

# Child abuse and neglect...what is it?

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## ***What is child abuse?***

Child abuse is when a child is hurt intentionally, or when a parent or caregiver fails to protect a child in their care. It is against the law.

Child abuse is a misuse of parental power and can lead to life long negative consequences.

There are different kinds of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

## ***What is physical abuse?***

Physical abuse is any deliberate physical force or action (usually by a parent or caregiver) that results, or could result, in injury to a child. It can include punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. It is different from what is considered reasonable discipline.

## ***What is reasonable discipline?***

The law presently allows parents to use "reasonable force" to discipline children. What is reasonable depends on the situation, but many forms of physical punishment used in the past are unacceptable today, such as hitting with an object or tying/ locking children up. Any form of physical discipline that requires medical attention, or results in bruising, welts or broken skin, is not considered reasonable discipline. Using belts, electrical cords or other objects to discipline a child can cause serious harm.

Physical discipline of babies is unacceptable. Handling babies roughly – whether in anger or playfulness – is extremely dangerous. Shaking can cause serious injury, including brain damage, blindness and even death.

Physical punishment can also lead to physical abuse when parents or caregivers lose control and strike their children in anger.

The following examples are used by the courts in deciding whether physical force applied to a child is "reasonable" in the circumstances

- it is improper to hit a child under the age of two
- it is improper to use corporal punishment on teenagers
- it is improper to use implements in administering corporal punishment
- it is improper to inflict a slap or blow to the head
- it is improper to cause injury which is tantamount to child abuse
- spanking, absent of any resulting injury, is not child abuse

## ***Alternatives to physical discipline***

*Good disciplinary practices include:*

- *positive reinforcement*
- *praise*
- *modeling*
- *structure and routine*
- *setting and maintaining limits*
- *realistic expectations and following through*
- *verbal and non-verbal cues*
- *time outs*
- *logical consequences*
- *problem-solving*

Revised 05/2006



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