

# Child Abuse or Child Maltreatment in Psychological Maltreatment

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## Description

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual, and/or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child or children, especially by a parent or a caregiver. Child abuse may include any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to a child and can occur in a child's home, or in the organizations, schools, or communities the child interacts with. The terms child abuse and child maltreatment are often used interchangeably, although some researchers make a distinction between them, treating child maltreatment as an umbrella term to cover neglect, exploitation, and trafficking. Different jurisdictions have developed their own stance towards mandatory reporting, different definitions of what constitutes child abuse to remove children from their families or for prosecuting a criminal charge.

Definitions of what constitutes child abuse vary among professionals, between social and cultural groups, and across time. The terms abuse and maltreatment are often used interchangeably in the literature. Child maltreatment can also be an umbrella term covering all forms of child abuse and child neglect. Defining child maltreatment depends on prevailing cultural values as they relate to children, child development, and parenting. Definitions of child maltreatment can vary across the sectors of society which deal with the issue, such as child protection agencies, legal and medical communities, public health officials, researchers, practitioners, and child advocates. Since members of these various fields tend to use their own definitions, communication across disciplines can be limited, hampering efforts to identify, assess, track, treat, and prevent child maltreatment.

In general, abuse refers to (usually deliberate) acts of commission while neglect refers to acts of omission. Child maltreatment includes both acts of commission and acts of omission on the part of parents or caregivers that

cause actual or threatened harm to a child. Some health professionals and authors consider neglect as part of the definition of abuse, while others do not; this is because the harm may have been unintentional, or because the caregivers did not understand the severity of the problem, which may have been the result of cultural beliefs about how to raise a child. Delayed effects of child abuse and neglect, especially emotional neglect, and the diversity of acts that qualify as child abuse, are also factors.

Among professionals and the general public, there is disagreement as to what behavior constitutes physical abuse of a child. Physical abuse often does not occur in isolation but as part of a constellation of behavior including authoritarian control, anxiety-provoking behavior, and a lack of parental warmth. The WHO defines physical abuse as:

Intentional use of physical force against the child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in- harm for the child's health, survival, development, or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, and suffocating. Much physical violence against children in the home is inflicted with the object of punishing.

Overlapping definitions of physical abuse and physical punishment of children highlight a subtle or non-existent distinction between abuse and punishment, but most physical abuse is physical punishment "in intent, form, and effect". As of 2006, for instance, Paulo Sérgio Pinero wrote in the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children: Corporal punishment involves hitting children, with the hand or with an implement -whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding, or forced ingestion.

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