

Safeguarding children

Information for parents, families and the wider community about child protection

This factsheet has been produced by the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to help anyone who suspects that a child is being abused or harmed.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse takes many forms. Not all have visible, external signs.

Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child.

Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill-treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development.

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.

Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development.

What should I do if I think a child is being harmed?

If you are worried about a child's welfare, contact Children, Schools and Families (CSF), the NSPCC or the police and tell them about your concerns. Telephone numbers are at the end of this factsheet.

Please act promptly. It can be very difficult to investigate concerns if there is a delay because some signs of abuse disappear quickly.

You may like to discuss your concerns first with someone who works with children and families, such as a GP, health visitor, social worker, school nurse or teacher. If you are in any doubt, it is much better to talk to someone who has experience of working with children who will be able to advise you.

Hertfordshire County Council
Children, Schools and Families

Telephone: 0300 123 4043
www.hertsdirect.org/csf



Will I have to give my name?

If you feel very strongly that you cannot give your name, you need not do so – your concerns for a child will still be investigated. All professionals are expected to give their name.

What happens once I have told Children, Schools and Families (CSF) about my concerns?

The person you speak to will take your concerns very seriously and refer the matter to a social worker trained in child protection. The social worker will talk to other people who know the child or family. This may include their doctor, health visitor or a teacher. The social worker will also talk to the family about the concerns and seek their consent for further enquiries, unless to do so would place the child at risk.

CSF will send you a written acknowledgement of your concerns. However because of the confidential nature of this work, you may not hear of the outcome of the investigation.

Does CSF take action on every case?

CSF is required by law to make enquiries regarding all reports of child abuse. If a criminal offence may have been committed, the investigation may be carried out jointly with the police.

Depending on the outcome of a visit to the child and the family, either:

- No further action will be taken
- CSF will offer parents advice, help and support
- A child protection conference may be held

What is a child protection conference?

This is a meeting where all the professionals involved meet with the parents or carers to share concerns and agree on the best way to help the family and protect the child.

If it is agreed that a child is at risk of significant harm, then he or she will become the subject of a child protection plan. This means that a key worker will be appointed (usually the social worker) who will work with the parents, the child and other professional to ensure that the issues are addressed. The local authority is required by law to keep a list of all children with a child protection plan; it is kept securely and only those professionals who need to know can make enquiries about any information contained on it.

There will be regular review meetings to ensure that the child and family are getting the help needed until there are no longer concerns regarding the child. A child protection plan will be discontinued when the child is considered no longer to be at risk of significant harm and this can only happen at a review child protection conference.

Parents responsible for their children

The Children Act 1989 states that parents have the primary responsibility for their children's development and protection. If a child is, or appears to be, at risk of abuse, all agencies must work with parents wherever possible.

CSF aims to work in partnership to support families, rather than take responsibility away from them. A court order to take a child away from its parents should only be requested if this partnership approach is not adequately protecting the child and he/she is at risk of significant harm.

Could the child be taken away?

It is very rare for a child to be removed from their family. Even when this is the case, the plan is normally to work towards returning the child home when it is safe to do so.

The decision to remove a child from their family can only be made by a family court. In very rare emergencies a police officer may place a child in police protection for a limited time.

Is child abuse increasing?

The number of cases reported has increased over recent years because people are more aware of the problem and people working with children are now better at identifying abuse.

Child abuse and the internet

Internet service providers give parents and carers the ability to have controls on computers, which enable monitoring of internet use and restrict access to sites that are unsuitable for children.

Chat rooms are targeted by individuals who may cause harm to children. When using chat rooms children should be encouraged not to disclose personal information or arrange to meet any person without being accompanied by a trusted adult.

If you are concerned about the welfare of a child, please telephone Children, Schools and Families on 0300 123 4043.

Parents can also contact this number for support if they are feeling stressed about parenting issues.

Useful contacts

Emergency calls

In an emergency for incidents requiring immediate police response, please call **999**

Hertfordshire Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit

A specialist team responsible for child protection investigation.

Telephone: **0845 3300 222 (24 hours)**

NSPCC Child Protection helpline

A free 24 hour service providing counselling, information and advice to anyone concerned about a child at risk of abuse. The experienced helpline staff can make direct contact with CSF, the police or your local NSPCC team on your behalf if you wish.

Telephone: **0808 800 5000**

PohWER

Provides an independent advocacy service for parents and carers.

Telephone: **01438 740162**
01438 317070 (Minicom)

Email: **pohwer@pohwer.net**

Web: **www.pohwer.net**

Child line

A free advice service for children who are worried about any kind of abuse or problem.

Telephone: **0800 1111**

Children, Schools and Families (CSF)

Customer Service Centre: **0300 123 4043**

Email: **hertsdirect@hertscc.gov.uk**

Website: **www.hertsdirect.org**

A full copy of Hertfordshire County Council's child protection procedures are available at **www.hertsdirect.org/safeguarding** .

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.