

# Safeguarding 7-minute briefing: Emotional Abuse

## Watch out for unusual behaviour...

Withdrawn; suddenly behaves differently; anxious; clingy; depressed; aggressive; problems sleeping; eating disorders; wets the bed; soils clothes; takes risks; misses school; changes in eating habits; obsessive behaviour; nightmares; drugs/alcohol; self-harm; thoughts about suicide

## What is Emotional Abuse?

Emotional abuse is the ongoing emotional maltreatment or emotional neglect of a child - sometimes called psychological abuse. It can seriously damage a child's emotional health and development. Emotionally abused children are usually suffering another type of abuse or neglect at the same time - but this isn't always the case. Emotional abuse can involve deliberately trying to scare or humiliate a child or isolating or ignoring them.

## Parents' behaviour

All parents tell their children off from time to time. And sometimes the relationship between them might seem strained. But if you notice severe or constant harsh behaviour, or that a child seems scared or unfeeling towards their parent, it could be a sign that the child is being emotionally abused.

## Signs, symptoms and effects

There often aren't any obvious physical symptoms of emotional abuse or neglect but you may spot signs in a child's actions or emotions. Changes in emotions are a normal part of growing up, so it can be really difficult to tell if a child is being emotionally abused.



## Why emotional abuse happens

Periods of high stress and tension, such as money worries can take a parent's or carer's focus away from providing the emotional love and support that a child needs. They may:

- be emotionally unavailable, because they're not around or tired
- forget to offer praise and encouragement
- expect a child to take on too much responsibility for their age
- be over-protective, limiting opportunities to explore
- expect a child to meet their own emotional needs
- take out their anger and frustration on their child.

## Types of Emotional Abuse - Passive

When a parent or carer denies their child the love and care they need in order to be healthy and happy it's known as "passive" abuse. It's just as damaging, but it can be harder to spot than "active" abuse. The definitions for passive emotional abuse and emotional neglect are very similar.

## Types of Emotional Abuse - Active

When someone intentionally scares, demeans or verbally abuses a child it's known as "active" abuse. This requires a premeditated intention to harm a child. Active emotional abuse has been defined as:

- spurning (rejecting)
- Terrorising
- Isolating
- exploiting or corrupting.

Sometimes a fifth category of "ignoring" is also included.

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