

Safeguarding children with disabilities



Prevalence of abuse

- 800,000 children with disability in UK (6% population)
- *Sullivan and Knutson, 2000*
- 3.8 times more likely: neglect
- 3.8 times more likely: physical
- 3.1 times more likely: sexual
- 3.9 times more likely: emotional

Prevalence of abuse

- 31% of disabled children abused compared with 9% of the non-disabled population
- Bullying: 8 out of 10 in recent Mencap study
- Vast majority abused by people known to them

Abuse can cause disability

- Over 50% victims of severe neglect sustain permanent disability
- Estimated 25% of all disabilities
- Abusive head trauma, slapping, hitting and asphyxiation all associated with high risk of neurological sequelae



Risk factors: Child

- Immobility
- Speech and communication difficulty
- Incontinence, dependence on others for intimate care and food
- Socially isolated
- Impaired capacity to resist
- Vulnerable to bullying and intimidation
- Lack of understanding of socially acceptable behaviour



Risk factors: family

- Socially isolated
- Stress – higher emotional, physical and social demands
- Financial difficulties
- Presence of parental disabilities
- Multiple carers involved

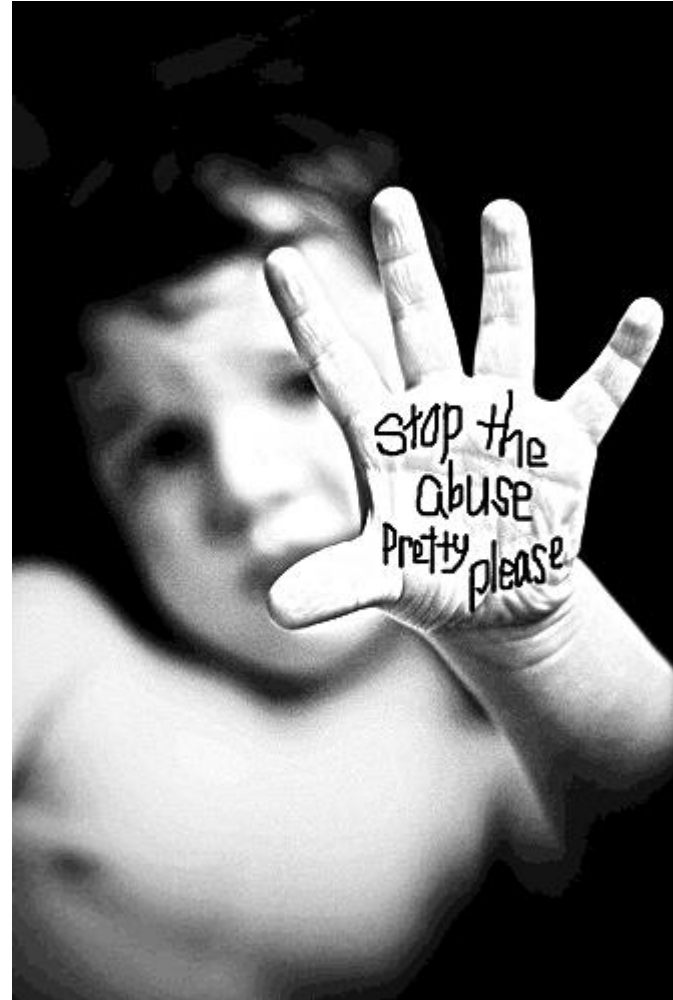


Risk factors

- Living away from home eg residential units
- Use of untrained carers, no CRB checks
- Professionals often have close relationship with the family
- Difficulty in getting placements

Types of abuse

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Neglect
- FII



Reasons for under recognition

- Unable to disclose
- Failure to recognise the signs
- Features may overlap with characteristics of the disability eg fracture in osteoporosis
- Reluctance to challenge parents under stress
- Allowing the voice of the parent to dominate



Assessment

- Consider injuries in relation to mobility and cognitive awareness
- Investigate according to developmental age
- Can be difficult to separate abuse from symptoms of disability
- Fabricated and induced illness more common – careful chronology
- Examination by person with expertise in safeguarding and disability

Communication

- “nurse R cross tell me up children up she mean cruel hurt leg her hand I cry”
- “nurse [beginning with] R [got] cross. She tell me [to shut] up, [that I would wake the other] children up. She [is] mean/cruel she hurt [my] leg [with] her hand I cry”

Prevention

- Ensure appropriate personal, health and social care
- Ensure the child knows how to raise concerns
- Protective training for children and families
- Training on susceptibility of disabled children to abuse is essential for all working with disabled children