abuse (adults)

What it is	Signs you may see ^{[3],[4]}
<p>In adults this may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• emotional abuse• threats of harm or abandonment• deprivation of contact• humiliation• blaming• controlling• intimidation• coercion• harassment• verbal abuse• cyber bullying• isolation• unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An air of silence when a particular person is present• Withdrawal or change in the psychological state of the person• Insomnia• Low self-esteem• Uncooperative and aggressive behaviour• A change of appetite, weight loss/gain• Signs of distress: tearfulness, anger• Apparent false claims, by someone involved with the person, to attract unnecessary treatment.

Spiritual abuse (children and adults). This is not a separate category of abuse, it is a form of emotional and

psychological abuse relevant for faith contexts. It is important to be clear about this when discussing cases with statutory services who may be unfamiliar with its use. See also separate section below for full details

What it is ^{5,6}	Signs you may see
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Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological

abuse. It is characterised by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it and can be experienced in a variety of different relationships.

This abuse may include:

- Manipulation and exploitation
 - Enforced accountability
 - Requirements for secrecy and silence
 - Coercion to conform, for example, seeking to enforce rather than encourage behavioural changes; failing to allow an individual autonomy to make their own choices
 - Exercising control through using sacred texts or teaching to coerce behaviour
 - Requirement of obedience to the abuser
 - The suggestion that the abuser has a ‘divine’ position

- Use of scripture to justify abusive behaviour
- Use of scripture to manipulate or force a person into acts they would not wish to consent to.
- Prophetic ministry is an important part of the work of the Church, and this is affirmed. However, a warning sign of spiritual abuse can be exercising control through invoking fear of spiritual consequences for disobedience. To be clear the issue is not the discussion of spiritual consequences as provided in the Bible, but the exercise of control over another person through instrumentalising their fear
- Exercising control through the suggestion that obedience to the abuser is equivalent to obedience to God
- Emotional manipulation in the guise of righteousness
- Being manipulated or feeling pressured into service or conformity
- Feeling unable to say no to increasing demands for time,

[1] <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/emotional-abuse/>

[2] [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[3] <https://www.scie.org.uk/safeguarding/adults/introduction/types-and-indicators-of-abuse>

[4] See also [Care and support statutory guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) s 14.7 for definitions of adult abuse

[5] ‘Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse – Creating healthy Christian cultures’ – Dr Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys, 2019

[6] [Oakley, L., Kinmond, K., & Humphreys, J. \(2018\). Spiritual Abuse in Christian faith settings: Definition, policy and practice Guidance. *Journal of Adult Protection*, 20\(3-4\), 144-154.](#)

Refugees and asylum seekers

“Refugees and asylum seekers have the same fundamental rights to safety and protection* as any other person and the fact that their citizenship status may not have been resolved does not alter this.....From a safeguarding point of view refugees and asylum seekers are not necessarily vulnerable and their autonomy should be respected. They are, after all they have gone through, survivors and shouldn’t be treated as victims.....However, refugees and asylum seekers may face certain risks associated with their particular circumstances and experiences.....Asylum-seeking children who are unaccompanied are in a highly vulnerable situation”

These key points are taken from: [“Guidelines for safeguarding refugees and asylum seekers”](#) produced by Thirtyone:eight and Welcome Churches where a full discussion of safeguarding issues in respect of refugees and asylum seekers can be found.

* This means emergency safeguarding - access to non-emergency services provided by statutory agencies may differ.

This document is version 1 and was printed on 28 March 2024. The most up to date version of this policy can be found on the Church of England website: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding>

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